

**The tropical forest  
as symbol and setting  
in the fiction of Joseph Conrad  
and his British contemporaries**

**by**

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Benedick C. Felderhof, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

## **Abstract**

This thesis explains the prevalence and meaning of the tropical forest image in British fiction during the period 1885 to 1914, referring in particular to the writing of Conrad, but also that of Stevenson, Haggard, Hudson, Kipling, Doyle, and Wells. It attempts to combine the two strands of Conradian criticism based on the traditions of adventure romance and on evolutionary theory. Following up on the argument made by Corinne J. Saunders (*The Forest of Medieval Romance*, 1993) that literary woodlands have long been used to express ideas concerning undifferentiated matter, geneses, and the existence of a purposive force in nature, the fundamental contention of this thesis is that Darwin's theory of natural selection and waning Christian beliefs prompted late-Victorian interest in such questions and a revival of erstwhile forest conventions. The historian of evolution Peter Bowler has identified an 'eclipse of Darwinism' lasting from the publication of *On the Origin of Species* (1859) to as late as the 1930s, during which much of the scientific and political establishments were anxious to combat the growth of atheistic materialism through replacement dogmas like neo-Lamarckism, social Darwinism, and imperialism. While many Victorian-Edwardian authors reflect this 'reoccupation' in conventional stories that depict fallen wastelands becoming redeemed idylls, Conrad's jungle is more unorthodox, ambiguous, and far less encouraging.

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# Introduction

## The argument

From his position overlooking the Congo River in August 1926, André Gide took in his tropical surroundings and concluded that they were a wholly unsuitable subject for depiction by the artist. '*L'art comporte une tempérance et répugne à l'énormité*', he wrote in his journal.<sup>1</sup> And yet, the dedicatee of his travelogue, Joseph Conrad, was one of many prominent authors who made the tropical forest a recurring feature of British fiction from the 1880s to the Second World War. There were obvious and practical reasons for the eruption of interest in this landscape, such as the influence of reports by mid-nineteenth-century missionaries and explorers on adolescent imaginations,<sup>2</sup> and the subsequent expansion of European empires into equatorial regions, most famously the so-called 'Scramble for Africa'.<sup>3</sup> The Industrial Revolution had created a huge demand in Europe for tropical plant species and their products, including manila copal, gambier, and Pará rubber.<sup>4</sup> In the sciences, the environments and wildlife of tropical forests had stimulated the discoveries of Alexander von Humboldt, Charles Darwin, and Alfred Russel Wallace.<sup>5</sup> In literature, the great novelists and poets of the Victorian era had passed away by the 1890s,<sup>6</sup> marking the end of what Malcolm Bradbury calls 'a progressivist and positivist ... literary culture',<sup>7</sup> and making room for the more 'exotic' tastes and experiences associated with modernism.<sup>8</sup> However, I argue in this thesis that the image of the jungle in *fin-de-siècle* British

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<sup>1</sup> André Gide, *Voyage au Congo*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 13, Martin-Chauffier (ed.), Paris, 1927, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> The primary motivation of men like David Livingstone was to document and combat the slave trade, but their presence in the tropics was made possible by the advent of quinine as a common treatment and prophylaxis for malaria during the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> Between 1881 and 1895, Britain's colonial dependencies increased in size from 22,395,000 to 29,021,000 square kilometres (Peter Watson, *Ideas: A History from Fire to Freud*, Paperback edn., London, Phoenix, 2006, p. 903).

<sup>4</sup> Produced from *Agathis dammara*, *Uncaria gambir*, and *Hevea brasiliensis* respectively (T.C. Whitmore, *An Introduction to Tropical Rain Forests*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 159).

<sup>5</sup> Humboldt journeyed through the rainforests of Venezuela between 1799 and 1800. Darwin made landfall in *The Beagle* on the Atlantic coast of Brazil in 1832. And Alfred Russel Wallace explored South America between 1848 and 1852, and the Malay Archipelago between 1854 and 1862.

<sup>6</sup> Such as Thackeray (d. 1863), Dickens (d. 1870), George Eliot (d. 1880), Matthew Arnold (d. 1888), Robert Browning (d. 1889), and Tennyson (d. 1892).

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, 'London, 1890-1920', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.), London, Penguin, 1991, p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> Drawing an explicit connection between the tropical forest and modernism, Richard Valdez Moses claims that Conrad helped 'generate a new style that we have come to recognise retrospectively as modernist' in part because he lacked the right linguistic tools to represent the landscape of 'Heart of Darkness' ('Disorientation: Conrad and the Imperial Origins of Modernist Aesthetics', in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, Begam & Valdez Moses (eds.), Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007, p.56). In doing so, he enlarges on T.S. Eliot's attribution to the 'earlier Conrad' of a modernist language 'struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects,

fiction was not an entirely new phenomenon, but a revival of ancient conventions of the literary forest related to the decline of Christianity and the rise of modern-day materialism. Therefore, it encapsulated something more intangible and important about the *Zeitgeist* and the inner lives of the authors than mere political, economic, and artistic utility.<sup>9</sup>

The symbol of the forest stands for the beginning of all material things,<sup>10</sup> and can take on either the pristine tranquillity of the Garden before the Fall, or the volatility of a godforsaken void. To define it is a step towards defining the essential thing that supposedly gives it ‘form’: God, humanity, civilisation, and reason. Therefore, before Enlightenment thinkers temporarily defused the troubling implications of materialism by positing a benign and mechanistic universe, literary woodlands were the setting for philosophers and poets to explore various questions around the nature of the universe, living creatures, human society, and the individual:<sup>11</sup> From what, and with what intention was the world created? Are the various species part of a fixed and law-bound scheme, or is nature mutable and accidental? What is mankind’s original condition and our status with regard to the beasts?<sup>12</sup> How does a corrupt society distort human nature,

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new feelings, new aspects’ (‘Swinburne as Poet’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1921, p. 136). In *Developing Countries in British Fiction* (London, Macmillan, 1977, p. 78), D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke repeats the claim that Conrad’s style was the result of struggling to come to terms with alien environments and render them into understandable language. Of course, the tropical forest was not unknown to the West before the nineteenth century. Alexander the Great’s army encountered it when it reached the Punjab in 326 BC, and details of its flora found their way into *An Enquiry into Plants* by Theophrastus, written in ten volumes between c. 350 and c. 287 BC (T.C. Whitmore, *An Introduction to Tropical Rain Forests*, p. 1). Following the Renaissance, European interest in the tropical forest revolved around spices, especially cloves, pepper, and nutmeg, which were desirable as a means to mask the flavour of rancid meat. By the seventeenth century, the Dutch were jealous guardians of their monopoly on nutmeg, which originated from Pulau Run in the Banda Islands; while other European powers were busily transplanting species from one tropical region to others, such as the breadfruit, the sweet potato, the banana, and cassava (pp. 156-8).

<sup>9</sup> My argument is similar to that put forward by John Glendening in *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels: ‘An Entangled Bank’* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007), who claims that Victorian-Edwardian authors were reacting to Darwin’s evolutionary theory and image of nature as an orderly and interdependent ‘entangled bank’ in *On the Origin of Species*. Thus tropical forests in the fiction of Wells, Conrad, and Hudson were Darwin’s metaphor ‘recreated and complicated as scenes of action’ (p. 7). However, Glendening fails to acknowledge that the symbol dates from long before Darwin.

<sup>10</sup> Much like the image of the sea, with which the literary forest shares various chaotic qualities, due in large part to Genesis 1:2. One need only look at Buchan’s description of Arctic waters in *Sick Heart River*: ‘It was like no ocean he had ever seen, for it seemed to be without form or reason. The tide licked the shore without purpose. It was simply water filling a void, a treacherous, deathly waste, pale like a snake’s belly, a thing beyond humanity and beyond time. Delta and sea looked as if here the Demiurge had let His creative vigour slacken and ebb into nothingness. He had wearied of the world which He had made and left this end of it to ancient Chaos.’ (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1941, Ch. XIV.)

<sup>11</sup> As Leo Meller writes in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment* (Westling (ed.), New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 105), the wilderness has a tutelary role; it is ‘a place that invites humans to ask the largest possible questions’.

<sup>12</sup> Investigations of the natural world have long provided the foundation for opinions on the right way to live. For example, in the late-twelfth-century poem ‘Altercatio Ganymedis et Helene’, Helen and Ganymede seek arbitration from Mother Nature on whether sodomy is permissible. They find her ‘clothing Hyle with multifarious forms’ as she weaves the tapestry of life under the supervision of Reason (Barbara Newman, *God and Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, University of Philadelphia Press, 2003, p. 90).

and what must be done to reform it?<sup>13</sup> Why do we behave in the way we do? Are our actions determined by the matter of which we are composed, or do we possess a soul of divine reason and the power of free will?<sup>14</sup> I propose that such questions became more urgent when established doctrines were challenged by the discovery or re-discovery of contrary ideas, and these times were accompanied by a spate of stories employing the forest symbol, either in defence or condemnation of the *status quo*. The late nineteenth century was typified by exactly this kind of controversy, when the randomness implied by Darwin's theory of natural selection threatened to overturn the two-hundred-year-old consensus that the universe was a logical and anthropocentric creation.

A number of scholars have likewise suggested that later British imperial literature was engaged in more than entertainment and propaganda. In *Empire and the Animal Body*, John Miller argues that such adventures commonly interrogated the boundary between human and animal, with its knotted strands of kinship and difference.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Jane Hotchkiss has claimed that the reappearance of the pastoral wild-child figure in *fin-de-siècle* fiction was part of widespread reflection on 'the question of human origins as it arises in Darwin's work and ... [Victorian] anthropology'.<sup>16</sup> And Daniel Bivona has asserted that evolutionary theory gave the 'primitive' a new intellectual and imaginative prominence as the key to the 'civilised', the recovery of which was an important theme in imperial narratives.<sup>17</sup> Other critics and biographers have also written that the exposition of humanity's 'state of nature' was the main aim of individual writers, like Haggard and Wells.<sup>18</sup> Of Conrad's stories 'Heart of Darkness' and 'The Rescuer', Robert Hampson has said that they investigate 'the nature and potential of the self, when the restrictions and safeguards of "social organisation" are stripped away'.<sup>19</sup> One might almost suppose late-nineteenth-century authors had agreed that the proper setting in which to explore such questions was the tropical forest.

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<sup>13</sup> This was the approach of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755). Likewise, Karl Marx wrote a newspaper article in 1853, where he claimed that 'The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilisation lies unveiled before our eyes ... [in] the colonies, where it goes naked' ('The Future Results of British Rule in India', *New York Daily Tribune*, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1853, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 12, New York, International Publishers, 1941, p. 217).

<sup>14</sup> Kellie Robertson ('Medieval Materialism: A Manifesto', in *Exemplaria*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Summer 2010, p. 111) asserts that medieval poets, like Dante, Chaucer, and Gower, were continually asking such questions about the source of human morality.

<sup>15</sup> John Miller, *Empire and the Animal Body: Violence, Identity and Ecology in Victorian Adventure Fiction*, London, Anthem Press, 2012, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Jane Hotchkiss, 'The Jungle of Eden: Kipling, Wolf Boys, and the Colonial Imagination', in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2001, p. 435.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Bivona, *Desire and contradiction: Imperial visions and domestic debates in Victorian literature*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990, p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> I speak of Peter Childs (*Modernism and the Post-Colonial: Literature and Empire, 1885-1930*, London, Continuum, 2007, p. 9), Margaret Atwood ('Notes to the 2005 Penguin Classics edition of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*', p. xvii), and Michael Sherborne (*H.G. Wells: Another Kind of Life*, London, Peter Owen, 2012, p. 106).

<sup>19</sup> Robert Hampson, *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*, London, St. Martin's Press, 1992, p. 91.

The jungle may often represent mankind at its most backward and benighted, but it is also consistently seen by writers as a place of insight. Kipling apparently perceived it as ‘a backdrop to explore ideas about society and the rule of law’,<sup>20</sup> or to ‘discover the meanings both of wildness and of humanity’.<sup>21</sup> ‘[In Africa] the man is really a man. There one knows what are will and strength and courage,’ rhapsodises Alec Mackenzie in Somerset Maugham’s *The Explorer* (1907).<sup>22</sup> For Joyce Cary, the attraction of that continent was that it laid bare ‘basic obsessions, which in Europe hide themselves under all sorts of decorous scientific or theological or political uniforms’.<sup>23</sup> Graham Greene was drawn to its interior by ‘the curiosity to discover if one can from what we have come, to recall at what point we went astray’.<sup>24</sup> Conrad’s revelation is somewhat different and more dispiriting. As E.M. Forster opined in a letter to a friend, ‘In Conrad the interest is not the man ... but the leagues of forest and swamp or sea in which he is a speck and his power of comprehending that he is a speck’.<sup>25</sup>

I do not pretend that every author of Victorian adventure fiction was versed in ancient and medieval philosophy (though Kipling *was* familiar with the subject<sup>26</sup>), and on the basis of that knowledge deliberately selected the tropical forest setting to articulate their deeply held beliefs about matter and human nature. Rather, I think such themes and images came almost unconsciously to many of them, such was the profound influence exerted on their writing by odysseys and quest romances.<sup>27</sup> Certain customary attributes of the adventure romance form serve to contest materialist philosophy’s notion of an arbitrary and purposeless universe, and

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999, p. 255.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Montefiore, ‘Kipling as a children’s writer and the *Jungle Books*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, Howard J. Booth (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> William Somerset Maugham, *The Explorer*, London, William Heinemann, 1908, p. 277.

<sup>23</sup> Joyce Cary, *The African Witch*, London, Michael Joseph, 1936, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Graham Greene, *Journey Without Maps*, London, William Heinemann, 1936, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> E.M. Forster, ‘Letter to Clive Carey, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1907’, as quoted in J.H. Stape’s introduction to the 2002 Oxford World’s Classics edition of *An Outcast of the Islands*, p. xvii.

<sup>26</sup> John Coates (*The Day’s Work: Kipling and the Idea of Sacrifice*, Associated University Presses, 1997) has demonstrated Kipling’s familiarity with medieval philosophy, particularly that of the 1260s, when Thomas Aquinas synthesised Augustinian Christianity and Aristotelianism in the *Summa Theologica*.

<sup>27</sup> According to the literary historian George Saintsbury (*The English Novel*, London, J.M. Dent and Sons, 1913, pp. 2-3), late-Victorian romance was more Greek than medieval in its inspiration. However, as Linda Dryden tells us, the nineteenth-century cult of medievalism and of the chivalrous gentleman was established by Kenelm Digby in *The Broad Stone of Honour* (1822), which promoted honour, faith, and self-discipline in conduct and attire (*Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 2000, pp. 18 & 19). Around the same time, Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* was re-published (1816), following a long period in which it had been deemed too ‘Catholic’ for British consumption (*‘Le Morte D’Arthur’*, *In Our Time*, BBC Radio Four, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2013, [radio programme]). The public appetite for Arthurian tales and ideals was further whetted by the Pre-Raphaelites and by Tennyson, whose *Idylls of the King* drew thinly veiled comparisons with modern British imperialism. The popular passion for Arthurian romance persisted well into the twentieth century, through the writing of Ford Madox Ford and Evelyn Waugh, and through Lord Milner’s group of imperial protégés ‘The Round Table’. One member of that coterie, T.E. Lawrence, was supposedly driven by his resolve to emulate a medieval knight, keeping a copy *Le Morte D’Arthur* in his saddle-bags throughout the Arab Revolt (T.E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1940, p. 495).



champion many of the principles of idealism.<sup>28</sup> Frequently, it relates a hero's escape or exile from wayward domesticity into a mysterious otherworld, where various trials ensue. These may comprise enticements by a diabolical figure, followed by a hellish interval of possession or bewilderment, or even a descent into animality. By demonstrating a capacity to adhere to reason and master base urges, the hero is able to progress to a regenerated state of nature, a 'promised land', and realise the previously obscured ideal forms of self, community, and the wider world.<sup>29</sup> Both medieval and modern romances tend to promote the values of hierarchy and aristocracy, with the knight errant updated as the gentleman explorer, and the magical otherworld as a remote native society.<sup>30</sup>

The latter-day Sir Galahad braves the dark terrors of Africa, often physically similar to those of fairyland with its hidden entrances and abundant vegetation, with the same moral and physical superiority. The gentleman, with his courage, honour and chivalry, resembles the Arthurian knight, and his journey through strange lands peopled with uncouth beings resembles that of the knight through fairyland. The creatures of fairyland were like the primitives, different from the knightly heroes, with unusual powers and customs and standards other than the reader's own.<sup>31</sup>

Whereas many Victorian-Edwardian authors were faithful to the romance archetype, Conrad's relationship with such conventions is ambiguous. His stories appeared in the same periodicals as those of Kipling,<sup>32</sup> described in similar language tropical scenes and peoples, and were reviewed with relatively little reproach by pro-imperial commentators.<sup>33</sup> However, Conrad's literary influences were more varied<sup>34</sup> and his opinions more nuanced than those of his contemporaries. There is always more going on in his writing than a simple tribute to the

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<sup>28</sup> According to Robbie McLaughlan (*Re-imagining the 'Dark Continent' in Fin-de-siècle Literature*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p. 108), a number of other scholars have observed 'a teleological aspect embedded within the generic DNA' of romance, including Franco Moretti (*Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*).

<sup>29</sup> This is a similar pattern to that suggested by Northrop Frye in *The Secular Scripture* (1976), by Linda Dryden (*Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 3), and by John Miller regarding classical odysseys and adventure romances in *Empire and the Animal Body*, p. 154. Andrea White describes the 'essential plot element of [quest] romance' as 'the perilous journey and the crucial struggle and exaltation of the hero' (*Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 45).

<sup>30</sup> Jeff Rider asserts that the values of most medieval romances are those of the aristocratic society in which they were written ('The other worlds of romance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, Roberta Krueger (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 115). Andrea White agrees, claiming that adventure romance works to glorify and divinely authorise the existence of an embattled upper class (*Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 45).

<sup>31</sup> Brian V. Street, *The savage in literature: Representations of 'primitive' society in English fiction, 1858-1920*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> For example, *An Outcast* debuted in the June-July 1897 issue of *Cosmopolis*, where Kipling's 'Slaves of the Lamp' had recently featured.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Garnett was among the first reviewers to draw attention to Conrad's subversive intentions in *Academy and Literature* in 1902 (White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 173).

<sup>34</sup> In his introduction to the 1995 Penguin Classics edition of 'Heart of Darkness', Robert Hampson states that Conrad was influenced by more varieties of literature than just the adventure tradition (p. xxiv).

heroic colonial, and where he verges on romance cliché, he does so knowingly in order to undercut its dreamy idealism with an unglamorous reality.<sup>35</sup> As Linda Dryden writes,

Conrad's Sambir never conforms to the expectations of gorgeous exoticism presented in Henty's India or Haggard's Africa. His remote tropical islands are not the natural paradises of Ballantyne's and Marryat's idyllic atolls. Adventure, wealth, and return to English 'civilisation' for the white hero describe the formula of the imperial romance; but, in their remote Eastern backwaters, Conrad's protagonists find only sordid or violent death.<sup>36</sup>

Other critics recognise Conrad's subversiveness, but assert that it is ultimately overshadowed by his conservatism. Patrick Brantlinger claims that Conrad's views are 'complicated' by him being 'a critic of the imperialist adventure and its romantic fictions and simultaneously one of the greatest writers of such fictions'.<sup>37</sup> Lee Horsley argues that Conrad's novels are 'in many respects sardonic reversals of the [adventure] genre', but they are 'at the same time powerful expressions of the virtue inherent in heroic assertion'.<sup>38</sup> My own feeling is that these commentators overstate the ingenuousness of Conrad's generic conformism. No doubt the scale of his heterodoxy varied over time,<sup>39</sup> as Andrea White has suggested;<sup>40</sup> however, to regard any evidence in Conrad's fiction of heroism, progress, or human significance as unqualified is to fall into a 'reader trap', for such teleological concepts depend on a system of hierarchical oppositions that Conrad does not uphold: between order and chaos, light and darkness, man and animal, civilisation and savagery, reason and instinct, garden and jungle.<sup>41</sup> In my thesis, I

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<sup>35</sup> Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, pp. 81 & 109. As she says, 'Real life for Conrad, and his protagonists, is punctuated by disillusion, not romance'. Robert Hampson calls Jim's life in Patusan, with his defeat of Sherif Ali and love for Jewel, 'a self-conscious version of popular colonial romance' (*Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*, pp. 130-31).

<sup>36</sup> Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 256 & 265.

<sup>38</sup> Lee Horsley, *Fictions of Power in English Literature, 1900-1950*, London and New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> Conrad's disillusionment with religion and nationalism began at an early age, but by his faith in the ideals of exploration and empire seem to have remained largely intact until his disturbing Congo experience in 1890, when *Almayer's Folly* was already a work-in-progress.

<sup>40</sup> Andrea White detects a hazy chronological division in Conrad's approach, suggesting that, early in his writing career and while still seeing himself as sailor, he 'seemed less willing to distance himself in certain externals from the conventions and constraints of the discourse his writing belonged to' (*Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 136). He had absorbed adventure stories from a young age, and was also 'alive to the market value of exotic tales of imperial adventure' (pp. 106 & 118). However, as he grew in confidence, White surmises that Conrad felt freer to experiment, and to challenge his contemporaries' platitudes, morals, and methods (p. 107). She concludes that Conrad was an insider, who admired and exploited the adventure tradition, but subverted its assumptions to articulate the dishonour of modern imperialism (p. 192): 'The dreams central to the subject had been his own, and he recorded their failure with reluctance but with candour.' (p. 120.)

<sup>41</sup> In her essay on the parallels between 'Heart of Darkness' and the fairy tale form ('"Heart of Darkness" as a Modernist Anti-Fairy Tale', in *The Conradian*, Vol. 33, No. 2, Autumn 2008), Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère makes the similar claim that Conrad uses the genre's motifs (including 'threatening gloomy forests' (p.7)) to undermine the 'values that fairy tales are said to uphold ... order, coherence, and narrative closure, as well as reassuring notions of justice, hope and meaning' (p. 3).

will attempt to demonstrate that, in respect of the themes discussed through the tropical forest symbol and setting, Conrad was quite unusual among his contemporaries.

### My approach

I am conscious that my manner of treating the tropical forest in late-nineteenth-century fiction as the revival of a dormant European cultural tradition risks downplaying the landscape's distinctively non-European nature and largely neglects the issue of its endangerment.<sup>42</sup> The reader may object to this approach, and wonder whether my failure to make more references to the foremost theoreticians of postcolonialism or ecocriticism signifies repudiation, perhaps even an attempt by means of scholarship to 're-colonise' Africa, Asia, and South America. I hope it cannot be said that I have side-lined indigenous experiences; however, I want to be candid about the objective of my enquiry, which is primarily the elucidation of British preoccupations around the *fin de siècle*. It is an aim based on historicist assumptions about the relationship between a period's circumstances, its values, and its art, specifically between Victorian-Edwardian beliefs and the way authors depict the tropical forest. Elsewhere, I would like to develop my research apropos more naturalistic influences on the literary jungle, including writers' own experiences, and accounts they may have read by geographers, missionaries, soldiers, and sportsmen. But the truth is that most fiction of the period was less concerned with tropical nature and humanity as subjects of interest in their own right, than with using them as symbols to investigate European culture.<sup>43</sup>

Scholars of postcolonialist theory have found grounds for censure in this Eurocentrism, criticising a number of authors for treating native characters as 'only so many props',<sup>44</sup> or 'not functional protagonists but figures in a landscape who do not constitute a human presence'.<sup>45</sup> Conrad in particular stands accused of using the Malay Archipelago 'mainly as a backdrop for quintessentially Western crises of identity',<sup>46</sup> and creating native characters who are 'really

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<sup>42</sup> Bio-geographically, tropical forests differ from temperate woodlands in two main respects. Tree forms are far more diverse in subtropical environments. And whereas decaying organic matter is found mostly on the ground in the temperate forest, in its tropical equivalent, there may be a significant amount of 'crown humus' (absorbed by trees through their trunks), but on the floor is barely enough leaf litter to conceal the soil (K.A. Longman and J. Jenik, *Tropical Forest and its Environment*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Harlow, Longman, 1987, pp. 64-5). The reason is the concentration and efficacy of decomposers there, so that a leaf which takes a year to decay in a temperate deciduous forest, takes about six weeks in the tropics (Norman Myers, *The Primary Source: Tropical Forests and Our Future*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, W.W. Norton and Co., 1992, p. 34).

<sup>43</sup> With the possible exception of W.H. Hudson.

<sup>44</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 270.

<sup>45</sup> Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers*, London, Macmillan, 1983, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> J.H. Stape in his introduction to the 2002 Oxford World's Classics edition of *An Outcast of the Islands*, p. xiv.

transplantations from Polish history'.<sup>47</sup> I myself am inclined to apply to imperial romance as a whole Brian Shaffer's assessment of 'Heart of Darkness':

Conrad's novella is a critique of civilisation far more than it is of the jungle. Indeed, the text is as much concerned with the European cultures from which the major characters (and the author) derive as with the host culture, the Belgian Congo. Presented against the backdrop of an 'unfamiliar' and 'exotic' setting, the work – by juxtaposing 'First' and 'Third' Worlds – redefines and critically examines the civilisation familiar to its original readers.<sup>48</sup>

However, my intention here is not to condemn *fin-de-siècle* authors for treating the tropical forest as Europe's otherworld, rather to decipher their attitudes regarding the contest which I locate at the heart of Western culture: materialism versus idealism.<sup>49</sup> Here, too, historicism demands impartiality and discounts theoretical approaches that are predisposed to be hostile to one or other of these philosophies. Both postcolonialism and ecocriticism are fundamentally materialist outlooks, committed to dismantling a dualistic, hierarchical worldview that pits humanity against nature.<sup>50</sup> Although my ensuing assessment regarding the teleological disposition of British imperial ideology and imagery does not contradict these philosophies, it is important that I did not receive such conclusions from literary theory but reached them independently, through analysis of primary texts from the period.

### **The landscape and literature in question**

Here, I will set out briefly what I mean by 'tropical forest', and therefore which authors and works of fiction are encompassed by my enquiry. In my thesis, I sometimes use interchangeably the terms 'tropical forest' and 'jungle', which in its current usage conjures a dark, humid, and densely vegetated landscape; but the tropics are not uniformly warm and moist. There are woodlands within the tropics that do not possess these qualities, just as there

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<sup>47</sup> V.S. Pritchett, *The Living Novel*, London, Bloomsbury, 2011, pp. 145-6. Arnold Kettle (*An Introduction to the English Novel*, Vol. II, New York, Harper and Row, 1960, p. 70) also believes Conrad's Malays to have been 'conceived as Polish rather than Malayan nationalists'.

<sup>48</sup> Brian Shaffer, *The Blinding Torch: Modern British Fiction and the Discourse of Civilisation*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993, p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> I am a religious sceptic, but I am also aware that atheistic materialism is an intrinsically amoral worldview, which may look resignedly on acts of appalling cruelty or be susceptible to substitution by dangerous ideals (for example, Ernst Haeckel's philosophy of 'monism', which held that spirit and matter are different aspects of the same underlying substance and exerted a profound influence on Nazi ideology (Peter Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2003, p. 305)). George Gabriel Stokes outlined a similar concern in *Natural Theology* (1891), that an association between matter, animals, and mankind would render the human being a kind of 'elaborate machine' (London and Edinburgh, Adam and Charles Black, 1891, pp. 101 & 159).

<sup>50</sup> See John Miller, *Empire and the Animal Body*, p. 17. Note that eco-critics prefer to imagine the ecosphere as 'an intricate, mutual entanglement of everything in it'. Their opposition to Western exploitation of non-European mankind and nature is part and parcel of their materialism and opposition to anthropocentrism (p. 4).

are woodlands beyond the tropics that do.<sup>51</sup> I will not therefore adopt a strictly geographical definition of ‘tropical’ as referring to the band girdling the planet between latitude 23°27’ North (the Tropic of Cancer) and latitude 23°27’ South (the Tropic of Capricorn), but one instead based on climate and morphology. In doing this, I am following the example of the Russo-German geographer Wladimir Köppen (*Klima der Erde*, 1930), who circumscribed a tropical climate as having monthly average air temperatures greater than 18°C (excluding mountainous areas), diurnal variations greater than seasonal, and a temperature never dropping below 0°C;<sup>52</sup> and Norman Myers, who defines the tropical forest as:

Forests that occur in areas that have a mean annual temperature of at least 75° Fahrenheit (24°C) and are essentially frost-free – in areas receiving 2,000 mm or more of rainfall per year and not less than 100 mm of rainfall in any month for two out of three years.<sup>53</sup>

The crucial factor influencing the morphology of tropical vegetation is not quantity of rainfall but its distribution through the year.<sup>54</sup> While a universal terminology to describe different divisions of the tropical forest has yet to be agreed,<sup>55</sup> I am interested in two categories that recur in most systems of classification. These are the ‘seasonal’ or ‘monsoon’ forest,<sup>56</sup> and the ‘rainforest’. The former has a marked dry season of several months (less than sixty millimetres of rain per month), and are usually found beyond 10° North and South; for example, in Thailand, Burma, India, and some Pacific islands, but also along the northern coast of South America and the coastlands of West Africa.<sup>57</sup> It is less lofty and plentiful than rainforest, containing about one-fifth as much vegetation:

Towards the end of the dry season, [the seasonal tropical forest] may cease to be green altogether, turning brown as it loses most of its leaves. Since seasonal forests do not have continuous canopies as do rainforests, they allow much sunlight to penetrate to

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<sup>51</sup> For example, in China as far as 26° North.

<sup>52</sup> As cited in K.A. Longman and J. Jenik, *Tropical Forest and Its Environment*, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Myers, *The Primary Source*, p. 40. Myers adds that such forests tend to be evergreen and are generally found below an altitude of 1,300 metres (higher in South America).

<sup>54</sup> Variation in rainfall may bring regular intervals of drought, and how long these persist is crucial to the vegetation: dry periods lasting months favour tree species that shed their leaves to reduce water loss, contributing to less luxuriant, deciduous woodlands. For example, Mount Cherrapunji in Assam, India, receives almost twelve metres of rain per annum, but a dry season from October to March means that other tropical areas, with one-eighth the precipitation evenly spread, have ten times as many tree species (Myers, *The Primary Source*, p. 38).

<sup>55</sup> Myers, p. 67. The first attempt was made in 1898 by the German botanist A.F.W. Schimper in *Pflanzengeographie auf physiologischer Grundlage* (translated into English in 1903 as ‘Plant Geography upon an Ecological Basis’). His book contains the first known use of the term *tropische Regenwald*, or ‘rainforest’ (T.C. Whitmore, *An Introduction to Tropical Rain Forests*, p. 9).

<sup>56</sup> Compared to more temperate latitudes, the tropics are climatically invariable, but there are still seasons governed by the annual passage of the Intertropical Convergence Zone.

<sup>57</sup> Myers, *The Primary Source*, p. 41.

the forest floor, where it promotes dense undergrowth. But apart from these jungle-like tangles at ground level, seasonal forests contain less vegetation.<sup>58</sup>

Rainforest is characterised by exceptionally luxuriant vegetation and mostly occurs between 10° North and South, where there is little evaporation, and every month sees more than one hundred millimetres of precipitation.<sup>59</sup> On freely drained soils at low altitudes,<sup>60</sup> 'high' rainforest exists, consisting of diverse evergreen trees forty-five metres or more in height. Free-hanging, woody climbers are abundant, and ground vegetation is sparse. This is the main formation of the Eastern tropics, western Amazonia, and the Pacific coast of South America; it can also be found in small blocks along the southern coast of West Africa.<sup>61</sup> The occurrence of so-called 'low' rainforest can be attributed to four causes. 'Montane rainforest' occurs at high altitude, between around 1,200 and 1,500 metres, and is common in New Guinea, the Andes, and Jamaica.<sup>62</sup> In areas where soils derive from coastal alluvium, sand, or sandstone (podzolic soils), there may be 'heath rainforest', which is dense and profuse with insectivorous plants. This type makes up six per cent of the Brazilian rainforest, and is prevalent along the upper reaches of the Rios Negro and Orinoco; in Malaya and Borneo; and in Gabon, Cameroon, and The Ivory Coast.<sup>63</sup> Where there is a slight shortage of soil water, deciduous species, climbers, and bamboos are prolific, constituting 'semi-evergreen rainforest'. This formation accounts for the lower Amazon basin, most African rainforest, but only a narrow fringe in the East (i.e. India and Australia).<sup>64</sup> Finally, water-logged sites tend to be dominated by a single tree species; for example, *shorea albida* in Sarawak and Brunei. 'Freshwater swamp rainforest' occurs inland and is extensive in the Amazon and Congo basins. The alluvial plains of Asia were once swamp forests, before being cleared for rice cultivation. When water is trapped behind the levees of a river's silt deposits, 'peat swamp rainforest' may form. These are found in Sumatra, Malaya, Borneo, and west New Guinea, as well as parts of Guyana.<sup>65</sup> 'Saltwater swamp rainforest' is a formation consisting of beach vegetation, mangrove forest, and brackish water forest.

T.C. Whitmore tells us that to define 'tropical forest' as an amalgam of the seasonal and rainforest formations is not entirely without precedent: 'Since 1976, these two categories have often been elided under the term "tropical moist forest": the tall, closed canopy forests of the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Whitmore, *An Introduction to Tropical Rain Forests*, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> These are known as oxisols (or ferralsols) and ultisols (or acrisols). They are rich in aluminium and iron, and are characteristically red; turning yellow when the iron is hydrated (Longman and Jenik, *Tropical Forest and its Environment*, p. 20). Hence Conrad's description in 'The Congo Diary' of 'a confused wilderness of hills land slips on their sides showing red' (Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 1890; in the 1995 Penguin Classics edition of 'Heart of Darkness').

<sup>61</sup> Whitmore, *An Introduction to Tropical Rain Forests*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>62</sup> Whitmore, pp. 16-18.

<sup>63</sup> Whitmore, pp. 18-20.

<sup>64</sup> Whitmore, p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Whitmore, p. 22-23.

wet tropics.<sup>66</sup> According to The World Resources Institute, just under half of the land surface of the inter-tropical zone is covered by trees (including savannah), of which about sixty per cent is comprised of seasonal forest and rainforest.<sup>67</sup> This means that roughly thirty per cent of the land area of the tropics is covered by tropical forest as I define it. The greatest amount exists in Central and South America: approximately four million square kilometres. The Eastern zone contains around two-and-a-half million square kilometres, and the African zone is about 1.8 million square kilometres in size.<sup>68</sup> It must be said that these proportions and numbers relate to today's tropics, which in the late nineteenth century was a very different place. Apart from South-East Asia, mass deforestation is a recent phenomenon, taking place within the lifetime of the oldest inhabitants. Sixteen million square kilometres of land were once covered by tropical forests; a figure that is now about nine million, and decreasing all the time.<sup>69</sup> In the words of Whitmore, 'boundless forests now seem finite and vulnerable'.<sup>70</sup>

The image of the tropical forest abounded in the fiction of major British authors during the six decades before the Second World War, but there was a perceptible divide around 1913 or 1914 between different generations. Afterwards came novels like *The Village in the Jungle* (1913) by Leonard Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (1915) by his wife Virginia, William Somerset Maugham's Far Eastern tales of the 1920s, *A Handful of Dust* (1934) by Evelyn Waugh, *Burmese Days* (1934) by George Orwell, Joyce Cary's Nigerian novels of the 1930s, and *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) by Graham Greene. Elsewhere, I intend to examine how the tropical forest is represented by such authors, but the focus of this study is upon their forerunners, whom I define as the 'contemporaries' of Conrad: Robert Louis Stevenson, Sir Henry Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, William Henry Hudson, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Herbert George Wells. Peter Childs agrees with this division, claiming that a novel like *The Village in the Jungle* seems to have more in common with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) than it does with Doyle's *The Lost World*, published only one year earlier in 1912.<sup>71</sup>

The group of seven authors upon whom my thesis focusses was socially interconnected, and they related to each other with a mixture of mimicry, rivalry, and genuine friendship. During the 1880s or early 1890s, they were prominent figures on the London literary scene, before individually migrating around the turn of the century to Sussex and Kent, where a

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<sup>66</sup> Whitmore, p. 10. This more or less coincides with most people's perception of 'the jungle': 'The lowland forest [is] the jungle of common parlance' (Adrian Forsyth and Kenneth Miyata, *Tropical Nature*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984, p. 7).

<sup>67</sup> Chris C. Park, *Tropical Rainforests*, London, Routledge, 1992, pp. 2 & 3. Of this portion, one third is seasonal and the rest rainforest.

<sup>68</sup> Whitmore, *An Introduction to Tropical Rain Forests*, p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> Myers, *The Primary Source*, p. 46.

<sup>70</sup> Whitmore, *An Introduction to Tropical Rain Forests*, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Childs, *Modernism and the Post-Colonial*, p. 17.

number of them lived as near-neighbours until at least the early 1920s.<sup>72</sup> Initially, they would have become known to each other through their mutual association with agents, editors, and critics, like Alexander Watt,<sup>73</sup> Andrew Lang,<sup>74</sup> and W.E. Henley;<sup>75</sup> through other members of the Savile Club on Piccadilly;<sup>76</sup> or even J.M. Barrie's cricket team, the Allahakbarries.<sup>77</sup>

If there was a 'leading light' among them, it was Stevenson. According to his biographer Claire Harman, his 'Prospero-like exile half out of this world [in the Southern Pacific, 1888 to 1894] had endowed him with a sort of magus status' in the minds of his fellow writers.<sup>78</sup> Kipling had corresponded with him over a period of two years before resolving in 1891 to embark on a pilgrimage via Australia and New Zealand to meet his literary hero, but circumstances prevented him from getting any further than Wellington.<sup>79</sup> Eight years later, during a feverish bout of pneumonia in New York, Kipling rambled about making a submarine journey to visit Stevenson at Vailima.<sup>80</sup> Doyle was another great admirer and imitator of Stevenson,<sup>81</sup> and must have been pleased to receive a letter from his 'fellow Spookist' in 1893, followed by another praising his novel *The Refugees*.<sup>82</sup> There was further correspondence concerning Sherlock Holmes, and an unrealised plan on Doyle's part to visit Samoa.<sup>83</sup> When the

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<sup>72</sup> During the late-1890s, Ford Madox Ford claimed that all the literary artists of England lived within a three to five-mile radius of Wells's house at Sandgate (Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, p. 138). Between 1915 and 1922, Haggard, Kipling, Doyle, Hudson, and Conrad all lived within about seventy miles of each other in St Leonards-on-Sea, Burwash, Crowborough, Worthing, and Postling, respectively. Henry James (Rye), Ford (Winchelsea), and Hilaire Belloc (Shipley) also lived nearby.

<sup>73</sup> A Scot who represented Kipling from 1889, as well as Haggard, Doyle, and Thomas Hardy (Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 198).

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Lang was the intermediary through whom Stevenson praised Haggard's *Nada the Lily* (D.S. Higgins, *Rider Haggard: The Great Storyteller*, London, Cassell, 1981, p. 150). He also initiated Kipling into the Savile Club (Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 190).

<sup>75</sup> Henley worked with Haggard, Stevenson, Kipling, and Conrad, according to Nicholas Daly ('Colonialism and Popular Literature at the *Fin de Siècle*', in *Modernism and Colonialism*, Begam and Valdez Moses (eds.), p. 21).

<sup>76</sup> Where it was located from 1882 to 1927, and where Henley, Stevenson, Haggard, and Kipling were members. Although Stevenson frequented the institution some fifteen years before Kipling, he identified it as the haunt of 'young eaglets of glory ... swordsmen of the pen ... all young ... all Rising' (See White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 85; and Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 190).

<sup>77</sup> For which Kipling, Doyle, and Wells all played at various points between 1890 and 1913 (See Kevin Telfer, *Peter Pan's First XI*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography*, London, Harper Perennial, 2006, p. 428. Haggard never met Stevenson, but his brother Bazzett was the British Land Commissioner in Samoa and became friends with Stevenson, in spite of his growing alcoholism (p. 408).

<sup>79</sup> Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, pp. 235-36. It may have been that Kipling heard Stevenson's wife Fanny was suffering from depression. He again considered a visit during a planned honeymoon to the Far East in 1892 (p. 248).

<sup>80</sup> Lycett, p. 312.

<sup>81</sup> Doyle seems to have based the plot of *A Study in Scarlet* (1886) on a story from Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* (1885), and more than once critics compared Doyle's fiction to that of Stevenson. When giving a lecture series in America during 1894, Doyle's chosen topics included J.M. Barrie, Kipling, and Stevenson. (Martin Booth, *The Doctor, The Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle: A Biography*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1997, pp. 102, 108, 128, & 198.)

<sup>82</sup> 'Letter to Arthur Conan Doyle, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1893' and 'Letter to Doyle, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1893', cited in Booth, p. 169.

<sup>83</sup> Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, pp. 416 & 426.



executors of Stevenson's will asked Doyle to complete his hero's last novel *St Ives*, he declined, fearing that he was not up to the task.<sup>84</sup> Doyle and Kipling became friends after spending Thanksgiving of 1894 together at Kipling's home in Vermont.<sup>85</sup> But Kipling's real literary companion was Haggard, who had befriended him at a dinner-party in late-1889, writing later, 'From that time forward we have always liked each other, perhaps because on many, though not on all, matters we find no point of difference'.<sup>86</sup> In subsequent years, Haggard was a frequent visitor at Bateman's,<sup>87</sup> and one of the few people allowed into Kipling's study while he was writing.<sup>88</sup> An admirer-turned-critic of Kipling was H.G. Wells, whose 1911 novel *The New Machiavelli* describes the passing of the Kiplingism of 'the middle nineties': 'never was a man so violently exalted and then, himself assisting, so relentlessly called down'.<sup>89</sup> He was friendly at first with Doyle too, whom he met while they were touring Italy separately in 1898,<sup>90</sup> but Doyle later denounced Wells's enthusiasm for eugenics in *Anticipations* (1901).<sup>91</sup>

Conrad's attitude towards the trailblazing Stevenson was far less deferential than his peers. He is said to have agreed with Stephen Crane at their first meeting that Stevenson was overrated as an author,<sup>92</sup> and unlike his contemporaries, he displayed no eagerness to visit Vailima.<sup>93</sup> He could well have been envious of the ease with which Stevenson wrote, defending his own painstaking production to his agent by declaring: 'I am no sort of airy R.L. Stevenson who considered his art a prostitute and the artist as no better than one'.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, Conrad appears to have imitated Stevenson's writing,<sup>95</sup> and he was unusual among the *literati* of London

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<sup>84</sup> The novel was instead completed by Arthur Quiller-Couch (Booth, *The Doctor, The Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 207).

<sup>85</sup> In London during the early 1890s, the two were both clients of A.P. Watt, but hadn't bonded due to haughtiness on Kipling's part (Lycett, p. 279, and Booth, p. 201).

<sup>86</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life*, Vol. II, C.J. Longman (ed.), London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1926, p. 27. For his part, Kipling enjoyed Haggard's tales about himself that 'broke up the table' (Higgins, *Rider Haggard*, p. 133). The two men agreed especially on anti-bolshevism (Higgins, p. 236) and the benefits of emigration for both Britain and Empire, but Kipling was keener on imperial protectionism than Haggard (Lycett, p. 351). Two years before his death, Haggard recorded in his diary that Kipling had been one of 'three men with whom I have found myself in complete understanding during my life' (quoted in Lindy Stiebel, *Imagining Africa: Landscape in H. Rider Haggard's African Romances*, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 35); the other two were Andrew Lang and Theodore Roosevelt.

<sup>87</sup> Haggard stayed with the Kiplings in November 1904, and again in 1907, 1909, and 1911 (Lycett, pp. 188, 194, 200, and 207).

<sup>88</sup> Lycett, p. 350.

<sup>89</sup> H.G. Wells, *The New Machiavelli*, Toronto, McLeod and Allen, 1911, p. 120.

<sup>90</sup> Booth, *The Doctor, The Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 216. It is possible they met unwittingly before then, for Doyle's surgery in Chelsea was less than a hundred metres from the draper's store where Wells worked between 1881 and 1883 (p. 102).

<sup>91</sup> Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, p. 149.

<sup>92</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *Joseph Conrad: A Biography*, New York, Cooper Square Press, 2001, p. 160.

<sup>93</sup> Though, by coincidence, the personable first mate of the clipper (*Torrens*) that carried John Galsworthy back from Australia following a failed attempt to reach Stevenson in 1892-3, was Conrad (Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 429).

<sup>94</sup> 'Letter to J.B. Pinker, January 1902', in *Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol. II, Frederick Karl et al. (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 371.

<sup>95</sup> For example, his story 'The Inn of the Two Witches' (1915) bears a likeness to 'Olalla' (1885) (Meyers, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 324). Andrea White draws attention to the similarities between *An Outcast* and 'The Ebb-

as an admirer of his South Seas stories.<sup>96</sup> Together, Linda Dryden claims, Stevenson's later fiction and Conrad constitute a sceptical departure from the escapist, pro-imperial romances of Haggard and his mid-century predecessors.<sup>97</sup> This distinction is akin to the one Brantlinger makes between boys' adventure fiction, full of 'upbeat racism and chauvinism', and 'imperial Gothic': Conrad and Stevenson's adventures-turned-sour, in which 'white men do not always rise to the top – just as often they sink into savagedom, cowardice, or exotic torpor'.<sup>98</sup>

There is a great deal to be said for pairing Conrad off with Stevenson, or Wells, or even Hudson. In his book *'An Entangled Bank'*, John Glendening corrals *fin-de-siècle* authors into two groups based on their responses to Darwinism, separating those who emphasise 'anthropocentric progressivism, orderly and optimistic', from those (Conrad, Wells, and Hudson) who place 'a negative stress on the randomness, competition, death, and extinction' of natural selection.<sup>99</sup> Hudson and Wells were two of the writers with whom Conrad was personally close. He admired the seemingly unaffected writing style of Hudson,<sup>100</sup> who for his part admitted Conrad to his intimate circle of literary associates, visiting him in Kent.<sup>101</sup> Conrad began a correspondence with Wells after discovering that he was responsible for the favourable but anonymously authored notices of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast* that had appeared in *The Saturday Review* in June 1895 and May 1896 respectively.<sup>102</sup> In September 1898, Conrad became a neighbour of Wells in Kent,<sup>103</sup> and was introduced to him by Ford Madox Ford.<sup>104</sup> Wells may have enjoyed Conrad's writing,<sup>105</sup> but he later claimed that 'We never really "got on" together',<sup>106</sup> and mocked Conrad's pretension to being 'a wild, wild man'.<sup>107</sup> But when Conrad's bank failed in 1904, Wells did send him twenty-five pounds.<sup>108</sup>

In my view, Conrad can neither be equated to any of his contemporaries, nor entirely isolated from them. Jeffery Meyers extricates Conrad from his coevals altogether in *Fiction and*

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'Tide' (1894), both being tales about dissipated white men attracted to the fringes of empire through a kind of sympathetic hollowness (*Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 136). It is claimed that Attwater provided a model for Kurtz, whose final refrain also resembles a phrase in 'The Merry Men': "the horror! – the horror o' the seal!" (Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 463).

<sup>96</sup> Harman, p. 398.

<sup>97</sup> Such as Frederick Marryat, W.H.G. Kingston, R.M. Ballantyne, and G.A. Henty (Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 2). Brantlinger makes a similar point in *Rule of Darkness*, p. 41.

<sup>98</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 239.

<sup>99</sup> John Glendening, *'An Entangled Bank'*, p. 17.

<sup>100</sup> David Miller, *W.H. Hudson and the Elusive Paradise*, London, Macmillan, 1990, p. 2; and Meyers, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 156.

<sup>101</sup> Ruth Tomalin, *W.H. Hudson: A Biography*, London, Faber and Faber, 1982, p. 184.

<sup>102</sup> Michael Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, p. 125.

<sup>103</sup> Sherborne, p. 138.

<sup>104</sup> Meyers, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 150.

<sup>105</sup> He produced another complimentary review of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* in January 1898 (Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, p. 125).

<sup>106</sup> H.G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain*, Vol. II, London, Victor Gollancz and the Cresset Press, 1934, p. 618.

<sup>107</sup> 'Letter to Elizabeth Healey, November 1943', in *The Correspondence of H.G. Wells*, Vol. IV, David C. Smith (ed.), London and Vermont, Pickering and Chatto, 1998, p. 461.

<sup>108</sup> Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, p. 162.

*the Colonial Experience*, bracketing him with later novelists like E.M. Forster, Cary, and Greene, because they take a more complex view of interracial relations which is not antipathetic to the plight of the native. He argues that those more typical of the romantic-adventure tradition, like Haggard and Kipling, tend to see the world from the perspective of the righteous white man, whose task is to overcome the exotic obstacles of tropical nature and mankind.<sup>109</sup> It is important not to exaggerate the alterity of Conrad in this respect. Conrad described Haggard's stories as 'too horrible for words', but he also drew inspiration from them, including perhaps the title of his most famous novella.<sup>110</sup> Conrad's relationship with Kipling was similarly ambiguous. In private, he somewhat belittled Kipling, calling him a 'national writer',<sup>111</sup> whose "You bloody-Niggerisms" had marred British imperial policy.<sup>112</sup> 'I wouldn't in his defence spoil the small amount of steel that goes to the making of a needle,' he told R.B. Cunninghame Graham in 1897;<sup>113</sup> but in February 1898, he wrote an unpublished and now lost essay which did exactly that.<sup>114</sup> And during the summer of 1904, Conrad visited Bateman's, making a relatively positive impression on Kipling as 'a large seaman full of amusing stories'.<sup>115</sup> He and Kipling did not 'hate one another', as T.E. Lawrence thought two giants of subjectivism and objectivism might.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps it is more fitting to see Conrad as spanning the gap between generations, with one foot firmly in the romanticism of the nineteenth century.

### **The structure of my thesis**

In the opening chapter, 'Hyle', I show that wooded wildernesses and idylls have appeared consistently in European literature, from Ancient Greece onwards, as part of attempts to demonstrate two competing visions of nature: materialism and idealism. I argue that the practice of contemplating change and ideal forms through the allegory of the forest quest had its origins in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Thereafter, a hero's struggle to master and colonise the wilderness was emblematic of the idealist's resolve to rationalise the world and realise the 'good', in the face of unruly matter and the temptation to sin. The flurry of medieval tales about

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<sup>109</sup> Jeffery Meyers, *Fiction and the Colonial Experience*, Ipswich, The Boydell Press, 1973, pp. vii-viii.

<sup>110</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 105. He may also have named Aïssa after Haggard's longevous queen Ayesha (*She*).

<sup>111</sup> 'Letter to Henry-Durand Davray, January 1908', in *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol. IV, Frederick R. Karl et al. (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 28.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted by Ford Madox Ford in *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*, New York, Octagon Books, 1965, pp. 259-60.

<sup>113</sup> 'Letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1897', in *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame Graham*, C.T. Watts (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p.47. In a preceding letter on the 5<sup>th</sup> August, he had conceded that 'Mr. Kipling has the wisdom of the passing generations – and holds it in perfect sincerity. Some of his work is of impeccable form and because of that little thing he shall sojourn in Hell only a very short while' (p. 45).

<sup>114</sup> Meyers, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 208.

<sup>115</sup> Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 367.

<sup>116</sup> 'Letter to F.N. Doubleday, March 1920', quoted in Meyers, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 343.

knights who lose themselves in the woods and degenerate towards the bestial, before emerging renewed, wiser and more compassionate than before, partially reflected the ‘rediscovery’ of Aristotle in the twelfth century. Later, the Enlightenment fused materialism and Christianity to produce a vision of a godless but inherently self-ordering and benevolent universe, exemplified by their homogenous plantations. When a view of nature as tumultuous became once more popular in the mid-nineteenth century, the changing connotations of ‘forest’ necessitated the import of an Indian word, ‘jungle’.

I contend in Chapter Two that, although the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a steady dwindling of the Christian faith in Britain, there was no Darwinian revolution in the 1860s whereby materialism suddenly became the predominant outlook of the scientific establishment. Instead, subsequent decades more closely resembled a period of ‘reoccupation’, when even scientific naturalists resorted to language and ideas which lent a degree of purpose to what seemed increasingly like an amoral universe. Three important components of this process were neo-Lamarckian evolutionary theory, social Darwinism, and regenerative imperialism. All of Conrad’s jungle-writing contemporaries had doubts about the existence of God or criticised Christianity at some point in their lives, but they were equally unsatisfied with atheism and fell back on the unconditional truths of these new dogmas. Their fictional jungles are often chaotic places where the binary oppositions of teleology meld, but they tend ultimately to employ romance conventions in support of a vision of nature with underlying moral purpose. Although Conrad was more disillusioned idealist than materialist, he used the same conventions to contradict his peers. The way his forests consume light, people, edifices, and human reason undercuts confident assertions of hierarchy, meaning, and the possibility of progress towards a genuine ideal.

Thereafter, my thesis is structured according to divisions within the overall concept which the literary forest represents, ‘nature’. And so, it behoves me to outline very briefly the connotations of a word described by Raymond Williams as ‘the most complex ... in the [English] language’.<sup>117</sup> It must suffice to note that it was probably first used, as φύσις (*physis*) in Greek and *natura* in Latin, to refer to the origins and purpose of specific things, before standing alone in reference to the universe as a whole.<sup>118</sup> I am by no means the first to note that the term comprises different levels of meaning. For example, Glendening refers to the physical, the social, and the moral as the three ‘realms’ of nature confronted by Victorian science.<sup>119</sup> These are broadly the same as I will use in my thesis, although the latter three chapters more exactly correspond to the biological, the anthropological, and the social; a planned fourth chapter about

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<sup>117</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edn., New York, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 219.

<sup>118</sup> Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 133.

<sup>119</sup> Glendening, ‘*An Entangled Bank*’, p. 16.

the moral or psychological nature of the human individual in the late nineteenth century does not appear here.

In Chapter Three, I describe how Lamarckian evolutionary theory was used by the scientific establishment, including by Herbert Spencer and Darwin himself, to curb the materialist implications of natural selection in the decades after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. The notion of nature as amoral and circumstantial did not gain much traction until the mid-1890s. I show that many of Conrad's authorial coevals credited some type of Lamarckism, and that their jungle stories often uphold the idea of individuals wilfully altering their biological heritage in response to their environment. Conversely, the tropical forest in Conrad's fiction portrays nature as haphazard, not as steadily progressive. What signs there are of harmony and altruism merely distract from imminent, triumphant death and disorder. In the second part of the chapter, I point out that Darwin's *The Descent of Man* elevated 'modern' mankind above beasts and 'primitives', which fed into consequent misconceptions that natural competition results in human perfection, while its absence leads to animalistic imperfection. I therefore question whether the supposed negativity of late-Victorian Britain was indeed the result of Darwin's erosion of the human-animal boundary, as is sometimes claimed, or rather the dark side of a resurgent anthropocentrism. British writers made use of the literary forest's mutable image as either shambles or arcadia to locate humanity, with numerous savage traits, in the midst of the beneficial struggle for existence; but they also assigned to a select group of men the power to subjugate nature. In Conrad's unyielding jungles, putatively superior humans are transitory intruders, and their accomplishments inconsequential. To relieve their uneasy sense of insignificance, characters may project intention onto the face of tropical nature, but moments of lucidity reveal its actual indifference.

In Chapter Four, I take issue with the idea that post-Darwinian hereditarianism led directly to despondency regarding the possibility of lasting social progress in the short-term, and to fears that the most 'advanced' society is as vulnerable to backsliding as the most 'basic'. On the contrary, Darwin and Spencer gave birth to a hierarchical and fluid model of human culture, with modern Europeans at the top and dark-skinned 'primitives' at the bottom, and in which a society's advancement was determined by its exposure to competition. To advocates of this developmentalism, the environment and peoples of the tropics were of interest because they supposedly provided a glimpse of a primordial Europe, and because their salvation depended upon European stimulation. The notion of hard heredity did become more influential during the last decade of the century, but was used to substantiate the existence of civilised races, who were engaged in a battle for survival with the more prolific, effete, and de-civilised races. Social Darwinian ideas of racial and cultural superiority were common in the fiction of Haggard, Kipling, Hudson, and Doyle. Without the protection of the right sort of human, their natives tend to be vicious and irrational, like the disordered jungle. Although a number of Conrad's

characters are social Darwinists, most ruthlessly Carlier, Travers, and Kurtz, the novels themselves consistently undermine such convictions. Conrad's forest, his natives, and his Europeans are all as chaotic and paradoxical as each other.

Finally, I describe the way in which the image of the jungle was projected onto London and its inhabitants by Victorian-Edwardian authors, who felt domestic society was far too constrictive, effeminate, debauched, artificial, and generally degenerative. Yet, they maintained a strict partition between such visions of fallen nature and their ideal world, consisting of a lawful struggle for existence supervised by superior mankind: an original state they believed would return after a rebellious interval. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, such quasi-religious language was increasingly used to disguise a less charitable doctrine of racial supremacy that in reality sought to enslave, plunder, and destroy; but for most writers, romances about noble imperialists surmounting the odds to instil order and productivity in tropical wastelands were redemptive for the individual, the jungle, its native population, and the homeland. Conrad disliked modern European civilisation for perpetuating the complacent illusion that it immunises citizens from savagery, and that Britain could never again become one of the 'dark places of the earth'. He didn't discriminate between domestic culture and its imperial expression, which he saw in terms of Huxley's cosmic process masquerading as the ethical, horticultural equivalent. Instead of gardenlike idylls, its evangelists were really engaged in the propagation of tangled jungles, and this made modern imperialism more sorcerous and deceptive than anything believed by nature-dwelling peoples. In this respect, and in many others, Conrad's representation of the tropical forest grew out of romance tradition and yet was also highly *avant-garde*.

# Chapter One

## Hyle

### Materialist and idealist conceptions of nature

In his 1886 essay entitled 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy', Friedrich Engels divides philosophical opinion into 'two great camps', the idealists and the materialists.<sup>1</sup> In reality, the ideological boundary between these theoretically separate factions is far from clear-cut, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in the case of Aristotle and some Enlightenment thinkers, but the terms are nevertheless adequate for the purposes of this wide-ranging discussion. The word 'materialism' was first used in the late seventeenth century,<sup>2</sup> but the main idea it captures was pioneered by various pre-Socratic Greek philosophers, like the 'atomists' Leucippus of Miletus and Democritus of Abdera.<sup>3</sup> This is that matter, and the forces which act upon it, are the fundamental basis of reality, while mind or spirit cannot exist independently of matter. The first materialists believed that matter was itself alive and constantly in flux ('hylozoism'),<sup>4</sup> and therefore discounted the possibility of immaterial or supernatural causes like gods or the human soul, excluding anthropomorphic allusions to 'Mother Nature'.<sup>5</sup> Materialists tend to hold a monistic and relativistic view of the universe: at the

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy', in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 3:419, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> One of the first was Robert Boyle in his essay 'The Excellence and Grounds of Mechanical Hypothesis' (1674), according to George Novack, *The Origins of Materialism: The evolution of a scientific view of the world*, New York and London, Pathfinder, 1965, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Although materialism and the socio-political ideas it promotes have varied a great deal since then. For example, the pessimistic Epicureans advocated a *laissez-faire* submission to nature, including withdrawal and contemplation; while the more optimistic dialectical materialists urge the aggressive alteration of nature and mitigation of its processes upon human society (Novack, p. 10).

<sup>4</sup> Novack, p. 101. This promoted a view of organic life and human history as prone to evolution and degeneration. Proto-evolutionary ideas were a feature of the very first materialists. The Milesian Anaximander believed that all land animals, including man, had once been fish (p. 87). Empedocles thought that many of the earliest species had been monstrous misfits, including a 'man-faced ox-progeny', which were subsequently eliminated (John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York, *Critique of Intelligent Design: Materialism versus Creationism from Antiquity to the Present*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2008, pp. 60-1). The Roman materialist poet, Lucretius, even suggested that humanity had developed from a more bestial form, possibly in response to its environment (p. 62). Ideas of social evolution can be found in Herodotus' *Histories*, I.v ('For the cities which were formerly great, have most of them become insignificant; and such as are at present powerful, were weak in the olden time.').

<sup>5</sup> Novack observes that the early materialists, while generally freethinking and critical of state religion, were not full-blown atheists (pp. 110 & 249); for example, Lucretius begins *De rerum natura* by invoking the goddess Venus. The notion of Mother Earth, or Mother Nature, was particularly common among

social level, a view of all human cultures as components of the natural world; and, at the level of the individual, of knowledge and morality as the mere accumulation of sensations derived from the external world. Conversely, Socrates and Plato were among the first idealists, defined by Engels as ‘those who asserted the primacy of mind over nature’. If they accepted matter as real and not some passing illusion, they saw it as generally inert and moved only by forms, ideas, or God.<sup>6</sup> Idealism, upon which Christianity was founded, tends to posit a dualistic vision of reality containing acute and hierarchical contrasts between those things associated with heavenly forms and those with base matter: between God and man, man and animals, civilisation and untamed nature, the rational soul and the irrational, sensuous body. The mastery of nature by reason is an integral feature of the teleological ethos. In this chapter, I shall discuss how the image of the forest, as an orderly garden or as wild jungle, has been used throughout Western literature to illustrate both materialist and idealist visions of nature.

### **Ancient Greece and the origins of hyle**

Aristotle is commonly credited with establishing the figurative association between the forest and unordered matter by expressing the latter concept via the word ὕλη (frequently transliterated as ‘hyle’), which meant ‘woodland’, ‘undergrowth’, ‘timber’, and possessed the ancillary connotation of ‘mud’ or ‘slime’.<sup>7</sup> The word occurs frequently in his *Metaphysics*, where he defines it contradictorily as both the most fundamental of things<sup>8</sup> and distinguishable from prime matter or πρώτη ὕλη (‘proto hyle’).<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, Aristotle is interpreted as believing that matter is an eternal thing without any definite properties of its own, but with the potential to be either one of a pair of extremes.<sup>10</sup> Alone, raw matter is non-existent and unknowable,<sup>11</sup> a state of potentiality which Aristotle compares to sleep<sup>12</sup> and contrasts with the wakefulness of pure form, which is an entelechy (complete actuality).<sup>13</sup> However, the combination of form with

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them, including Epicurus, who wrote: ‘We are left with the conclusion that the name of mother has rightly been bestowed on earth, since out of the earth everything is born.’ (Quoted in Foster, Clark, and York, *Critique of Intelligent Design*, p. 60.) The goddess Natura persisted in Roman culture and can be seen again in Bernardus Silvestris’s twelfth-century poem *Cosmographia*, where she is an intermediary between God and the material world (Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 53).

<sup>6</sup> This idea of matter as inactive or dead would persist into the reincarnated, Enlightenment form of materialism.

<sup>7</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940, [website] <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.76:3:160.LSJ>, (accessed 19<sup>th</sup> December 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London, Penguin, 2004, 1029a, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, 1049a, p. 271.

<sup>10</sup> Based on what Aristotle writes at 1069b, p. 357. This was the reading of Augustine, Simplicius, and Aquinas, according to Thomas Ainsworth (‘Form vs. Matter’, [website] <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/form-matter/>, (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December 2016)).

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, 1036a, p. 204. See also Kellie Robertson, ‘Medieval Materialism’, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, 1048b, p. 267.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, 1074a, p. 380.



matter makes an object sensually perceptible:<sup>14</sup> for example, though the soul is intangible because it is pure form, a human is a composite of body and soul, matter and form.<sup>15</sup> In possessing capricious hyle, the ambiguity of which Aristotle describes as ‘the cause of the accidental’,<sup>16</sup> a substance becomes susceptible to change;<sup>17</sup> or rather to destruction,<sup>18</sup> for during change it is only the matter that persists.<sup>19</sup> In this way, Aristotle declares, it may be said that ‘all nature has matter’.<sup>20</sup>

It is my position that the *Metaphysics* lays the foundation for the literary convention, found in a great deal of medieval and nineteenth-century romance, that the true forms of mankind and civilisation are discovered through the allegory of forest adventure. At the conclusion of Book Seven, Aristotle presents the questions ‘what is man?’ and ‘why is a cultured man a cultured man?’ as counterparts of his central topic ‘what is a substance?’ He argues that a better line of inquiry would be ‘why man is such-and-such an animal’ or ‘why is this body here in the state that it is in a man?’ because ‘this shows that the cause that is the object of inquiry is that by virtue of which the matter [ὕλης] is in the state that it is in. And this cause is the form, and the form the substance.’<sup>21</sup> Thus, Aristotle insists that identification and isolation of a thing’s material or natural attributes is the best means of establishing the character of its immaterial and supernatural soul:

And in the same spirit, man does not consist of animal and bipedal. Rather, if we take these latter to be the material components, there must be some additional entity, neither an element nor composed of an element, but just that very thing the removal of which leads to a purely material account.<sup>22</sup>

This establishes the template whereby quests of identity, particularly regarding humanity’s true or ideal identity, are resolved through hyle or forest encounters.

Although I have already stated that Aristotle was the first thinker to make an overt connection between unorganised matter and forest, I think it is likely that he didn’t hit upon the analogy individually but was elaborating on a pre-existing connection.<sup>23</sup> Certainly, his hyle bears a close resemblance to Plato’s primordial ‘receptacle’ (ὑποδοχή), described as χώρος αἰ or ‘everlasting space’ (*Timaus*, 49a & 52a); for χώρα (or *chora*) meant not only ‘space’ but ‘the

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, 1042a, p. 234.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, 1037a, p. 209.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, 1027a, p. 159.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, 1068b, p. 349.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, 1039b, p. 223.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, 1045a, p. 247 & 1069b, p. 357

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, 995a, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, 1041b, pp. 228-9.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, 1043b, p. 240.

<sup>23</sup> The fact that wood is also representative of primal matter in Indian culture might be seen as supportive of this notion (*A Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, Chevalier and Gheerbrant (eds.), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, Penguin, 1996, p. 1123).

countryside', or perhaps 'backwoods'.<sup>24</sup> No doubt Aristotle was also inspired by the natural philosophers he catalogues in Book One of the *Metaphysics*: those for whom 'causes in the form of matter were alone the principle of all things'.<sup>25</sup> Thus, in its combination of profusion and blankness, hyle resembles the swarm of atoms in the void which Leucippus and Democritus postulated in the fifth century BC as the origin of the universe,<sup>26</sup> or even the primeval substratum named 'the boundless' by the Milesian Anaximander in the preceding century.<sup>27</sup> And surely these thinkers were influenced by the ancient Greek creation myth that began with the silent and misty gap of *χάος* (or *Khaos*), attended by *Nyx* ('Night'), *Erebus* ('Darkness'), and *Tartaros* ('Hell'), and from which sprang *Gaia*, 'the Earth'.<sup>28</sup> This would help to explain the correspondence between notions of primal matter, the chthonic, and wild spaces. Indeed, one could argue that early Classical materialism was little more than an extension of Greek mythology's tragic fatalism, most plainly to be perceived in the period's devotion to Dionysus.

Many of the features of Aristotle's matter can be traced in the uninhibited god of nature and fertility. According to tradition, Dionysus was the son of Semele, originally a Phrygian earth goddess, whom he later resurrected from the underworld. He was himself dismembered by the titans and subsequently revived. This supposedly led Heraclitus to regard him as not just chthonian and regenerative, but the very same deity as Hades.<sup>29</sup> John P. Anderson notes a subterranean quality in the Dionysian symbol of the serpent, and describes him as existing 'in the undifferentiated, in the primal unity of natural life'.<sup>30</sup> Like hyle, he is deeply paradoxical. Walter Otto writes,

It is true that the worlds of the other gods are not without paradox. But none of these worlds is as disrupted by it as is the world of Dionysus ... this god who is the most delightful of all the gods is at the same time the most frightful. No single Greek god even approaches Dionysus in the horror of his epithets, which bear witness to a savagery that is absolutely without mercy. In fact, one must evoke the memory of the monstrous horror of eternal darkness to find anything at all comparable.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Henry George Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, [website], <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.82:6:150.LSJ>, (accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, 983b, p. 12-13. Aristotle's hylomorphic model has been described as a fusion of materialism and idealism; indeed, Novack goes as far as to claim that Aristotle shifted from Platonic idealism towards materialism as his thinking progressed (*The Origins of Materialism*, p. 175).

<sup>26</sup> Novack, pp. 138-41.

<sup>27</sup> Novack, p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> See Hesiod's *Theogony* (trans. A. Athanassakis, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983): 'Chaos was born first and after her came Gaia/the broad-breasted' (133-34). And also Aristophanes, *The Birds*, trans. Benjamin B. Rogers, London, George Bell and Sons, 1906, p. 93: 'There was Chaos at first, and Darkness, and Night, and Tartarus vast and dismal', etc. (693-5).

<sup>29</sup> Heraclitus of Ephesus, quoted in Clement of Alexandria, *The Protrepticus*, II, and in Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, London, Indiana University Press, 1965, p. 116. Otto cites the fact that the dead were often celebrated at Dionysian festivals as further verification of this theory.

<sup>30</sup> John P. Anderson, *Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness': Rebirth of Tragedy*, Florida, Universal Publishers, 2005, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 113.

The duality of Dionysus is borne out in part through his vegetative associations, acquired because he represents ‘the driving force of mere life ... most easily seen in plants, particularly plants in the teeming Congo jungle’.<sup>32</sup> Described by Plutarch as a ‘tree god’,<sup>33</sup> two of his most prominent symbols were the invigorating vine and the sombre, deathly ivy. His ability to instil both orgiastic ecstasy and murderous rage in his initiates is unforgettably described by Euripides in *The Bacchae*, where the arrival of the god in the city of Thebes precipitates a bout of collective madness among the female population. After following Dionysus into the forest, they idle their time away drinking wine, listening to music, suckling wild animals, and looking for lovers. When they discover King Pentheus hidden in a tree, the women, among them the king’s mother, Agave, believe him to be a mountain lion and frenziedly tear him to pieces with their bare hands. Pentheus’ horrific fate in the forests of Mount Cithaeron expresses the period’s belief in the primacy of plastic nature over hubristic mankind. The integrity and constancy of the human form, civic authority, and the rational intellect (as opposed to unconscious instinct and the wild abandon of licentious passions) are all exposed as fallacious presumption.<sup>34</sup>

*The Bacchae* may suggest, along materialist lines, that the primeval forces of destruction embodied by Dionysus are a potentially positive source of renewal, but, as Harrison points out, it was written at a time when tragic wisdom based on the folly of human arrogance was giving way to the more anthropocentric idealism of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.<sup>35</sup> In many ways this transition resembles the usurpation of the Dionysian by the Apollonian disposition, according to the scheme laid out by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). In contrast to the feminine, chthonic, and arboreal unrestraint of Dionysus, Apollo represents sunlight, disdain for women, and the inhibition of the Dionysian impulse: he is ‘behind the notions of responsibility, status, hierarchy, and control structure in general’.<sup>36</sup> Robert Graves describes the god as the champion of religious law, cities, and cultivation.<sup>37</sup> Socrates and Plato likewise defended the legal authority of the Athenian state at a time when it was being undermined from within by sophists like Protagoras, who argued that there was no such thing as objective truths like justice and injustice; that ideals, in common with the natural world, are subject to circumstance, contradiction, and constant change.<sup>38</sup> They countered this relativism with a dualistic and hierarchical system of absolutes, distinguishing between physical phenomena and ‘forms’ or ‘ideas’ (εἶδη). Plato accepted the material realm was unstable and full of contradictions, as Novack states, ‘but this

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<sup>32</sup> Anderson, *Rebirth of Tragedy*, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Plutarch, ‘Symposiacs’, Bk. V, Q. iii, as cited in Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 157.

<sup>34</sup> As Robert Pogue Harrison (*Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation*, London, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 36) in part suggests.

<sup>35</sup> Harrison, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, *Rebirth of Tragedy*, p. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Graves, *Greek Myths*, as quoted in Anderson, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, p. 186. It was Protagoras who argued that there was no such thing as hot and cold winds because the same wind could feel hot to one person and cold to another.

changeability and these manifold, elusive, contradictory properties belong only to empirical things, to matter, to the bodily state, to sense perception'.<sup>39</sup> For him, the immaterial realm of the forms constituted an eternal, immutable, and essential reality, above and beyond illusory phenomena.<sup>40</sup> Thus, he argues in *The Laws*, natural justice does exist as a universal and constant form that the laws of a state might faithfully replicate; the relativistic alternative, he avers, amounts to no more than preaching that 'might is right'.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, for Plato, discovery and achievement of the forms, especially that of the Good, was the ultimate purpose of existence.<sup>42</sup>

On the relationship between matter and form, Aristotle was more ambivalent than Plato, who deemed them utterly discrete.<sup>43</sup> In Book XIII of the *Metaphysics*, he even appears to distance himself from his mentor by referring to the 'absurdities that ensue unto those who affirm, both the existence of Forms, and Forms too in a condition of separability from things'.<sup>44</sup> Aristotle has generally been interpreted as identifying objects as compounds of matter *and* form, with the latter questing to realise its purpose in conflict with the disruptive influence of the former. Harrison summarises the imagined relationship as follows: 'Forms maintain themselves in the world through a kind of restraint. Restraint is active resistance against the amorphous chaos of matter, which forever wants to draw phenomena back into the matrix of life.'<sup>45</sup> Aristotle himself made a comparison with the slave (matter) and his master (form): occasionally, the slave disobeys his owner, whereby their positions become inverted, and hideous anarchy and waste abounds; ultimately, however, the master will reassert his authority, leading to the return of harmony, beauty, and purposiveness.<sup>46</sup> In this way, the first idealists tended to imagine the cosmos as lawfully divided at every level between the subordinate material axis and the superior spiritual or mental axis. At a biological level, Xenophon records in his *Memorabilia* that Socrates believed humans to have been uniquely moulded in the likeness of a divine Creator, who intended the world and its beasts to serve our needs.<sup>47</sup> In terms of human society, Plato differentiated in his *Republic* between a ruling race of 'golden' men, 'silver' auxiliaries, and baser classes of labourers.<sup>48</sup> In metaphysical terms, it was desirable for the soul's reason and spirit to

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<sup>39</sup> Novack, p. 230.

<sup>40</sup> In contrast to Nietzsche, who saw the Apollonian as the dreamlike veil which conceals Dionysian reality (Anderson, *Rebirth of Tragedy*, p. 20).

<sup>41</sup> Plato, *Laws*, Book X, [website] <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laws.10.x.html>, (accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>42</sup> Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, p. 233.

<sup>43</sup> Kellie Robertson calls Aristotle 'the most serious interlocutor of atomism and materialism rather than its "oppressor"' (*Medieval Materialism*, p. 106).

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, 1087a, p. 427. Aristotle tended to substitute Plato's notion of Forms with four causes, particularly the 'final cause' (i.e. For what end does a thing come into existence?). See also *Metaphysics*, Books VI & VII, and *De Anima*, Book I.

<sup>45</sup> Harrison, *Forests*, p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1161a.32, and *Eudemian Ethics*, 1249b.6, [website] <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>, (accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>47</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, Bk. IV.iii, Op. Cit..

<sup>48</sup> Plato, *Republic*, Bk. III.415a, Op. Cit..

regulate the bodily appetites. As I shall attempt to convey, this model would exert a profound influence on medieval philosophy and literature.

### **Silva in Roman literature**

After Aristotle, the linguistic association between forest, disorder, and genesis went from strength to strength, for when the Romans came to translate ὕλη into Latin, they too opted either for the word *silva* (meaning ‘forest’) or *materia* (meaning ‘wood’, and which itself stems from *mater* or ‘mother’).<sup>49</sup> The ideological conflict between teleological and materialist worldviews also extended well into the period of Roman domination, with members of the Platonic and Stoic schools, such as Zeno, Cicero,<sup>50</sup> and Plutarch, propounding a providential model of nature, an Apollonian devotion to restraint, and a suspicion of wild landscapes, mankind, and passions. Their main opponents were followers of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (c. 341 – 270 BC), who drew on the traditions of atomism to portray the universe as consisting of solid bodies falling through a void.<sup>51</sup> Unlike Democritus, he was concerned with escaping an utterly deterministic philosophy, and so postulated that atoms deviate from the perpendicular almost imperceptibly in their flight, which supposedly endows the cosmos with an element of contingency and mankind with moral freedom.<sup>52</sup> Epicurus *did* resemble his materialist forebears in attacking notions of a natural hierarchy and preaching a relativistic outlook: ‘There never has been an absolute justice, only an agreement reached in social intercourse, differing from place to place and from time to time, for preventing the injury of one man by another.’<sup>53</sup> The figure who did the most to popularise Epicureanism in ancient Rome was Lucretius, whose poem *De rerum natura* attacks the Stoical conception of a providential, purposeful, and ideal universe, instead proposing a vision of an indifferent nature composed of atoms and void, in which the human senses are fundamentally dependable.

The Romans were disposed to define their culture by its opposition to undomesticated forests and nature. The borders of the early republic (*res publica*) were demarcated by the surrounding no man’s land (*res nullius*), and presided over by the god of sacred boundaries, Silvanus.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, it is difficult not to conclude that the Romans associated the wild forest with

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<sup>49</sup> Harrison, *Forests*, p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> In *De Natura Deorum* (45 BC).

<sup>51</sup> This was the third of his twelve elementary principles of atomism (Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, p. 249).

<sup>52</sup> Novack, pp. 251 & 254.

<sup>53</sup> Epicurus, ‘36<sup>th</sup> Sovran Maxim’, in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Book X (Epicurus)*, [website] <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>, (accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>54</sup> The scholar Servius tells us that, by the fourth century AD, there were three different words for forest in use: *silva* (a dense forest), *nemus* (a wood with clearings for cattle, etc.), and *lucus* (a sacred grove). The last term is derived from the word *lux* (‘light’), perhaps because the sanctuaries of such deities tended to be located in clearings open to the sky (Servius, *Commentaries on the Aeneid*, Note 1.441, [website])

an existential menace to their civilisation. The state gave legal entitlement of land to anyone who cleared it of forest. Spread over hundreds of years, the consequence of this policy was massive soil erosion and impoverishment of formerly prosperous territories like North Africa. The vast forests beyond the Alps were especially daunting, as one senses from Pliny the Elder's description of the Hercynian Forest, north of the Danube: Such 'gigantic oaks, uninjured by the lapse of ages, and contemporary with the creation of the world, by their near approach to immortality surpass all other marvels known'.<sup>55</sup> In a blend of myth and reality, historians played up the association between forests and the northern European cultures which resisted Roman hegemony; a prejudice that survives in the English word 'savage', a derivation of *silva*. The setting for one of the most infamous military setbacks in Roman history was the Teutoburg Forest, where, in AD 9, three legions led by Publius Quinctilius Varus were ambushed and massacred by thirty thousand German warriors. According to Tacitus, when Germanicus led the re-conquest of the region six years later, he supposedly found the battlefield untouched and, in an echo of Dionysian dismemberment, the heads of Roman soldiers nailed to tree trunks.<sup>56</sup> Tacitus relates similar woodland atrocities by Gothic peoples elsewhere:

At a stated period, all the tribes of the same race assemble by their representatives in a grove [*silvam*] consecrated by the auguries of their forefathers, and by immemorial associations of terror. Here, having publicly slaughtered a human victim, they celebrate the horrible beginning of their barbarous rite. Reverence also in other ways is paid to the grove.<sup>57</sup>

In the Roman imagination, British Celts were no less arboreal. The geographer Strabo claimed that 'forests are their cities',<sup>58</sup> and once more the overall impression given by historians is of woodland altars drenched in the blood and entrails of sacrificed prisoners.<sup>59</sup> However, it is significant that Tacitus' portrayal of such tribes is not entirely unflattering. Part of his purpose is to draw a cautionary comparison between the robust and virile Germans, living in their wooden huts amid the forest, and the marbled decadence of Rome.<sup>60</sup> For him, their forest home was not

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<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>, (accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2017)). Clearly, the Roman attitude to this category of woodland was very different. Pliny went so far as to claim that less reverence was paid in imperial Roman society to statues of ivory and gold than to the stillness of the forest (Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Book XII, Chapter ii, 'The Early History of Trees', trans. John Bostock and H.T. Riley, London, H.G. Bohn, 1855, [website] <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>, (accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2017)).

<sup>55</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Book XVI, Chapter ii, 'Wonders Connected with Trees in the Northern Regions'.

<sup>56</sup> Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales*, trans. George G. Ramsay, Vol. I, Book I, Chapter 61, London, John Murray, 1904, p. 75.

<sup>57</sup> Cornelius Tacitus, *De Origine et Situ Germanorum Liber*, trans. Henry Furneaux, Chapter 39.ii., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1900, [website] <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>, (accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>58</sup> Strabo, *Geographica*, trans. H.C. Hamilton and W. Falconer, Vol. I, Book IV, Ch. 5.ii, London, H. Bohn, 1854, p. 297.

<sup>59</sup> Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales*, trans. George G. Ramsay, Vol. III, Book XIV, Chapter 30, p. 207.

<sup>60</sup> Cornelius Tacitus, *De Origine et Situ Germanorum Liber*, trans. Henry Furneaux, Chapter 30.

just a savage and impenetrable wilderness, but a topography that tested the natural faculties of its inhabitants.

In the poetry and literature of Rome, it is possible to discern the influence of Aristotelian cosmogony in the way the forest modulates from a *locus terribilis* of disorder and irrationality to a gardenlike *locus amoenus* (or ‘pleasant place’). *The Aeneid* of Virgil can be seen as the origin of the romance genre, wherein heroes escape political turmoil or amorous indulgence at home to transform remote, wild locations into orderly and thriving colonies.<sup>61</sup> This template is compressed in Books Seven and Eight of the epic poem, when Aeneas and his band of followers travel up the Tiber into a marvellous forest, which he recognises as the future site of his city. Evander, the builder of a pre-existing citadel tells the hero that Latium was once the refuge of Saturn in the aftermath of his overthrow by Jupiter.<sup>62</sup> Evander describes how the forest of that time became a new Arcadia when Saturn gave laws to the savage inhabitants – fauns, nymphs and men born of tough trees – and ruled over them until this idyll was replaced by a meaner age of greed and war.<sup>63</sup>

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the other seminal literary work of the Augustan age in which woodlands recur, resounds with Aristotle’s hylomorphism, as well as more decisively materialist influences. There are some grounds for the Neo-Platonist or Christian reading of the *Metamorphoses* as celebrating the imposition of divine order on primordial chaos; or, at a metaphysical level, a change in the soul which leads to God.<sup>64</sup> However, onwards from the description of Creation at the beginning of Book One, in which ‘God, or kindly Nature, ended strife’ (*Hanc deus et melior litem natura diremit*),<sup>65</sup> one senses the poem’s ambivalence. In Book Three, Ovid’s sketch of the scene of Actaeon’s voyeuristic transgression, a valley ‘deep in the woods’ called Gargaphie, jars with the notion of intelligent design: ‘In its most sacred nook there was a well-shaded grotto, wrought by no artist’s hand [*arte laboratum nulla*]. But Nature by her own cunning had imitated art [*simulaverat artem ingenio natura suo*]; for she had shaped a native arch of living rock [*pumice vivo*] and soft tufa.’<sup>66</sup> Instead of rationalising Actaeon’s subsequent dismemberment as divine retribution for delving into forbidden knowledge, as later Christian

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<sup>61</sup> Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1993, pp. 33-4.

<sup>62</sup> Hence the derivation of the region’s name from *latere*, the Latin word meaning ‘to hide’.

<sup>63</sup> Virgil, *The Aeneid: Books VII-X*, trans. A.A. Irwin Nesbitt, VIII.306-396, London, W.B. Clive and Co., 1900, pp. 9-12. Virgil sets Rome’s founding myth of Italian origin, which also appears in Livy’s *Ab Urbe Condita*, at a later date. This relates how a Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silvia, having been impregnated by the god Mars, gives birth to the twins Romulus and Remus, who are then abandoned in the forests of Latium. For a short time they are suckled by a she-wolf, before a herdsman raises them to be brigands, and Romulus goes on to found a city of outlaws and refugees.

<sup>64</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, New York, Zone Books, 2001, pp. 99 & 110. She lists Arnulf of Orleans as one such commentator.

<sup>65</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Brookes More, Book I.21, Boston, Cornhill, 1922, [website] <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>, (accessed 27<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>66</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank J. Miller, Book 3.158-160, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1971, pp. 134-5.

scholars would, the poet in fact bemoans injustice that arises from arbitrary circumstance.<sup>67</sup> The fickleness of Ovid's world is more in accordance with Aristotle than Plato, for its inhabitants' susceptibility to sudden fragmentation,<sup>68</sup> or their transformation into flora and fauna, points towards the deceptive fluidity of form and the underlying, material unity of all things.<sup>69</sup> In common with a more materialist perspective, boundaries between categories of being (god, human, animal, etc.) and between opposing values (hunter/hunted; chastity/rape) are startlingly permeable.<sup>70</sup> Nowhere is this more apparent than in the tree-filled landscapes of the *Metamorphoses*, which have the potential to deteriorate rapidly from the orderly and idyllic setting of the *virida silva* ('the greenwood'), where moments of divine inspiration occur, into forbidding and overpowering wildernesses.<sup>71</sup> Inevitably, such fluctuating environments also represent an inner world of the human psyche that is vulnerable to unpredictable passions, as Saunders elucidates:

Ovid's forest becomes a world in which gods, humans and the hierarchy of creatures in between wander, falling prey to their most instinctive and irrational desires, or those of others. The end of such pursuits is often tragic or violent, so that the forest takes on a symbolic quality as the labyrinthine, dark and wild landscape appropriate to the darker side of the passions. This quality fits in well with the interpretation of the forests as signifying *hyle*, chaos and uncontrolled passions.<sup>72</sup>

### **The wildernesses of early Christianity**

It may be reductive to describe the ascent of Christianity in Europe as a victory lasting more than a thousand years for the idealist over the materialist worldview; the religion's influences and history are too diverse and obscure for such a claim to withstand much scrutiny. However, simplifications are unavoidable in an introductory study, and I would argue there is sufficient justification to assert that Christianity effectively banished the tragic pessimism of classical mythology, with its cyclical, hopeless universe; so too the relativism of the atomists and sophists. Epicurus was anathema to the early Church fathers generally, and St Augustine in

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<sup>67</sup> Ovid, 3.141-2, pp. 134-5.

<sup>68</sup> Note here the violent deaths in wooded settings of Pentheus (3.708-733) and Orpheus (11.1-43).

<sup>69</sup> Particularly evocative of Aristotle is the line which Conrad paraphrases in *Victory* (Part II, Ch. iii, p. 76): 'Be sure there's nothing perishes in the whole universe; it does but vary and renew its form' (15.254-5).

<sup>70</sup> Andrew Feldherr, 'Metamorphosis in *The Metamorphoses*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, Hardie (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 171 & 175. In the same volume, Stephen Hinds ('Landscape with figures') observes that the victims of lustful predation in the *Metamorphoses* are often virgin devotees of Diana (Daphne, Syrinx, Callisto, Arethusa, etc.) who have previously embraced the hunt as a rejection of sexuality (p. 131).

<sup>71</sup> Stephen Hinds cites the example of the rape of Io by Jupiter (1.590-600), when the landscape's 'groves thicken into pathless forests, its shade into darkness, its inherent numinousness into menace' (in Hardie (ed.), p. 132).

<sup>72</sup> Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 31.



particular, for rejecting the idea of providence, and for the importance he placed on pleasure<sup>73</sup> and the bodily senses.<sup>74</sup> As George Steiner has said, the possibility in Christianity of redemption and the afterlife is fundamentally optimistic: it is a *commedia* that ends well.<sup>75</sup> Due to the synthesis achieved by figures like Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-216), an important influence on Christianity was the Platonic vision of existence based on a hierarchy of fixed and mutually exclusive paradigms, in which purpose amounts to comprehending and emulating the will of God, the personification of λόγος. *Logos* means ‘word’, ‘language’, ‘speech’, and ‘narrative’, as well as ‘reason’, ‘argument’, and ‘law’.<sup>76</sup> The Gospel of John associates it with God, goodness, life, and light:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:1-5)<sup>77</sup>

Thus, the ungodly antithesis of *logos* is the irrationality of hyle and Dionysus, who would commonly appear to a deafening pandemonium among his entourage, followed by a sudden, deathly silence.<sup>78</sup> According to Walter Otto, this wordless combination<sup>79</sup> reveals ‘the wild spirit of the dreadful, which mocks all laws and institutions’:

A wild up-roar and a numbed silence – these are only different forms of the Nameless, of that which shatters all composure. The maenad, whose shrill exultation we think we have just heard, frightens us with her rigid stare, in which we can see the reflection of the horror which drives her mad.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Foster, Clark, and York, *Critique of Intelligent Design*, p. 57. See St Augustine, *The City of God*, Vol. II, Book XIX.i, trans. Marcus Dods, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1871, p. 294. Dante would later categorise Epicureans as heretics, and place them in burning tombs for eternity, amid the sixth circle of Hell (*The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum, London, Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, Canto X, pp. 98-101).

<sup>74</sup> St Augustine, *The City of God*, Vol. I, Book VIII.vii, trans. Marcus Dods, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1871, p. 316.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Tragedy’, *In Our Time*, BBC Radio Four, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1999, [radio programme]. By contrast, Lucretius believed that the existing world was in its declining phase and coming to its end (Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, p. 274).

<sup>76</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, [website] <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.43:9:139.LSJ>, (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>77</sup> The Holy Bible: King James Version, John 1:1-5.

<sup>78</sup> One is reminded of the outbreak of ‘excessive’ shrieking followed by an equally ‘excessive’ silence in ‘Heart of Darkness’ (p. 68).

<sup>79</sup> Which Nietzsche expressed as ‘*o totenstillen Lärm!*’ in ‘Ruhm und Ewigkeit’, *Dionysosdithyramben* (1891), [website] <http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/works-pub/dd/dd.htm>, (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>80</sup> Otto, *Dionysus*, pp. 92 & 93. Thus, melancholy silence was an indication that a woman had become a Bacchante, possessed by Dionysus, and was replicating the shades of the underworld (Otto, pp. 94 & 115).

Due to the influences I have outlined, pre-medieval Christianity would regard hyle as a menace to its spiritual ideal.<sup>81</sup> This aversion to unruly nature spanned both the physical and the metaphysical realms. The nascent religion drew on Gnosticism to contend that every human contains a rational, immortal soul, which had fallen from its original realm of light and perfection into the evil, material world. Here, it had become trapped in a body of mortal flesh and corrupted by demonic earthly forces. The only way to rescue and return the soul to God was by obtaining a proper knowledge (or *gnosis*) of itself.<sup>82</sup> St Augustine was so perturbed by the thought of matter taking precedence over a demiurgical God that he revised the story of the Creation to decree that the universe had been generated *ex nihilo* ('out of nothing').<sup>83</sup> However, as a cautionary device, hyle was too useful to be discarded altogether, therefore he retained in practice its degenerative peril by placing greater doctrinal emphasis on Adam's original sin and the world as subsequently fallen. In his *Confessions*, Augustine uses the forest as an allegory for such an existence, filled with illicit passions and temptations: 'In this vast forest [*silva*], filled with snares and dangers, see how many I have cut away and thrust out of my heart, even as you have granted me to do, O God of my salvation.'<sup>84</sup> Others followed in Augustine's footsteps. In his re-interpretation of *The Aeneid* to suit the Christian system of morals, Servius equates the Avernus forest of Book Six with the vicissitudes and enticements of earthly life through which the hero must travel in search of the golden bough of spiritual perfection: 'for by the forests, shadows and dark places are signified, where lust and unbridled passion rule'.<sup>85</sup>

This Christian literary tradition of using wild woods as a metaphor for the temptation to sin, known as the *errorem sylvarum* ('the deception of the forest'),<sup>86</sup> also arose from the traits associated with the desert in the Old Testament. Today, we tend to imagine this landscape realistically, as an arid Middle-Eastern expanse, but when medieval scholars retold biblical

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<sup>81</sup> Harrison, *Forests*, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> Watson, *Ideas*, p. 313.

<sup>83</sup> This marked a departure from the Neo-Platonic version to which Augustine's forebears subscribed. For example, in his fourth-century AD commentaries on the *Timaean*, Chalcidius describes the ordering of hyle by the provident spirit of God (Chalcidius, *Commentaries on the Timaeus*, VII.cxxiii, as translated in Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 20).

<sup>84</sup> St Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xxxv, [website] <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/latinconf/10.html>, (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>85</sup> Servius, *Servii grammatici*, VI.I.131, as quoted in Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 21.

<sup>86</sup> The association in early Christianity between unhumanised nature and moral errancy was largely conceptual, but the more practical motive behind the Church's hostility to forests was that they remained the last strongholds of pagan rites. The ancient Roman cults of the forest were smoothly substituted for those of saints, such as St Silvester, St Silvanus, or St Quiricus (a reference to the oak tree, *quercus*, which was sacred to Jupiter), and the sanctity of many Roman woodlands was preserved, becoming the location for churches and hermitages. And yet, the Church found it necessary to discourage any reference to half-human half-animal figures, and in the seventh century attempted to quash the New Year tradition of dressing up in animal skins. There also seems to have been particular difficulty in getting Britons to cease worshipping trees. There is evidence of the gradual synthesis of pagan and Christian customs in *The Dream of the Rood*, which depicts the cross in its initial form of a tree. But it was still necessary for Canute to issue a proclamation in 1018 prohibiting the worship of 'any kind of forest tree' (Richard Hayman, *Trees: Woodlands and Western Civilisation*, London, Hambledon, 2003, pp. 14 & 15).

wilderness stories, they often transposed them to the wooded wastelands of their own experience. The desert of Judaic tradition is juxtaposed with the Garden of Eden, an abundant and harmonious idyll in which mankind is dominant; for it resembles the wilds where Adam must 'till the ground from whence he was taken', having been exiled from his *locus amoenus* for abandoning God's law.<sup>87</sup> For different reasons, the wilderness also contrasts with cities, the first of which was established by Cain<sup>88</sup> and which would come to epitomise sinful excess in the form of Sodom, Gomorrah, Babel, and Rome. The wilds are a place of deviancy and suffering, but they also facilitate purgation, contemplation, and revelation. Elijah is the archetypal figure who renounces the corruption of human society and attains divine inspiration in the wilderness.<sup>89</sup> And there is the example of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, whose boastfulness is punished by God with a seven-year bout of insanity, during which he lives in the desert and thinks himself to be an ox.<sup>90</sup> The uncivilised landscape is appropriate to the madman,<sup>91</sup> reflecting the inner deficiencies of Nebuchadnezzar's soul, while expediting his rehabilitation. The convention of *loci deserti* as places of moral improvement continues in the New Testament with John the Baptist<sup>92</sup> and Jesus Christ, who fasts in the Judean desert for a period of forty days and nights like Elijah, and is subject to temptation by the devil.<sup>93</sup>

At the dawn of Christianity, there were a number of men who sought to emulate these biblical examples. When the persecution of Christians declined in the Roman Empire around the middle of the second century AD, the movement of Monasticism was founded west of the Nile Delta by men hoping to find in the desert's demons a substitute for martyrdom.<sup>94</sup> Among those who constituted this movement was St Paul of Thebes, who allegedly lived for a hundred years in a cave; St Anthony, who is recorded as having resisted in the wilderness a series of supernatural temptations; and St Jerome, who immersed himself in contemplation in the desert near Antioch in the fourth century. For Saunders, all these stories fit a certain pattern originating from the Old Testament:

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<sup>87</sup> The Holy Bible: King James Version, Genesis 3:22.

<sup>88</sup> The Holy Bible, Genesis 4:16.

<sup>89</sup> The Holy Bible, 1 Kings 19:1-15.

<sup>90</sup> The Holy Bible, Daniel 4:28-37.

<sup>91</sup> St Jerome, in his *Commentaries* on the Book of Daniel (4:1), also makes the comparison between madness and the existence of a wild beast in the forest: 'For once men have lost their reason, who would not perceive them to lead their existence like brutish animals in the open fields and forest regions?' (trans. Gleason L. Archer, 1958, [website] [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome\\_daniel\\_02\\_text.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_daniel_02_text.htm), (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017)).

<sup>92</sup> The Gospel of Mark 1:1-7 describes John the Baptist as 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness', and in such a place existing on locusts and wild honey, clothed in camel's hair and a girdle of skin, while baptising the penitent.

<sup>93</sup> The temptation of Christ is detailed in the Gospels of Matthew (4:1-11), Mark (1:12-13), and Luke (4:1-13).

<sup>94</sup> Watson, *Ideas*, p. 309.

The life of the desert was two-fold in purpose: the absolute escape from the world's vices which it offered might, through the accompanying hardship and sense of loss, bring the wiles of the devil closer to become the ultimate test. The temptation-filled desert thus became the place in which God educated his people.<sup>95</sup>

Following Augustine, Christianity became a more communal and urban religion, but a belief that hardship and isolation are beneficial for the soul inspired two ascetic movements in medieval Europe: the *desertum-civitas* of monastic orders like the Cistercians and the contrasting *contemptus mundi* of the solitary anchorites. The Cistercians, founded in the eleventh century by Robert de Molesme, advocate cultivation and construction of a 'city of God' in the wilderness, as well as the pursuit of spiritual inspiration. In such ways, the medieval literary forest absorbed from the biblical desert the themes of self-denial, atonement, and illumination. As St Bernard declared,

You shall find something further in the forests than in books. The trees and rocks will teach you that which you will never be able to hear from the masters of science.<sup>96</sup>

### **The forest in medieval and Renaissance poetry**

Before discussing the role of the forest in medieval literature, it is worth commenting here on the origins of the word 'forest' and the type of landscape it initially signified. The Saxons had used *wald* to describe the great woodlands that covered England before they were degraded during the reign of King Edgar in the tenth century.<sup>97</sup> The Old French word *forest* originated from the Merovingian Latin legal term *forestem silvam* ('the outside woods') that defined Charlemagne's royal hunting preserve.<sup>98</sup> According to the Tudor jurist John Manwood, forests were largely identified by the character of their animal populations and not their vegetation:

A forest is a certain territory of woody grounds and fruitful pastures, privileged for wild beasts and fowls of forest, chase, and warren, to rest and abide there in the safe protection of the king, for his delight and pleasure... Many other places have woods, coverts, and fruitful pastures, yet are no forests; so that 'tis this privilege that distinguishes a forest from those places.<sup>99</sup>

Following the Norman Conquest, William I declared as much as one quarter of England to be forests, and Henry II extended these districts yet further. For the Saxon population of England,

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<sup>95</sup> Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 14.

<sup>96</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, as quoted in Saunders, p. 17.

<sup>97</sup> Whence the name of the region in south-east England, the Weald, is derived.

<sup>98</sup> 'Forest', in the *Online Etymological Dictionary*, [website] <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=forest>, (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>99</sup> John Manwood, *A Treatise and Discourse of the Lawes of the Forrest*, as quoted in Harrison, *Forests*, p. 72. This meant that the bare landscape of Exmoor was legally considered a forest but wooded Arden was not.

the creation of forests entailed a great deal of suffering. When the New Forest was instituted, for example, churches and villages were razed and the inhabitants murdered. These regions lay outside the jurisdiction of common law and were instead governed by ‘forest law’, which included gruesome penalties for peasants caught poaching the King’s venison, such as enucleation, emasculation, and death.<sup>100</sup> According to one source, atrocities were most common between around 1165 and 1190 when Alan de Neville was Chief Forester: ‘violence took the place of law, extortion was praiseworthy, justice was an abomination and innocence a crime. No rank or profession... no one but the king himself, was secure from their barbarity.’<sup>101</sup> The medieval forest was seen, at least by ordinary people, as a moral chaos where animals were valued more highly than humans, and civil justice diverged from the ideal. Thus, it fused quite aptly with the concept of hyle.

In her essay entitled ‘Medieval Materialism’, Kellie Robertson challenges contemporary genealogies of materialism which exclude the Middle Ages on the basis that tyrannical religion had supposedly obliterated Epicureanism until at least 1417, when Poggio Bracciolini re-discovered Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*. She repudiates this narrative by pointing out that earlier scholars would have been familiar with atomist ideas because they appear as both object lesson and inspiration in Aristotle, whose work was increasingly influential following Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, she refers to writers who expressed materialist ideas even before the recovery of Aristotelian philosophy began in Europe in the mid-twelfth century. One such figure was Bernardus Silvestris of Tours, whose Latin epic *Cosmographia* (c. 1140s) is an account of the Creation. The ‘ambiguous heroine’ is Silva, who longs to be shaped but is constantly degenerating into formlessness:

Teeming and chaotic in her ceaseless flux, she is marked by an ominous “malignity” that no shaping hand can ever fully expunge – the Platonic equivalent of original sin – and her shapeless visage is such as to frighten even her maker. Yet she is at the same time the inexhaustible womb of being, the mother of all, without whom the ideas of Noys [νόος or ‘mind’] would remain forever unmanifest.<sup>103</sup>

Bernardus was broadly speaking a Neoplatonist, but his allegory of the Creation inverts the *Timaeus* by attributing fundamental importance to matter.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Hayman, *Trees*, pp. 23 & 24. Such draconian measures may have been responsible for a growth in the number of outlaws who seeped into the remote woodlands, some of whom would later become enshrined in legend. Most of these people were merely respondents who had skipped trial and the possibility of execution. Unable to bring such men to justice, the authorities confiscated their lands and goods, and placed them outside the law’s protection. They possessed no more rights than beasts and were to be killed on sight (Hayman, p. 51).

<sup>101</sup> Adam of Eynsham, *Magna vita sancti hugonis*, I.114, as translated in W.L. Warren, *Henry II*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977, p. 390.

<sup>102</sup> Robertson, ‘Medieval Materialism’, pp. 102 & 109.

<sup>103</sup> Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 56 & 58.

<sup>104</sup> Newman, p. 60.

Robertson also questions the notion that later theologians of the Middle Ages could not be both Christian and materialist; an assumption she attributes to 'a narrowly Neoplatonic understanding of medieval Christianity ... rarely found in practice in later medieval England'.<sup>105</sup> There was of course a conservative element within the Church which denounced any hint of materialist thought and frequently condemned Aristotle for his problematic views on matter.<sup>106</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum tells us the Church was especially alarmed by the concept of species-crossing, and long continued to enforce the *Canon episcopi* (c. 900) prohibiting as blasphemy the belief in metamorphosis. She suggests this anxiety emanated from 'an insistence on hierarchy that privileges the human person as rational, at the top of the ladder of corporeal beings'.<sup>107</sup> However, there was also a radical medieval tradition more materialist than Aristotle, which came to prominence during the fourteenth century with scholars like William of Ockham, Jean Buridan, and Nicholas Autrecourt.<sup>108</sup> This revival contributes to an overall impression of the Middle Ages as a period in which materialist concepts were explored more than they were oppressed. This exploration frequently manifested itself through poetry and allegorical tales. Perhaps originally it was a way for thinkers like Bernardus Silvestris to mull over heretical ideas 'that if voiced as formal theology could have provoked a swift, hostile response'.<sup>109</sup> But readers learnt to decipher the literary tropes that were 'the building blocks of medieval physics', and came to expect descriptions of matter and Creation, until vernacular literature was the 'generically appropriate vehicle' for such discussions. As Robertson declares, 'In the Middle Ages, science happened in poetry and vice versa'.<sup>110</sup>

The literary form we now call 'medieval romance' emerged in Europe around the middle of the twelfth century. It has no single narrative archetype, but Saunders identifies three such patterns in which the forest features time and again:<sup>111</sup> tales of quest, forbidden love,<sup>112</sup> and conversion experiences.<sup>113</sup> The settings generally reflect aspects of the real medieval forest, but

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<sup>105</sup> Robertson, 'Medieval Materialism', p. 104.

<sup>106</sup> Most famously in 1277, according to Robertson, p. 105.

<sup>107</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 82. For example, the monk Conrad of Hirsau forbade any tales concerning the eclipse of man's divine reason by means of his transformation into beasts or stones.

<sup>108</sup> Robertson, 'Medieval Materialism', p. 106.

<sup>109</sup> Newman, *Gods and the Goddesses*, p. 65.

<sup>110</sup> Robertson, 'Medieval Materialism', pp. 110-111.

<sup>111</sup> Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. ix.

<sup>112</sup> The forest regularly features as the venue of elopement in the romance archetype that encompasses stories of forbidden love, as in Marie de France's *lais* or those concerning Tristan and Iseult. These narratives tend to highlight the conflict between the protagonists' social obligations and their individual passions. Marie de France's *Equitan* and *Lanval* both tell of affairs that are only viable beyond the bounds of society. The forest in such stories tends to oscillate between dangerous wasteland and pleasurable idyll. This is seen by Harrison and Saunders, in their respective analyses of *Pietro and Agnolella* (in Boccaccio's *Decameron*) and *Jehan and Blonde*, as an expression of the emotional volatility of the lovers' newly sexualised existence, which is lonely, predatory and violent (Harrison, *Forests*, p. 90) but also 'a highly attractive one' (Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 100).

<sup>113</sup> The third romance archetype identified by Saunders is that of spiritual inspiration, conversion and miracle, involving a movement of withdrawal from society. Medieval hagiographies fall into this category, typified by the *Lives* of the Saints Eustace, Hubert, Julian and Romuald. In these works, it is common for

romance was also profoundly influenced by the classical canon. Initially, from the earliest lays to Chrétien de Troyes and the Arthurian prose cycles, the greatest inspiration was *The Aeneid* (as in the case of *Le Roman d'Enéas*, c. 1160). Virgil's epic poem, as I have already suggested, communicates the imposition of form on matter, civilisation on nature, and spirit on corporeal desires, via its story of a hero founding an ordered, imperial city on the site of a wooded wilderness. Aeneas therefore sets the pattern for medieval knights who venture forth into a forest landscape. The first such tales were arguably secular in emphasis, being trials of courtly values and chivalric prowess;<sup>114</sup> however, in the thirteenth century romance became more obviously expressive of spiritual ideas, whereby the triumph of the questing knight expressed the return of order to society and to the soul.

According to the Aristotelian model of nature, ethereal forms can be corrupted by rebellious hyle, and the best means of attaining a *gnosis* of the true forms of mankind, civilisation, and the soul, is through knowledge and mastery of their savage material component. Therefore, in medieval quest romances, a forest ordeal is the means by which heroes can 'through the darkness approach the divine',<sup>115</sup> often represented by the Holy Grail. This process frequently involves a period of literal bewilderment and even degeneration towards animality. However, for the virtuous adventurer such a phase is ultimately beneficial. Harrison says it allows 'social rehabilitation of the lawless nature against which the social order defines itself. The knight must descend into its shadows as a way of overcoming its menace.'<sup>116</sup> As a place of trial and revelation, the forest of romance elicits a two-fold response: it is a thing *perilleux* to be feared and resisted, but also a thing *merveilleux* to be explored. As Saunders writes, 'The role of the knight is both to confront and delight in the world of the forest, to bring it under Arthur's rule and to revel in its otherness.'<sup>117</sup>

Middle English romances of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (c. 1390), tended to be influenced more by Ovid than Virgil,<sup>118</sup> and arguably bear the imprint of the period's involvement with materialist ideas. The forest appears as a morally equivocal location in which the abomination and the ideal overlap and are indistinct. Previously, the forest's clear-cut polarity allowed shifts between hellish and heavenly landscapes, making it a narrative device essential to the progression and resolution of the story. In these later romances, Saunders writes,

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a forest-hunt to act as a gateway to a supernatural experience: a knight gets lost during the chase, stumbles upon a sacred place or happening, and, repenting of his sins, adopts a contemplative life. In the *Vie de Saint Eustache*, for example, Placidus pursues a stag, only for his quarry to reveal itself on a mountain as Christ and promptly to convert the pagan hero.

<sup>114</sup> Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 80.

<sup>115</sup> Saunders, p. 114.

<sup>116</sup> Harrison, *Forests*, p. 68.

<sup>117</sup> Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 109.

<sup>118</sup> Hayman, *Trees*, p. 42.

It is in the forest that the ambiguities of human nature become apparent: here the boundary between sexual desire and love is blurred, and irrationality and chivalric behaviour begin to blend into each other; here the passage from hunt to otherworld may as easily present a situation of nightmare as one of wish fulfilment, and adventure may fade into spiritual vision.<sup>119</sup>

However, this ambivalence seems not to have lasted. With the exception of Montaigne, who challenged Christianity's suspicion of all things related to matter and the body,<sup>120</sup> the late Renaissance appears to have taken a more straightforwardly antipathetic attitude to wild woods. According to Harrison, the period between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed deforestation and species extinction on an unprecedented scale across the continent.<sup>121</sup> In its literature, forests are venues of deception and savage appetites, typically aligned with evil, and symbolising the temptation to sin. Only through faith in God can the heroes overcome such places, and attain a garden or city landscape of harmony and virtue, such as the New Jerusalem in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (c. 1580).

In his commentaries on *The Aeneid* (c. 1500), the Flemish humanist Badius Ascensius equates the hazards faced by the hero in penetrating the Avernus to the *errorem sylvarum*: 'it is difficult to always hold to the correct way, or the woods, that is, the passions of the body, obstruct virtue'.<sup>122</sup> At the beginning of Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (1485), the dark forest represents the disorder of a country which has not yet been subdued by King Arthur's regime.<sup>123</sup> During the Grail quest (Books XIII-XVII), it illustrates the inner barrenness of the knights and presents an obstacle to their salvation. The forest recedes in importance during stories which describe the Golden Age of chivalric order, but its reappearance at the end, as the backdrop to Guinevere's abduction by Meligaunt (XIX.i-ii), signals a return to the lawless violence of the opening. *Orlando Furioso* (c. 1532) by Ariosto commences with the escape from captivity of a Saracen princess, Angelica, and the quest to retrieve her by Charlemagne's paladins, including Orlando. By various symbolic devices, including deviation from the straight path and the loss of horses and helmets, Ariosto suggests the knights' sortie into the forest signifies their abandonment of Christian virtue and duty for mindless desire. There, Orlando's jealousy of Angelica and her lover sends him into a Dionysian frenzy, causing him to rampage naked through the woods uprooting trees, dismembering shepherds, and eating raw animal flesh. In Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96), the forest is expressive of the snares which the material world contains for men in their pursuit of virtue;<sup>124</sup> it is also the 'wastfull wood' to

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<sup>119</sup> Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, pp. 132-33.

<sup>120</sup> Watson, *Ideas*, p. 698.

<sup>121</sup> Harrison, *Forests*, p. 92.

<sup>122</sup> Badius Ascensius, *Bucolica, Georgica, et Aeneis, Servii Mauri Honorati et Aelii Donati commentariis illustrate*, Basel, 1544, as quoted in Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 190.

<sup>123</sup> See the tale of Balin and Balan, in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Vol. I, London, Penguin Books, 1969, Book II, Chapters xvi-xviii, pp. 84-90.

<sup>124</sup> Hayman, *Trees*, p. 75.



which Spenser felt Britons had been figuratively banished, and from which he hoped they would be redeemed by the ideal of spiritual chivalry.<sup>125</sup> In the first book ('Holiness'), the knight Redcrosse and his companion Una become disorientated in the labyrinthine Wandering Wood, where they meet two deceitful antagonists in the form of the monster Error and the sorcerer Archimago. In Book Six ('Courtesy'), the forest is the dwelling place of the hellish Blatant Beast. Both locations stand in opposition to the symbol of the Good, the Garden of Adonis, which has been divinely sculpted out of that 'huge eternall Chaos' lying 'In hatefull darknes and in deepe horrore'.<sup>126</sup>

### **The Enlightenment plantation and the re-birth of hyle as 'jungle'**

The ideas of the ancient atomists and Epicureans exerted enormous influence on numerous Enlightenment thinkers, from Hobbes,<sup>127</sup> Descartes, Newton, and Vico, to Hume,<sup>128</sup> Rousseau, and Kant; however, outright atheism was rare among these figures.<sup>129</sup> During the second-half of the eighteenth century in France, there were those who renounced and ridiculed religion, like Voltaire, La Mettrie, and Baron D'Holbach, but their books were among the most commonly burnt by the pre-revolutionary authorities.<sup>130</sup> In Britain, Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) painted a picture of the universe as bereft of sentient governance or moral purpose, in which matter itself contains the source of order; however, these weren't published until after the author's death, and even then anonymously. 'Materialist' became a term of abuse associated with French republicanism, and the full force of the philosophy's anti-religious message not felt until the mid-nineteenth century. The majority of Enlightenment scholars subsumed their Epicurean beliefs within Deism, a mechanistic but teleological view of the universe. This religious outlook eschewed an interventionist God in favour of a less intrusive 'Divine Clockmaker', who had designed the universe as if it were a machine tending towards a perfect final cause. It was thought that the Demiurge's final involvement in the

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<sup>125</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book III, Canto 3.xlii, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1903, p. 218.

<sup>126</sup> Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book III, Canto 6.xxxvi, p. 241.

<sup>127</sup> Hobbes espoused a radical atomism or 'corpuscularianism', according to which the only things that existed were bodies; even his God was a 'spirit corporeal'.

<sup>128</sup> Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1748) includes an imaginary speech by Epicurus before an Athenian crowd, justifying his rejection of teleology in nature (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 135-40).

<sup>129</sup> It is not my intention to discuss in detail the forest in literature between 1650 and 1850. I have already demonstrated the ways in which this image was used to discuss the concept of nature from Aristotelian philosophy to the medieval literature that so influenced British authors of imperial romance. If possible, I will publish elsewhere my enquiries on this further topic and on the search for human origins amid tropical forests in nineteenth-century non-fiction. Here, I wish only to outline the significant change in attitude towards nature and domestic forests that took place during the Enlightenment.

<sup>130</sup> James Anson Ferrer, *Books Condemned to Be Burnt*, London, Elliot Stock, 1904, pp. 14-15.

universe had been to set the machine in motion;<sup>131</sup> for this reason, Engels would declare that Enlightenment materialism merely ‘posited Nature instead of the Christian God as the Absolute confronting man’.<sup>132</sup>

The optimistic belief in an inherently progressive universe was a radical departure from the gloomy millenarianism of previous centuries. Medieval Europe had interpreted the Aristotelian concept of nature as ultimately unstable and liable to random acts of destruction and creation: for example, Thomas Aquinas supposed that lower life-forms were produced by ‘spontaneous generation’ from putrefying matter, such as flies from rotting meat.<sup>133</sup> The usurpation of this chaotic worldview by an ideology of advancement was by no means sudden, but the version of nature prevalent by the eighteenth century was unmistakably more rational, law-abiding,<sup>134</sup> and benevolent. Deists seized on any evidence to substantiate their belief that nature and humankind operated according to God’s *bienfaisance*, and that the earth had been ‘designed for man’s terrestrial happiness’.<sup>135</sup> They formulated new, non-scriptural creation stories depicting humans as innocents, not fallen and despised outcasts in the wilderness.<sup>136</sup> Hence John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) conjures an image of the earliest people living in harmony with each other amid an idyllic state of nature, in contrast with the intrinsically acquisitive creatures described forty years earlier by Hobbes in his *Leviathan*.<sup>137</sup> Locke also re-drew the Christian model of the individual’s metaphysical nature, which had envisaged a divinely rational soul entangled and obscured by the material world and sinful bodily impulses. In ‘An Essay Concerning Human Understanding’ (1690), he represents the human mind instead as a ‘blank slate’ inscribed by experience, and not innate knowledge that must be revealed. Locke’s mechanistic vision of human nature contributed to the blurring of

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<sup>131</sup> Watson, *Ideas*, p. 705, and A.N. Wilson, *God’s Funeral*, London, Abacus, 2000, p. 24.

<sup>132</sup> Friedrich Engels, ‘Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy’, in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan, New York, Prometheus, 2009, p. 173. Even D’Holbach in *Le Système de la nature* (1770) didn’t entirely dismiss the idea of God as the moving power in nature (Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, p. 112).

<sup>133</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. II, Q. 45, Art. viii (‘Whether creature is mingled with works of nature and art?’), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, London, Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1920, p. 239.

<sup>134</sup> Generally, Enlightenment biologists held that organisms were produced only from parents of the same species, supposedly ensuring the continuity of the scheme which God instituted at the Creation. In 1668, Francesco Redi struck a putative blow against the materialist view when he proved that meat produces no maggots unless flies lay their eggs on it (Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 45). Since Marius’s *De elementis* in the 1160s, natural philosophers had used the principle ‘like begets like’ to impose order on nature and posit immutable species categories (Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 83).

<sup>135</sup> Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment: An Evaluation of its Assumptions, Attitudes and Values*, London, Penguin, 1968, p. 81.

<sup>136</sup> The birth of the idea of human progress has been traced to a number of post-medieval scholars, including Francis Bacon, who remarked that the Elizabethan Age seemed to have accumulated at least as much knowledge and wisdom as antiquity (Watson, *Ideas*, p. 740).

<sup>137</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651 edn., Part I, Ch. XIII: ‘Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as concerning their Felicity and Misery’, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1909, p. 99.

boundaries between animal and man,<sup>138</sup> one of whose distinguishing features had been his possession of a soul, but the possibility that we might have evolved from other species remained largely un-investigated before the nineteenth century.<sup>139</sup> He allotted people an almost unbounded capacity for improvement, and by the end of the eighteenth century, it was quite common to believe that mankind had risen through various stages of dignified savagery to his present, civilised station, with yet more progress ahead.<sup>140</sup>

During this period, there was a tendency to measure woodlands only by their utility and profitability. In the wake of prolific medieval logging, John Evelyn's *Sylva: A Discourse Concerning Forest Trees* (first published in 1664, but running to four editions during the author's lifetime) promoted forestry as a matter of national pride and security, being the key to preserving England's 'wooden walls'. This tract, and the new, German science of *Forstwissenschaft*, were responsible for the largescale afforestation which took place across Britain between the end of the seventeenth century and the 1830s. Under such influences, domestic forests containing trees of diverse ages and species were gradually replaced by mono-cultural plantations, where randomness was reduced to a minimum.<sup>141</sup> In eighteenth-century culture, the preoccupation with lawfulness and stability was exhibited as a revival of the pastoral aesthetic of Virgil, extolling husbandry and mastery of nature in general.<sup>142</sup> One such example in literature is Alexander Pope's 1713 poem portraying the eponymous Windsor Forest as an Arcadian extension of the order that characterises the great city downriver.

Over these two centuries, British woodlands all but lost their chaotic medieval qualities and associations with otherworlds, treacherous passions, monstrous hybrids, and epiphanies. Nor was there much need for the unruliness of Aristotelian hyle in the Enlightenment worldview. By the end of the eighteenth century, many thinkers had shed the cloak of Deism to reveal a law-bound, blindly fatalistic, and 'soulless' materialism, requiring no supernatural actor. Matter, and therefore nature and the human primitive, was thought to be rational and self-ordering. Its moral outlook was a kind of sunny relativism, with both savagery and civilisation characterised by the same reason and harmony.<sup>143</sup> Thus, the word 'forest' came to signify a kind

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<sup>138</sup> Subsequently, staunch materialists, like La Mettrie (*Man as Machine*, 1747) and D'Holbach, would view humans as little different from soulless, machinelike animals, consisting of the same self-ordering matter (Watson, *Ideas*, p. 725).

<sup>139</sup> With the exception of Jean-Baptiste de Monet, chevalier de Lamarck (1744-1829).

<sup>140</sup> The French political scientist Condorcet prophesied in his *Outline of an Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795) that, beyond the French Revolution, lay progress without limit for the infinitely perfectable and potentially immortal human species (Watson, *Ideas*, p. 741).

<sup>141</sup> Harrison, *Forests*, p. 122.

<sup>142</sup> Specifically Virgil's *Georgics* (Terry Gifford, 'Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, and Post-Pastoral', in Westling (ed.), p. 20). The gardens designed by Capability Brown, including temples, urns, and Latin inscriptions nailed to trees, are another, non-literary example of this.

<sup>143</sup> Romanticism was largely a reaction against this trend, towards an idealism that retained a place for spirit and will within nature. In general, this mysterious vital force was juxtaposed with the unnatural and tyrannical reason, laws, language, and urban ideal of *logos*, which they saw as begetting the selfishness and

of awe-inspiring harmony rather than the epitome of chaos.<sup>144</sup> This process of idealisation meant that, when the offspring of Darwinian evolution wanted to express a more gothic notion of nature as self-seeking, volatile, and requiring mastery, they fixed on the tropical equivalent and a loan-word recently imported from the Indian subcontinent.

'Jungle' had existed in languages other than English for thousands of years, but originally it betokened a different thing altogether from lush verdure. The Sanskrit word *jangala* meant 'dry' or 'arid', and hence 'desert'. It subsequently entered the modern languages of Hindi and Marathi as *jangal*, and was applied to any area of uncultivated or waste land.<sup>145</sup> It was in this form that it first appeared in the English language following Robert Clive's successful campaigns, along with numerous other Indian words.<sup>146</sup> These verbal acquisitions reflect the colonials' enthusiasm for the new and various experiences offered by the East, particularly beyond the centres of trade. According to Ivor Lewis, 'Many plants and animals of India had their Anglo-Indian baptism at this time and later in the works of a growing number of observers who became keen students of Indian natural history'.<sup>147</sup>

One of the earliest written examples of 'jungle' in English occurs in a 1776 volume on Hindu jurisprudence, *A Code of Gentoo Laws*, by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, who was a lexicographer under the patronage of Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of Bengal. Here, the word appears as a legal term for 'lands wholly uncultivated', and is also connected to a fixed interval of neglect: 'Land Waste for Five Years ... is called Jungle.'<sup>148</sup> Given the speed at which such areas in India become overgrown, it is easy to see how the word might have been associated more generally with scrub forest. This was certainly the context in which the British used 'jungle' at the end of the eighteenth century, to the exclusion of the word's other implications: 'When [jungle] was taken over into Anglo-Indian, it was gradually extended to an "area of thick tangled trees".'<sup>149</sup> Edmund Burke may have railed against the infiltration of the

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violence to be found in many industrial cities. For the Romantics, nature was benevolent when unmolested, but rancorous when civilised mankind sought to dominate and enslave it.

<sup>144</sup> In his *Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, Michael Ferber makes a similar point about the modern image of domestic woodlands: 'Forests used to be places of danger to a degree difficult to appreciate today, when for modern city-dwellers they are retreats or playgrounds; perhaps only arctic forests or tropical jungles retain something of the fearful vastness and strangeness they once implied. Forests are traditionally dark, labyrinthine, and filled with dangerous beasts.' (p. 78.)

<sup>145</sup> John Ayto, *Word Origins: The Hidden Histories of English Words from A-Z*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, A. & C. Black, 2005, p. 297.

<sup>146</sup> Of the thirty-five Indian loan-words recorded for the first time in English during the eighteenth century, only four occur before 1750 (Mary S. Sarjeantson, *A History of Foreign Words in English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 223).

<sup>147</sup> Ivor Lewis, *Sabibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs: A Dictionary of the Words of Anglo-India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 22.

<sup>148</sup> *A Code of Gentoo Laws or, Ordinations of the Pundits*, trans. Nathaniel B. Halhed, London, 1776, pp. 15 & 190.

<sup>149</sup> Ayto, *Word Origins*, p. 297. Such metamorphoses among loan-words are not unusual, as Lewis tells us (*Sabibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs*, p. 5), and were especially common among Anglo-Indianisms: 'Here already [in the seventeenth century] have been examples of development of meaning in Anglo-Indian use which

English language by Anglo-Indianisms, claiming that such terms were employed by the East India hierarchy to confound parliamentarians,<sup>150</sup> but he too was apt to season his oratory with them. His 1783 speech on Charles Fox's *East India Bill* contains one such example: "That land [Rohilkhand, Uttar Pradesh] ... is now almost throughout a dreary desert, covered with rushes, and briers, and jungles full of wild beasts."<sup>151</sup> Notably, Burke associates jungles with feral animals in the same way that hyle once evoked the bestial. This was nothing less than the re-birth of a lost convention in Western culture: a setting depopulated, overgrown, home to ferocious creatures, unwholesome (thanks to 'jungle-fever', first used around 1803), but still exclusively Indian.

While 'jungle' appeared frequently in the memoirs of early-nineteenth-century, Anglo-Indian hunters, such as Thomas Williamson's *Oriental Field Sports* (1808) or Daniel Johnson's *Sketches of Field Sports* (1822), it wasn't until the middle decades of the century that British writers started to refer to jungles in other parts of the world, and then not always tropical parts. Charles Darwin made a handful of references in his 'Journal and Remarks' covering the voyage of the Beagle, published in 1839, to 'thick', 'impenetrable', and 'entangled' jungles in India and Uruguay.<sup>152</sup> Hugh Low used the word liberally in his 1848 account of James Brooke's raj on the island of Borneo.<sup>153</sup> And the first volume of Thomas Macaulay's *History of England*, also published in 1848, includes this ominous description of the battlefield at Sedgemoor: 'It was a vast pool, wherein were scattered many islets of shifting and treacherous soil, overhung with rank jungle, and swarming with deer and wild swine.'<sup>154</sup> One of the first narratives to transport 'jungle' to the continent of Africa was David Livingstone's *Missionary Travels* (1857), although he used the term sparingly, generally preferring 'bush' for most types of undergrowth between the Kalahari and the Congo basin, and 'forest' for anything taller. For him, 'jungle' connoted low, thick, and tangled vegetation, perhaps near water, but not the distinctive upshot of a humid climate, and not indicative of a swathe of trees; for example, the seasonal vegetation between present-day Zimbabwe and Mozambique:

The country around the Nake is hilly, and the valleys covered with tangled jungle. The people who live in this district have reclaimed their gardens from the forest, and the soil is extremely fertile.<sup>155</sup>

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are foreign to the original Hindustani' (Sarjeantson, *A History of Foreign Words in English*, p. 223). For example, 'shampoo' derives from the Hindi *champo*, meaning 'to knead'.

<sup>150</sup> Lewis, *Sahibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs*, p. 22.

<sup>151</sup> 'Speech on Mr Fox's East India Bill, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1783', in *The Works of Edmund Burke*, Vol. II, Boston, Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1839, p. 304.

<sup>152</sup> Charles Darwin, 'Journal and Remarks, 1832-36', in Robert FitzRoy, *Narrative of the Surveying Voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle*, Vol. III, London, Henry Colburn, 1839, pp. 99, 158, 590 & 606.

<sup>153</sup> Hugh Low, *Saravak: Its Inhabitants and Productions*, London, Richard Bentley, 1848.

<sup>154</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, *History of England*, Vol. I, London and New York, J.M. Dent and Sons, 1906, p. 452.

<sup>155</sup> David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, London, John Murray, 1857, p. 605.

Likewise, H.W. Bates's *In the Heart of the Amazon Forest* (1859) includes some of the earliest references to jungle in the Americas, where it generally suggests dense vegetation that hides exotic birds and prowling jaguars.<sup>156</sup> When used figuratively at this time, a jungle signified a place of bewildering complexity or confusion, or indeed any wild and tangled mass. In the third of his *Latter-day Pamphlets* (1850), Thomas Carlyle refers to the Colonial Office as 'a world-wide jungle of redtape, inhabited by doleful creatures, deaf or nearly so to human reason and entreaty'.<sup>157</sup>

Between 1860 and 1885, there was a significant escalation in European exploration of wet and closed tropical forests across the world, and during this period their reputation as 'jungle' was cemented through numerous works of non-fiction. There are different explanations for the elision of what are fairly discrete biomes. Norman Myers suggests that it was a misconception resulting from the tendency of Victorian adventurers to bypass the interior of tropical forests:

Naturalist explorers from North America and Europe have traditionally roamed forest regions by boat along waterways, where the forest is exposed to lots of sunshine – which stimulates the dense curtains of foliage that the explorers saw along river banks. Hence the accounts of impenetrable masses of vegetation that presumably persisted through the forest interior.<sup>158</sup>

Longman and Jenik detect a more sinister, if unconscious, motive behind Europeans' preference for a word other than 'forest', claiming it was symptomatic of a hostile attitude:

Call a piece of land 'bush', for instance, a term which is widely employed to describe both forest and many other types of woody cover, and one is already implying that the trees are a nuisance, cluttering up a site one wishes to use in a different way, rather than being a valuable entity.<sup>159</sup>

I think there is some truth in this assertion, and it is certainly a line of argument that I will pursue in my study of British fiction. But I would return to my original point: the Enlightenment had altered the very meaning of 'forest' for subsequent generations, and it is likely that nineteenth-century pioneers were inclined to seek a more apposite name for what they witnessed in the deepest recesses of South-East Asia, Central Africa, or Amazonia: scenes of palms, cycads, bamboos, and woody climbers, quite unlike any deciduous temperate

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<sup>156</sup> Henry Walter Bates, *In the Heart of the Amazon Forest*, London, Penguin, 2007.

<sup>157</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'No. III: Downing Street', in *Latter-day Pamphlets*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1850, p. 74.

<sup>158</sup> Myers, *The Primary Source*, p. 29.

<sup>159</sup> Longman and Jenik, *Tropical Forest and Its Environment*, p. 3.

woodland of their acquaintance. The inadequacy of English to express the qualities of such an ecosystem is a problem that still bothers contemporary naturalists like Myers:

The more I become acquainted with tropical forests, the more I believe that using the term 'forest' for a bunch of trees in the tropics and a bunch of trees elsewhere is misleading ... How much better we might understand tropical forests if we gave them a new name, indicating that they are a fundamentally different state of affairs from the forests with which we are more familiar.<sup>160</sup>

It is difficult to substantiate my theory that an alteration to the meaning of the word 'forest' accounts for the rapid spread of 'jungle' in English.<sup>161</sup> Eric Partridge asserts that loan-words proliferate 'by being consonant with and appropriate to the genius of the language',<sup>162</sup> and the compatibility of 'jungle' with the genius of English may lie in its phonic and conceptual resemblance to the pre-existing words 'jumble' and 'tangle'. The chaotic quality of 'jungle' was certainly reinforced in the early twentieth century, when it began to be used adjectivally as a substitute for 'savage' and 'wild', often in conjunction with the word 'passion'. For example, in a 1908 biography of William Morris, Alfred Noyes describes his subject's verses as like 'the savage jungle-cries of the elemental passions' carried on the wind through a primeval pine-wood.<sup>163</sup> Around the same time, it became a byword for an anarchic situation in which the strong abuse the weak with impunity, as in Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel about migrant labour in Chicago, *The Jungle*. What we know for sure is that 'jungle' underwent a transformative journey during the nineteenth century virtually identical to that of 'forest' over a thousand years before, as though the word was slowly aligning itself with the disordered void vacated by its predecessor.

From the chaotic, chthonic, and violent hyle of the ancient Greeks, to the Roman *silva*, the testing wastelands of medieval Christianity, and the Enlightenment's uniform plantations, forests have long been used by European writers to reify theories about the fundamentals of universe and humanity. Wooded landscapes that exhibit an underlying harmony and docility fit the idealist perspective, while those characterised by irremediable randomness and ambiguity are more in line with materialism. In the chapters that follow, I shall demonstrate how this same pattern can be discerned in the jungles of Victorian-Edwardian romance.

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<sup>160</sup> Myers, *The Primary Source*, p. 32.

<sup>161</sup> In accounting for the adoption of the term *shikari* (roughly 'big-game hunter'), Heather Schell notes that it served to distinguish aficionados of India and blood-sports from fresh-off-the-boat novices ('Tiger Tales', in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, D. Morse and M. Danahay (eds.), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, p. 235).

<sup>162</sup> Eric Partridge, *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (1970), as quoted in Lewis, *Sabibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs*, p. 5.

<sup>163</sup> Alfred Noyes, *English Men of Letters: William Morris*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1908, p. 118.

## Chapter Two

### Reoccupation

#### Confusion and conviction in *fin-de-siècle* Britain

In attempting to establish some common trends in late-Victorian opinion by the study of contemporaneous testimonies and modern scholarship, one encounters some intriguingly conflicting judgements on the period. On the one hand, it was an age in which the boundaries of European empires and of scientific knowledge were aggressively extended, called in some respects ‘an era of orthodoxy’.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, J.G.W. Griffith claims in *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma* that, ‘Far from being the confident progressivist period that it has often been labelled’, the late nineteenth century was ‘an age of cultural crisis’.<sup>2</sup> Such an interpretation chimes with H.G. Wells’s account, in his 1924 novel *The Dream*, of an ‘Age of Confusion’ following the expiration of Enlightenment confidence. The source of uncertainty seems straightforward enough: this was a so-called ‘Generation of Materialism’,<sup>3</sup> which had broadly accepted one sort or another of evolutionary model for the universe, and whose Christian devotion was ravaged as a result.<sup>4</sup> A.N. Wilson recounts in *God’s Funeral* the scepticism infecting the British middle classes during the 1880s,<sup>5</sup> which G.K. Chesterton said had become widespread in the suburbs by the 1890s.<sup>6</sup>

It had still been the norm in the mid-1870s for prominent scientists to have religious convictions.<sup>7</sup> James Clerk Maxwell, for example, concluded an 1873 lecture, having made

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<sup>1</sup> According to Kelly Hurley (*The Gothic Body: Sexuality, materialism, and degeneration at the fin-de-siècle*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 26), the late nineteenth century was a period of great taxonomical activity. ‘An era of orthodoxy’ is the verdict of Robin Jared Lewis, writing specifically of the British in India between the 1857 Mutiny and the First World War (‘The literature of the Raj’, in *Asia in Western Fiction*, Winks and Rush (eds.), Honolulu, University of Hawaii, 1990, p. 53).

<sup>2</sup> John W. Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma: ‘Bewildered Traveller’*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1995, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> The title of Carlton Hayes’s 1941 book on the period 1871-1900.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Bowler also sees in this period (c. 1875), infatuated by ideas of biological evolution, ‘a deeper change in the values of western society, as the Christian view of man and nature was replaced by a materialistic one’ (*The Non-Darwinian Revolution*, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988, p. 152).

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *God’s Funeral*, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*, Hutchinson & Co., 1936, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> In a survey of the Fellows of the Royal Society conducted in 1874 by Francis Galton, 70% described themselves as members of the established churches, with many of the remaining 30% being Nonconformists (Wilson, *God’s Funeral*, p. 241).



numerous references to pre-Socratic atomists, by saying that because molecules ‘continue this day as they were created’, we can learn from them ‘the essential constituents of the image of Him who in the beginning created ... heaven and earth’.<sup>8</sup> William Thomson, ennobled in 1892 as Lord Kelvin, was a devout Christian until his death in 1907,<sup>9</sup> believing that his discoveries in the field of thermodynamics were entirely in line with a vision of a purposeful universe and Old Testament decline. Yet another physicist, George Gabriel Stokes, was both a member of the conservative religious establishment opposed to the spread of the ‘amoral’ theory of natural selection and president of the Royal Society from 1885 until 1890. However, by that time his advocacy of ‘directionist’ natural theology was unusual among his peers,<sup>10</sup> most of whom deemed supernatural explanations extraneous. One of these so-called ‘scientific naturalists’ was John Tyndall, whose inaugural speech as President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1874 (which became known as the ‘Belfast Address’) drew explicitly upon Democritus, Lucretius, and Giordano Bruno, in attributing to matter, ‘hitherto covered with opprobrium, the promise and potency of every form and quality of life’.<sup>11</sup> He went on to describe ‘the religious sentiment’ as ‘mischievous’ and nothing more than an ancient and immovable fact of consciousness to be kept separate from the rational sphere.

As I have already indicated, while religion tends to promote a worldview consisting of various binary and oppositional truths, a materialist perspective is attended by a more relativistic value system, or what John Glendening calls ‘entanglement’.<sup>12</sup> He argues, following Daniel Dennett,<sup>13</sup> that the dwindling influence of Christianity and the legacy of Darwinism, which could be interpreted as demonstrating that previously contrary categories of thought were a mere peculiarity of evolutionary chronology, had the effect of confusing and abolishing definitive ideas like ‘man’ and ‘animal’, or ‘modern civilisation’ and ‘primitive savagery’. The apparent disclosure that ruthless and self-interested creatures would prevail at the expense of the selfless even threatened to entangle ‘good’ and ‘evil’.<sup>14</sup> In this way, contemporary science

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<sup>8</sup> James Clerk Maxwell, ‘Molecules’ (1873), [website] <http://www.victorianweb.org/science/maxwell/molecules.html> (accessed 10th October 2016).

<sup>9</sup> See Kelvin’s ‘Letter to Professor J. Helder, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1906, quoted in Brantlinger (ed.), *Energy and Entropy: Science and Culture in Victorian Britain*, Bloomington and Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1989, p. 203.

<sup>10</sup> D.B. Wilson, ‘A Physicist’s Alternative to Materialism: The Religious Thought of George Gabriel Stokes’, in Brantlinger (ed.), *Energy and Entropy*, pp. 178-9 & 200-1.

<sup>11</sup> John Tyndall, ‘Belfast Address’ (1874), in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880-1900*, Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 231.

<sup>12</sup> John Glendening, ‘*An Entangled Bank*’, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1995, p. 64. Glendening and Dennett adhere to a commonly-held belief that, by demonstrating all species were in fact the result of the operation of natural laws over millions of years and not created directly by God, Darwin dealt a fatal blow to the dominance of the teleological perspective of nature and advanced the cause of non-theistic naturalism. As A.N. Wilson puts it, natural selection ‘removed any necessity for a metaphor of purpose when discussing natural history’ (*God’s Funeral*, p. 239). A more qualified example of this thesis can be found in Foster, Clark, and York, *Critique of Intelligent Design*, pp. 105-6, 116, & 124.

<sup>14</sup> Glendening, ‘*An Entangled Bank*’, pp. 16-17 & 19.

altered the image of nature, which O'Hanlon says 'became so very much more complex and uninviting than its pastoral and romantic past had ever suggested'.<sup>15</sup> In the words of Margaret Atwood, 'Gone ... was the kindly Wordsworthian version of Mother Nature that had presided over the first years of the century; in her stead was Tennyson's "Nature, red in tooth and claw"'.<sup>16</sup> Gillian Beer identifies Darwin's emphasis on extreme fecundity as the source of a new vision of nature 'less as husbanding than as spending':<sup>17</sup> excessive, corrupting, and ultimately destructive.

The challenge that science presented to Christianity was not new, but the displaced faith of previous generations had taken repose in the idea of a logical cosmos that tended on the whole towards moral perfection. However, even this reassuring contingency would be denied to the early twentieth century by the strange discoveries of particle physicists like Ernest Rutherford. This atmosphere would conjure a universe in which there is no distinction between a pure, original, bountiful nature and a fallen, inhospitable nature, nor is there orderly movement between the two states as either progress or regress; all is random and illogical chaos. As for humanity, it is purely accidental that we briefly find ourselves among such a lethal tumult, which will eventually consume us. Just such an impression, and its materialist foundation, was expressed by Bertrand Russell in his 1903 essay 'A Free Man's Worship':

That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins--all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Redmond O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin: The Influence of Scientific Thought on Conrad's Fiction*, Edinburgh, Salamander, 1984, p. 28. One could point to the conservation movement, which emerged in India during the 1870s and took off in the first decade of the twentieth century, as evidence that attitudes to wild nature were in fact quite positive. However, my argument is not that people began to see nature as evil, but that they largely ceased during the early 1900s to attribute any moral value to the image of the savage wilderness. It becomes an impassive void. Before then, preservations tended to be sanitised versions of nature, afforested, and cleansed of dangerous predators. Afterwards, big game hunting was disapproved, and tigers eventually ceased to be seen as 'vermin' or foul man-eaters in need of eradication (Schell, 'Tiger Tales', in *Victorian Animal Dreams*, pp. 233 & 245).

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Atwood, 'Introduction to the 2005 Penguin Classics edition of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*', p. xviii.

<sup>17</sup> Gillian Beer, *Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 114.

<sup>18</sup> Bertrand Russell, 'A Free Man's Worship' (1903), [website] <https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/courses/264/fmw.htm> (accessed 9th October 2016).

No longer is there any romantic, regenerative power in nature for mankind. In Thomas Hardy's 1898 poem 'In a Wood', an excursion among the tress in search of relief and shelter from the overwrought city only makes clear how essential to life is competition and violence:

But, having entered in,  
Great growths and small  
Show them to men akin—  
Combatants all!  
Sycamore shoulders oak,  
Bines the slim sapling yoke,  
Ivy-spun halters choke  
Elms stout and tall.<sup>19</sup>

Glendening notes that Darwin's own image of nature as an 'entangled bank', found in the final paragraph of *On the Origin of Species*, stressed 'orderly complexity' and inevitability,<sup>20</sup> not contingency, but he claims that some late-Victorian novels, like *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, 'Heart of Darkness', and *Green Mansions*, subverted this lawful, ecological interdependence to emphasise the themes of randomness, competition, and death.<sup>21</sup> For him, late-Victorian evolutionary fiction is dominated by disordered entanglement: 'the forces of chaos generally overmatch order ... entanglement as snarl outweighs entanglement as network'.<sup>22</sup> I would agree with Glendening's thesis that the trend in British culture during this period was towards a vision of nature that was cruelly arbitrary, but I would query whether it was the overriding image before 1914. The growth of materialism and relativism in the final years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries is one of the narratives of the period, but it is possible to identify a counter-narrative that may account for the incongruous assertions that this was a period of exceptionally fervent conviction and assurance.

The ideological territory that Christianity ceded during the second half of the nineteenth century was not immediately lost to radical materialism or atheism. These very terms were still associated in Britain with the revolutionary terrors of late-eighteenth-century France, and even scientific naturalists like Tyndall and Thomas Huxley refused to identify themselves as such. Huxley loathed organised religion and described its terminology as 'utterly barren, [leading] to nothing but obscurity and confusion of ideas', however materialism was little better, a 'hideous idol';<sup>23</sup> he preferred the term 'agnosticism', which he coined in 1869 to indicate doubt rather than an out-and-out denial of God's existence.<sup>24</sup> Tyndall was eager to find a place for

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'In a Wood' (1898), [website] <http://www.bartleby.com/121/39.html> (accessed 9th October 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', pp. 26-27.

<sup>21</sup> Glendening, pp. 7 & 17.

<sup>22</sup> Glendening, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Huxley, 'On the Physcial Basis of Life' (1870), in *The Fin-de-Siècle*, Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 224-5.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 219.

romantic notions of the imagination and the sublime within the scientific worldview, and had a large readership among theists.<sup>25</sup> Not only did the new wave of sceptics refuse to align itself in opposition to religion, they met a resurgent idealist movement, inspired by German thought, which saw a place for purpose in nature. Its task was the reconciliation of recent scientific developments with the concept of a harmonious and anthropocentric universe.<sup>26</sup> Having already broken with the Spencerian view of evolution as progressive and positive, in 1895 Huxley was assailed by the conservative politician A.J. Balfour and his more explicitly supernatural brand of teleology.<sup>27</sup> The biologist died before he was able to respond.

Instead of an absence of moral categories in the scientific discussions of the period, we find a continuing kinship between the language of evolution and of Christianity. In 1883, Francis Galton complained that man ‘has not yet risen to the conviction that it is his religious duty to [further evolution] deliberately and systematically’,<sup>28</sup> which William Greenslade claims set the tone for ‘a whole generation of post-Darwinian spokesmen for evolution ... who were convinced that the process of evolution was in many ways an ethically-valid substitute for the loss of formal religious faith’.<sup>29</sup> Particularly redolent of the medieval doctrine of spiritual progress was the image of the path, which was employed by intellectuals ranging from Henry Maudsley (‘the steep and narrow way of evolution’<sup>30</sup>) to Galton’s protégé Karl Pearson, who conjures a route to perfection that resembles the corpse-strewn track from ‘Heart of Darkness’:<sup>31</sup>

The path of progress is strewn with the wreck of nations; traces are everywhere to be seen on the hecatombs of inferior races, and of victims who found not the narrow way to the greater perfection. Yet these dead people are, in very truth, the stepping stones on which mankind has arisen to the higher intellectual and deeper emotional life of to-day.<sup>32</sup>

Just as Christianity conceived of a counterpart to righteousness in original sin, so the evolutionists promoted the notion of degeneration: ‘a broad and easy way of dissolution,

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<sup>25</sup> Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p.241.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 318.

<sup>27</sup> Bowler, p. 318.

<sup>28</sup> Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1883, p. 304.

<sup>29</sup> William Paul Greenslade, ‘The concept of degeneration, 1880–1910, with particular reference to the work of Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, and H.G. Wells’, PhD Thesis, The University of Warwick, 1982, p. 73. Galton’s enthusiasm contrasts with Huxley’s negative appraisal of the requirements for man’s mental and physical development as ‘those qualities which he shares with the ape and the tiger’ (‘Evolution and Ethics’, in *Collected Essays*, Vol. IX, [website] <http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/CE9/E-EPro.html>, (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016)).

<sup>30</sup> Henry Maudsley, ‘Lessons of Materialism’, in *A Selection of Lectures Delivered Before the Sunday Lecture Society, Fourth Selection*, London, Sunday Lecture Society, 1886, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> “Now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side.” (‘HD’, 39)

<sup>32</sup> Karl Pearson, *National Life from the Standpoint of Science*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, Adam and Charles Black, 1905, p. 64.

national, social, or individual' (Maudsley again). The word 'degeneration' had already been used by Christians for several centuries to describe a moral and physical deterioration from initial perfection,<sup>33</sup> and now it was applied to those species, races, etc., who appeared to have retreated from complexity and dynamism to simplicity and lethargy. 'The new hell [of degeneration] is almost as exciting to the scientific imagination as was its predecessor to the medieval mind', claims O'Hanlon.<sup>34</sup> One of the first post-Darwinian portrayals in literature of evolution and devolution as a moral journey can be found in Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1862-63). According to Stephen Prickett, Kingsley saw evolution as 'a concrete expression of God's outpouring life-force moulding and re-creating Nature ... [which is] the manifestation of a dynamic spirit';<sup>35</sup> therefore knowledge of this divine power is the key to progress. In *The Water-Babies*, the unfortunate tribe of Doasyoulikes fail to strive for this understanding, preferring instead to wallow in the pleasures of their idyllic homeland like 'those jolly old Greeks in Sicily'.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the Doasyoulikes degenerate until they are 'grown so fierce and suspicious and brutal that they keep out of each other's way, and mope and sulk in the dark forests'.<sup>37</sup>

The common thread that unites religion and science is the quest for knowledge, and, through knowledge of the universe's underlying rationale, progress towards some blissful end. The image that Tyndall uses in invoking 'the inexorable advance of man's understanding in *the path* of knowledge'<sup>38</sup> is the same that a twelfth-century poet or philosopher might have used. And late-nineteenth-century science in turn transmitted this preoccupation to anthropologists, sociologists, and various popular doom-merchants. For E. Ray Lankester, scientific investigation was the very key to racial salvation: 'The full and earnest cultivation of Science, the Knowledge of Causes – is that to which we have to look for the protection of our race – even of this English branch of it – from relapse and degeneration.'<sup>39</sup> Max Nordau diagnosed the cause of the ailment that afflicted modern Europe's 'Doasyoulikes' as a 'feebleness of will, inattention, predominance of emotion, lack of knowledge, absence of sympathy or interest in the world and humanity, atrophy of the notion of duty and morality'.<sup>40</sup> The prophylaxis to avoid

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<sup>33</sup> R.B. Kershner, Jr., 'Degeneration: The Explanatory Nightmare', *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2, Summer 1986, p. 422.

<sup>34</sup> O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, p. 47. Bowler reports that some Calvinists even welcomed the theory of natural selection for buttressing their own view of modern mankind as necessitating redemption (*Evolution*, p. 203).

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Waco, Baylor University Press, 2005, p. 154.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Kingsley, *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby*, London, Rand McNally and Co., 1912, p. 231.

<sup>37</sup> Kingsley, p. 237.

<sup>38</sup> My emphasis. John Tyndall, 'Belfast Address' (1874), in *The Fin-de-Siècle*, Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 234.

<sup>39</sup> E. Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1880, p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn. (translated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. of *Entartung*), New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1895, p. 536.

slipping into a dreamy languor and emulating the fate of their fictional counterparts was obvious to his mind:

Progress is possible only by the growth of knowledge; but this is the task of consciousness and judgment, not of instinct. The march of progress is characterised by the expansion of consciousness and the contraction of the unconscious; the strengthening of the will and the weakening of the impulses; the increase of self-responsibility and the repression of reckless egoism.<sup>41</sup>

In the jungle fictions of the period, one generally observes the same tendency to view the processes of universe and humanity through a teleological lens, with progress in the journey towards reason and order constituting the ultimate good.

### **Tending the forsaken jungle: the authors and their beliefs**

All of Conrad's fellow authors whom I have identified as making greatest use of the tropical forest setting before the First World War reproduced in miniature the age's great crisis of faith, either through profound doubt or outright rejection of Christianity, and all sought consolation in other teleological systems.<sup>42</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson grew up in a devoutly Presbyterian household, and one of his favourite childhood games involved pretending to deliver his own church sermons.<sup>43</sup> At Edinburgh University, he seems to have vacillated between zeal and irreverence,<sup>44</sup> and aged twenty-two he informed his devastated parents that he no longer believed in Christianity.<sup>45</sup> Wiltshire, the protagonist of 'The Beach of Falesá', also equivocates with regard to religion, scolding missionaries ('Falesá', 34) and comparing the Bible to native talismans (60), while taking 'the off chance of a prayer being any good' (53).

Faith and disillusionment waged a lifelong battle in W.H. Hudson. As a boy, under the influence of his pious mother, he was fond of reading about the lives of the Church Fathers, 'especially that of Augustine, the greatest of all'.<sup>46</sup> Less orthodox was his youthful belief that trees have souls of their own, and that 'all nature is alive and intelligent, and feels as we feel'.<sup>47</sup> This animist streak persisted in later life, when he would argue for a kind of intelligent principle

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<sup>41</sup> Nordau, p. 554.

<sup>42</sup> A. Sandison writes of Haggard that his 'awareness of flux and change' prevented him from believing in a higher, benevolent Divinity (*The Wheel of Empire*, London, Macmillan, 1967, p. 30). Consolation for him took the form of a belief in spiritualism and reincarnation.

<sup>43</sup> Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 26.

<sup>44</sup> Harman, p. 70.

<sup>45</sup> Harman, p. 79. Stevenson's parents were left distraught for many months after the conversation on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1873.

<sup>46</sup> W.H. Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago: A Childhood in Argentina*, London, Eland, 1982, p. 215.

<sup>47</sup> W.H. Hudson, *Idle Days in Patagonia*, New York, E.P. Dutton and Co., 1917, p. 117. He would regularly steal out of the house to stand near a large group of trees, where 'the sense of mystery would grow until a sensation of delight would change to fear, and the fear increase until it was no longer to be borne' (W.H. Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago*, p. 231).

in nature. Hudson possessed a horror of death from an early age, which was exacerbated in his teens by a bout of rheumatic fever and the misleading prognosis by a doctor that his condition was terminal.<sup>48</sup> But what troubled him particularly was the prospect of oblivion, which he feared even more than eternal damnation.<sup>49</sup>

Arthur Conan Doyle was immersed during his earliest years in Jesuitism, first at home and then at school in Stonyhurst, Lancashire.<sup>50</sup> This upbringing produced an enthusiastic believer, judging by a letter he wrote aged ten to his mother:

I am glad to say that I have made my first communion Oh mama I cannot express the joy that I felt on the happy day to receive my creator into my breast I shall never though I live a 100 years I shall never forget that day.<sup>51</sup>

However, during his teens, Doyle began to question various aspects of Catholicism, especially the idea of damnation.<sup>52</sup> A growing interest in science led him to study medicine at Edinburgh University, where he met numerous admirers of Huxley, and this freethinking atmosphere seems to have swayed him decisively against religion. Around the time of his twenty-first birthday in 1880, he declared himself to be an agnostic.<sup>53</sup>

Judging it thus by all the new knowledge which came to me both from my reading and from my studies, I found that the foundations not only of Roman Catholicism, but of the whole Christian faith, as presented to me in nineteenth-century theology, were so weak that my mind could not build upon them.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, his apostasy felt to him less like a moment of liberation than as if his 'life-belt had burst'.<sup>55</sup> Doyle would later insist that his agnosticism 'never for an instant degenerated into atheism'.<sup>56</sup> Although unreceptive to organised worship, including Freemasonry, in which he was briefly enrolled between 1887 and 1889, he was loath to accept that the universe lacked the guidance of an intelligent force:

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<sup>48</sup> Miller, *W.H. Hudson and the Elusive Paradise*, p. 7; and Tomalin, *W.H. Hudson*, p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> W.H. Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago*, p. 305.

<sup>50</sup> Booth, *The Doctor, The Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 25.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, 'Letter to Mary Doyle, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1869', in *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*, Lellenberg, Stashower and Foley (eds.), London, Harper Perennial, 2008, p. 22.

<sup>52</sup> Booth, *The Doctor, The Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*, pp. 25 & 59.

<sup>53</sup> Booth, p. 59. Booth states that Doyle's 1880 voyage to Greenland on the *Hope of Peterhead* seemed to prompt an awakening: 'In the Arctic, he had seen nature unsullied by Man and he had seen it despoiled by the blood of clubbed seals' (p. 61).

<sup>54</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> This is the phrase used by his autobiographical character Munro in Doyle's *The Stark Munro Letters*, 1895 (London, Smith, Elder and Co., 1912, p. 45): 'When first I came out of the faith in which I had been reared, I certainly did feel for a time as if my life-belt had burst.'

<sup>56</sup> Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 20.

For Conan Doyle, science could not exist without there being some spiritual quality to it. Existentiality was not enough. There had to be a purpose to creation, some design to it which implied it had a designer whom he could not bring himself to think was feckless, amoral and indifferent. He believed not so much in God in the Christian sense as in some overall powerful theistic entity.<sup>57</sup>

*The Lost World* reflects both the author's lack of Christian faith and his compulsion for teleological structure. While beautiful, the vision of nature invoked by the novel is un-miraculous and violent; capable of producing both the *aurora borealis* and the 'lancet-like proboscis' of the blood-tick (*LW*, 107). Even the animals let out screams that are a 'stupendous indictment of high heaven' (*LW*, 121). However, dark origins and brutal methods merely provide the impetus which propels life forward, towards humanity and the light; it just requires 'a robust faith in the end to justify such tragic means' (*LW*, 174).

Kipling's anxiety and fascination with religion was a common theme throughout his life. According to Lycett, Kipling was an agnostic who drifted between numerous belief-systems. As a young man in India, he became involved in Freemasonry.<sup>58</sup> He reassured his fiancée Carrie Taylor during the winter of 1889-90, when she fretted that he might convert to Roman Catholicism, that he was an Anglican who believed in a personal God but was sceptical about the Trinity and the afterlife.<sup>59</sup> In his later years, Kipling showed an interest in the dualistic philosophy of the thirteenth-century Cathars;<sup>60</sup> and, under the influence of Haggard, he came increasingly to believe in aspects of the occult, such as telepathy and reincarnation.<sup>61</sup> Kipling was a regular churchgoer in spite of his theological peripateticism, especially in the times of crisis following the deaths of his daughter Josephine in 1899 and son John in 1915.<sup>62</sup> He also made frequent use of religious language in his writing, although Lycett judges this had little doctrinal significance and was merely an attempt to exhort the British people to shoulder their imperial duties 'with an appeal to an outdated mid-Victorian religiosity'.<sup>63</sup>

Kipling's attitude resembles that of Muller, the Head Ranger of India ('In the *Rukb*'), who seems torn between the freethinking that dominates while he oversees the planting of trees and makes 'reborts'; Christianity, with God acting through him to regulate the woodlands; and ancient Greek polytheism. He is particularly perplexed by his encounter with Mowgli, whom he first characterises in modern, anthropological terms, then Judeo-Christian, and finally pagan:

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<sup>57</sup> Booth, *The Doctor, The Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 61. He occasionally discerned the influence on his life of something like a guardian angel, a 'beneficent force outside ourselves, which tries to help where it can' (A.C. Doyle, *Through the Magic Door*, New York, McClure, 1908, p. 128).

<sup>58</sup> Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 129.

<sup>59</sup> Lycett, p. 200.

<sup>60</sup> Lycett, p. 428.

<sup>61</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 244.

<sup>62</sup> Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 472; and Brantlinger, p. 242-3. Brantlinger claims that Kipling trod a path 'from doubt to faith'.

<sup>63</sup> Lycett, p. 282.



'Dis man haf lived, and he is an anachronism, for he is before der Iron Age, and der Stone Age. Look here, he is at der beginnings of der history of man – Adam in der Garden, und now we want only an Eva! No! He is older than dot child-tale, shust as der *rukhs* is older dan der gods. Gisborne, I am a Bagan now, once for all.' ('IR', 178)

Yet, after further reflection, Muller is forced to admit that none of these creeds are adequate conduits for reaching a complete understanding of the universe: "Now I know dot, Bagan or Christian, I shall nefer know der inwardness of der *rukhs*!" ('IR', 179).

The specifics of religious convention seem to have been less important to Kipling than their function in upholding a system of absolute values, like natural justice.<sup>64</sup> Other critics have remarked on the presence in Kipling's writing of oppositions and hierarchies. Douglas Hewitt claims that Kipling rarely deals in paradoxes and usually places the reader in a position where they are required to take sides.<sup>65</sup> According to Jonah Raskin, where Kipling does violate boundaries, it is in order to bolster the primacy of the law over anarchy, man over animal, and Europeans over natives.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Zohreh Sullivan argues that Kipling's fiction often enters spaces between the rigid binary constructions of nineteenth-century thought, but 'it is precisely in those borderline sites that Kipling's anxieties over definition and structures become more exaggerated'.<sup>67</sup> His jungle is just such an ambiguous 'borderline site', where the energy and monotony of being is entwined with the carnage and quietude of death (*JB1*, 20). The sudden 'roar' and 'crackling' of wind and rain on foliage abruptly gives way to silent immobility ('IR', 159). But, as when the wolves kill their aging leader and a new one is born, 'to be killed in his turn' (*JB1*, 19), violent struggle and the elimination of life is always the means to an ultimate good, the perpetuation of life. This is especially obvious during the springtime, when even the vegetation must 'put away the hanging-on, over-surviving raffle of half-green things which the gentle winter has suffered to live' (*JB2*, 309). The fatal quarrels and writhing bodies of animals,

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<sup>64</sup> Kipling also saw religion as a necessary veil for the overwhelming truth of the universe, and a means of keeping humanity grounded. The idea that truth is too dangerous to be viewed directly can be found in a number of his works, such as the stories 'A Matter of Fact' in *Many Inventions*, and 'Thrown Away' in *Plain Tales from the Hills*. 'The Prayer of Miriam Cohen' craves,

A veil 'twixt us and Thee, dread Lord,  
A veil 'twixt us and Thee:  
Lest we should hear too clear, too clear,  
And unto madness see!

In a May 1918 letter to Haggard, Kipling suggests that God only allows us a glimpse of Himself so that we should not become 'unfitted for our work in the world' (Morton Cohen (ed.), *Rudyard Kipling to Rider Haggard: The Record of a Friendship*, Hutchinson, 1965). In *Egypt of the Magicians* (1914), a mock conversation between Kipling and the pharaoh Ahkenaton reveals that without the belief that they are lower than the angels, men 'will assuredly become bigger beasts than ever' (*The Kipling Society Archive*, [website] [http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg\\_egypt\\_intro.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg_egypt_intro.htm), (accessed 10<sup>th</sup> February 2017)).

<sup>65</sup> Douglas Hewitt, *English Fiction of the Early Modern Period, 1890-1940*, London and New York, Longman, 1988, p. 51.

<sup>66</sup> Jonah Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2009, p. 66.

<sup>67</sup> Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 8.

which look to the naïve observer like reprehensible outbursts of destruction, are all part of the process by which the jungle is renewed ('IR', 158-59; *JB2*, 313-14).

In contrast to the illogicality of Conrad's forest, Kipling's is more straightforwardly 'full of words that sound like one thing but mean another' (*JB2*, 307-8). His jungle is bound by laws based on fear and segregation. According to the creation myth related by Hathi in 'How Fear Came', the First of the Tigers 'brought Death into the jungle' when he killed a buck in anger; thereafter, a semblance of the world's original harmony can only be maintained by the imported authority of mankind, and division of the animals into their various species:

'Then we of the jungle followed the herd till we came to that cave, and Fear stood at the mouth of it, and he was, as the buffaloes had said, hairless, and he walked upon his hinder legs. When he saw us he cried out, and his voice filled us with the fear that we have now, and we ran away, tramping upon and tearing each other because we were afraid. That night, it was told to me, we of the jungle did not lie down together as used to be our custom, but each tribe drew off by itself – the pig with the pig, the deer with the deer; horn to horn, hoof to hoof – like keeping to like, and so lay shaking in the jungle.' (*JB2*, 163-64)

Of all Conrad's fellow authors, H.G. Wells probably had the knottiest relationship with faith. He describes his own estrangement from Christianity as taking place very abruptly at about the age of eleven, when he dreamt he saw God breaking a sinner on a wheel in hell: 'Never had I hated God so intensely. And then suddenly the light broke through to me and I knew this God was a lie.'<sup>68</sup> Whether this revelatory episode actually took place or was part of a process spanning the course of his adolescence, Wells liked to describe himself as a 'prodigy of Early Impiety'.<sup>69</sup> While working as a teenage apprentice to a Portsmouth draper, he kept a notebook addressing such questions as 'what is matter?'<sup>70</sup> However, the young writer's philosophical and literary heroes, like Thomas Carlyle, were generally sceptics who nonetheless could not accept unalloyed, atheistic materialism.<sup>71</sup> So began an ambivalent and fluid 'love-hate obsession with religion'.<sup>72</sup> Ambivalent, because Wells exhibited the sombre attitude of an atomist for whom chaos is the *status quo* of existence, but never altogether eschewed the idealist notion of a latent perfect world; and fluid, because he appears to have oscillated for lengthy periods throughout his life between the extremes of this dual outlook.

At his most impious, Wells's early dystopian fiction makes a mockery of the Christian belief in future perfection. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) in particular attests to the insurmountable power of nature. For Glendening, it dramatises materialism by shuffling into a random heap 'dualistic categories' such as nature and culture, right and wrong: 'Throughout *The*

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<sup>68</sup> H.G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, Vol. I, London and Boston, Faber and Faber, 1934, p. 67. Michael Sherborne speculates that the young Wells's loss of faith was a result of his family's financial hardship during that time (*H.G. Wells*, p. 36).

<sup>69</sup> Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, Vol. I, p. 66.

<sup>70</sup> Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, p. 44.

<sup>71</sup> Sherborne, p. 60.

<sup>72</sup> Sherborne, p. 27.

*Island of Doctor Moreau* chance and uncertainty undermine order and knowledge. The novel signifies indeterminacy as the ruling element in the universe and in the human condition.<sup>73</sup> Above all, it is the ‘green confusion’ of the forest which symbolises this amoral world, prone to unpredictable, unavoidable, and entropic transformations into formlessness.<sup>74</sup> According to John Reed, Wells found the bestial jungle ‘terrifying’ and used it consistently as a metaphor for ‘threateningly abundant disorder’, in contrast to the ‘coherent’ garden.<sup>75</sup> Glendening points out that, in the forest, Prendick becomes ‘perplexed’ (*IDM*, 45),<sup>76</sup> a word related to the Latin *perplexus*, meaning ‘entangled’.<sup>77</sup> He also notes that the island’s jungly character was absent in the first version of the novel, inferring that it was added ‘as Wells discovered his theme of mental entanglement’.<sup>78</sup> However, Glendening’s definitive judgement is that the book is not a ‘naturalistic or even nihilistic message about the pointlessness of the cosmos and the helplessness of humanity’, but rather an exploration of the control humanity might exercise once it acknowledges the absence of any moral agent besides itself.<sup>79</sup> Wells himself preferred an even-handed interpretation of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. The only contemporary review which he found satisfactory, in the Anglican *Guardian*, theorised that the author’s aim had been ‘to satirise and rebuke the presumptions of science’ while reproving God.<sup>80</sup>

It is common among Wells scholars to depict the author’s general outlook as a kind of ‘qualified optimism’, broadly mirroring the vision outlined by Huxley in ‘Evolution and Ethics’ of humans carving from nature by artificial means a degree of moral progress, before this utopia must ultimately be destroyed in the inevitable heat-death of the universe.<sup>81</sup> John Carey has argued that there was a sacred quality about Wells’s manifesto for a society of ideal artists, cleansed by eugenics.<sup>82</sup> According to Sherborne, though Wells’s utopia ‘purports to be built on the rock of reason’, it is as otherworldly as Plato’s Republic or the Judeo-Christian image of New Jerusalem.<sup>83</sup> *The Time Machine* (1895), where a transitory utopia is achieved before

<sup>73</sup> Glendening, ‘*An Entangled Bank*’, pp. 39-40.

<sup>74</sup> Glendening, p. 53. He writes that the image of entangled vegetation signifies ‘the commingling of objects, processes, and qualities that strike the human mind as incompatible or antagonistic because they upset boundaries and categories; and it points to the limits of knowledge, since the mind, caught in the very processes it tries to understand, is continually confounded by contingencies, like those governing the course of Darwinian evolution, too complex to be anticipated or fully comprehended’ (p. 41).

<sup>75</sup> John R. Reed, *The Natural History of H.G. Wells*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1981, p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> Glendening, ‘*An Entangled Bank*’, p. 56.

<sup>77</sup> Charlton T. Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary*, New York, Cincinnati, and Chicago, American Book Company, 1890, [website] <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>, (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017).

<sup>78</sup> Glendening, ‘*An Entangled Bank*’, p. 67. He goes on, ‘this discovery is hinted at, I believe, by his addition of the word “tangle” to the first page of the original, manuscript version of the story’.

<sup>79</sup> Glendening, p. 43.

<sup>80</sup> Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, p. 114.

<sup>81</sup> Glendening, ‘*An Entangled Bank*’, p. 149; Sherborne, p. 105; Michael R. Page, *The Literary Imagination from Erasmus Darwin to H.G. Wells: Science, Evolution, and Ecology*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2012, p. 151; W.W. Wagar, *Traversing Time*, Middleton, Wesleyan University Press, 2004, p. 36; Marina Warner, ‘Introduction to 2005 Penguin Classics edition of *The Time Machine*’, p. xxii.

<sup>82</sup> John Carey on ‘Literary Modernism’, *In Our Time*, BBC Radio Four, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2001 [radio programme].

<sup>83</sup> Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, pp. 166 & 239.

becoming overgrown, embodies this tension in Wells between, on the one hand, a naturalism 'in which life is portrayed as squalid and meaningless ... and, on the other hand, a militant fantasy supposedly endorsed by science but with its roots in Wells's religious upbringing'.<sup>84</sup> The novel may lampoon the lexicon and redemptive promise of Christianity, but it contains numerous biblical references and romantic features, including battles with otherworldly enemies, departing from the epic archetype only in its omission of divinities.<sup>85</sup> 'It is highly characteristic of Wells that, even as he parodies religious mythology, he depends on it to give shape to his ideas,' writes Sherborne.<sup>86</sup>

For Gregory Claeys, Wells is 'famous as a writer who commenced his career writing dystopian works in the vein of fin-de-siècle pessimism, only to embrace utopia and exchange degeneration for regeneration'.<sup>87</sup> Sherborne claims that Wells began to retreat from staunch secularism during the 1890s, becoming increasingly defensive of the concept of God, until, by the time of the Great War, he observed something like 'a very diluted Protestantism'.<sup>88</sup> During this allegedly upbeat phase, Wells produced *Tono-Bungay* (1909), a story so bleak that the narrator claims a far better name for it would be *Waste* (TB, 381). George Ponderevo shows all the signs of being an irremediable materialist. When confronted at a young age by his fanatically Christian cousins, the Frapps, whom he considers cannibalistic savages (45), George proclaims that he doesn't 'believe in anything at all' (51). He finds the concept of progressive evolution absurd (85), feeling instead that life is generally fortuitous and futile (10 & 348). But, without constant and autonomous standards, he is beset by Glendenning's entanglement and unable to make sense of the world: 'The perplexing thing about life is the irresolute complexity of reality, of things and relations alike. Nothing is simple. Every wrong done has a certain justice in it, and every good deed has dregs of evil.' (195-6) It is therefore appropriate that the essential episode of the novel, and George's life, should be a voyage into the jungle of a West African island, where the

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<sup>84</sup> Sherborne, p. 95.

<sup>85</sup> Sherborne, p. 103. Specifically, he views the time traveller as a blasphemous parody, 'a prophet with no message of salvation and a messiah who is incapable of rescuing the Eloi from the hell being prepared below them' (p. 105). He also draws attention to the biblical derivation of the names 'Eloi' (from Christ's words on the cross) and 'Morlock' (from Moloch, a god to whom children were sacrificed).

<sup>86</sup> Sherborne, p. 105.

<sup>87</sup> Gregory Claeys, 'The origins of dystopia: Wells, Huxley, and Orwell', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Claeys (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 113. Likewise, Jack Williamson (*H.G. Wells: Critic of Progress*, Mirage Press, 1973) considers the author's early romances as critiques of Victorian progressive idealism, and his twentieth-century works as prophecies of human possibility. However, Michael Page argues that there was little alteration in Wells's pessimism, but rather his later works were attempts to divert the nightmarish course on which the world was set. Stylistically, he says, Wells first built an antithesis to the complacent, Victorian vision of progress through the dark Gothicism of Mary Shelley, before turning to the idealist progressivism of her husband (*The Literary Imagination*, pp. 180 & 184). The fact that Wells finally disowned his religious convictions before his death in 1946 would appear to add weight to Page's position.

<sup>88</sup> Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, pp. 238-39. In a letter of 16<sup>th</sup> November 1900, Wells assured Galsworthy that he was still 'an extensive skeptic, no God, no king, no nationality' (*Correspondence*, Vol. I, David C. Smith (ed.), London and Vermont, Pickering and Chatto, 1998, p. 366), however Sherborne claims that he showed few signs of this scepticism in his writing (p. 150).

ambiguity of all existence is distilled into a single, incomprehensible image of nonchalant immobility and half-concealed passions:

Here and there strange blossoms woke the dank intensities of green with a trumpet call of colour. Things crept among the jungle and peeped and dashed back rustling into stillness. Always in the sluggishly drifting, opaque water were eddyings and stirrings; little rushes of bubbles came chuckling up light-heartedly from this or that submerged conflict and tragedy; now and again were crocodiles like a stranded fleet of logs basking in the sun. Still it was by day, a dreary stillness broken only by insect sounds and the creaking and flapping of our progress, by the calling of the soundings and the captain's confused shouts; but in the night as we lay moored to a clump of trees the darkness brought a thousand swampy things to life and out of the forest came screamings and howlings, screamings and yells that made us glad to be afloat. And once we saw between the tree stems long blazing fires. (*TB*, 325)

This disclosure of life as a 'strange by-play of matter' culminates in barrenness and decay, represented by two small heaps of a radioactive substance called 'quap': 'Suppose indeed that is to be the end of our planet; no splendid climax and finale, no towering accumulation of achievements but just – atomic decay!' (*TB*, 329-30). The shocking implications of the absence of a final cause are made plain when George murders an innocent native as though it were 'a matter-of-fact transaction', like the packing of a portmanteau or 'the killing of a bird or rabbit' (*TB*, 335). He prompts us to wonder whether fatalism and a lack of stable values leaves the atheist especially vulnerable to such senseless impulses:

It was the most unmeaning and purposeless murder imaginable. Even as I write down its well-remembered particulars there comes again the sense of its strangeness, its pointlessness, its incompatibility with any of the neat and definite theories people hold about life and the meaning of the world. I did this thing and I want to tell of my doing it, but why I did it and particularly why I should be held responsible for it I cannot explain. (*TB*, 333)

Through his experience on Mordet Island, the protagonist learns the wisdom of his uncle's earlier pronouncement: "It's when you bump up against Chance like this, George, that you feel the need of religion. Your hard-and-fast scientific men – your Spencers and Huxleys – they don't understand that." It isn't the Christian God, but George does eventually find an inexpressible absolute to cut through the confusion of life: 'Sometimes I call this reality Science, sometimes I call it Truth. But it is something we draw by pain and effort out of the heart of life, that we disentangle and make clear.' (*TB*, 388)

### **Captivation and disillusionment amid Conrad's waste forest**

Joseph Conrad was born into a family which placed a great deal of importance on ideals, not only those of Christianity but of patriotic and chivalric romanticism also. He

departed from his father's 'Christian stoicism' at about the age of thirteen,<sup>89</sup> associating the religion with a savage, Russian mentality.<sup>90</sup> Nor did he feel the need for religion later in life. In a 1914 letter, he said he found Christianity 'distasteful',<sup>91</sup> and his note accompanying the 1920 edition of *The Shadow-Line* disavowed belief in the supernatural altogether.<sup>92</sup> One encounters occasional references in Conrad's fiction to a deity, such as an affirmation in the preface to *Almayer's Folly* of a common humanity 'under the inscrutable eyes of the Most High', enduring 'the load of the gifts from Heaven'; but these are usually infected with irony<sup>93</sup> or contradicted elsewhere.<sup>94</sup> There are no divinities or providential forces which orchestrate forbidding skies or use humans as instruments of their will; merely cyclones (*LJ*, 301) and people who 'happen along' (*Victory*, 17). Nor does God heed the prayers of characters like Captain Whalley (*Tether*, 167). In a reversal of the traditional pattern, Conrad depicts ideals of all kinds as dreamy illusions,<sup>95</sup> and scepticism as the revitalising medicament, 'the tonic of minds, the tonic of life, the agent of truth – the way of art and salvation'.<sup>96</sup> His tropical forest is frequently the scene of romantic delusions, but it can also epitomise the universe as the sceptic is able to see it, causing Lingard to doubt whether "there is such a thing as justice" (*Outcast*, 204). More disturbingly, it is the place where Kurtz realises "there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased" ('HD', 92), just as Gentleman Jones is a cold-blooded killer because he behaves 'as if the world were still one great, wild jungle without law' (*Victory*, 89). As Glendening puts it, the jungle serves to 'undermine idealisations, including the trappings of both romantic love and romantic nature'.<sup>97</sup>

In his book *The Blinding Torch*, Brian Shaffer writes that 'Conrad's fiction presages poststructuralism ... as the line dividing ... oppositions dissolves before our eyes'.<sup>98</sup> I think it is

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<sup>89</sup> Meyers, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 24.

<sup>90</sup> For Conrad, Russians in general were 'primitive natures fashioned by a Byzantine theological conception of life, with an inclination to perverted mysticism' (*The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol. VII, Laurence Davies & J.H. Stape (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 615), and Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* were 'like some fierce mouthings from prehistoric ages' ('Letter to Edward Garnett, 27<sup>th</sup> May 1912', in *Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924*, Edward Garnett (ed.), Indianapolis, The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1924, p. 240).

<sup>91</sup> 'Letter to Edward Garnett, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1914', in *Letters from Joseph Conrad*, p. 245.

<sup>92</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Author's Note', in *The Shadow-Line: A Confession*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 110: 'all my moral and intellectual being is penetrated by an invincible conviction that whatever falls under the dominion of our senses must be in nature and, however exceptional, cannot differ in its essence from all the other effects of the visible and tangible world of which we are a self-conscious part'.

<sup>93</sup> If the existence of God is affirmed, it is sometimes intimated that He is sick or senile; for example, Stein wonders whether 'the artist' who created man was 'a little mad' (*LJ*, 150), and, in *Almayer's Folly*, the motionless treetops are irregularly jagged, 'as if traced by an unsteady hand' (*AF*, 84).

<sup>94</sup> See Robert Hampson's analysis of this very example in *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2000, p. 114.

<sup>95</sup> 'Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore' ('Letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1898', in *The Selected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, p. 89).

<sup>96</sup> 'Letter to John Galsworthy, 1901', in *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol. II, Laurence Davies & J.H. Stape (eds.), p. 359.

<sup>97</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', p. 140.

<sup>98</sup> Brian Shaffer, *The Blinding Torch*, p. 66.

possible to say, more specifically, that Conrad casts into doubt the possibility of culture, or rather nature as regulated by *logos*, with its attendant symbolism of goodness, life, light, and the garden or ideal city (as distinct from and triumphing over evil, death, darkness, and the wilderness). Instead, the modern world in its entirety resembles hyle, untamed nature, where traditionally contrary values merge or are even inverted.<sup>99</sup> Glendening discusses Conrad's fondness for such elision at length, especially with regard to his forests. However, he seems to view it more as an expression of the atheistic character's internal confusion, not of the irrational universe itself,<sup>100</sup> calling Conrad's tropical wilderness 'an ominous, impenetrable barrier of perceptual and cognitive chaos in which death interfuses life'.<sup>101</sup>

On the important point of Conrad's attitude to culture, Glendening makes two contradictory declarations. Initially he writes, 'With his evocative jungles Conrad follows Huxley's lead by advocating a clear line of demarcation between nature and culture';<sup>102</sup> but he goes on to claim that, 'Even more than Huxley, [Conrad] beholds both nature and culture as an entangled forest with no clear paths.'<sup>103</sup> The second of these statements more closely matches my own understanding. Conrad was undoubtedly conscious that, without the comforting illusion of order provided by teleological beliefs, a world lacking physical and moral clarity could be a bewilderingly difficult place to negotiate. He wrote to Edward Garnett in September 1899 comparing himself to 'a man who has lost his gods. My efforts seem unrelated to anything in heaven and everything under heaven is impalpable to the touch like shapes of mist'.<sup>104</sup> Along with the dense vegetation and rotting riverbanks ('HD', 31), spells of cloud and fog make Conrad's forests apposite representations of a chaotic universe by blurring the lines between objects (*LJ*, 291; 'HD', 29 & 67-73; *Rescue*, 61), and between concepts, like 'immaculate' whiteness and deadly poisonousness ('Outpost', 256). The animals of Conrad's jungle also epitomise an atmosphere that is predominantly solemn but increasingly punctuated by moments of absurdity, such as the long-nosed monkeys in *An Outcast*, who look on 'with grave and sorrowful intensity, disturbed now and then by irrational outbreaks of mad gesticulation'

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<sup>99</sup> Patrick McCarthy similarly identifies the 'blurring of margins' in 'Heart of Darkness' as suggestive of entropy, citing the description of the sea and sky as 'welded together without a joint', and Marlow's lack of rivets ('HD', 15 & 51): 'one suggests the obliteration of all differences, the other the dissolution of all bonds' ('"Heart of Darkness" and the Early Novels of H.G. Wells: Evolution, Anarchy, Entropy', in the *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 13, No. 1, March 1986, pp. 56-7). As evidence of blurred concepts, he could equally have pointed towards the image of the sepulchral city, or the fact that 'The light of day appears more inimical as a rule than even the heart of darkness, in Conrad' (Gurdip Kaur Panesar, 'Worlds Elsewhere: Studies in Some Late Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Romance', PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2003, p. 64).

<sup>100</sup> Glendening, *'An Entangled Bank'*, p. 170.

<sup>101</sup> Glendening, p. 165.

<sup>102</sup> Glendening, p. 149.

<sup>103</sup> Glendening, p. 154.

<sup>104</sup> 'Letter to Edward Garnett, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1899', in *Letters from Joseph Conrad*, p. 155.

(*Outcast*, 250), or their garrulous peers who undermine Jim's romantic pretensions with their 'insulting hullabaloo' (*LJ*, 177).

Much of Conrad's fiction focuses on the question of whether there is any meaning or purpose to life in an exclusively material world bereft of *logos*. Some characters are anxious to discern a supernatural motivation behind the course of events, even if it is retributive (e.g. Lena in *Victory*, 266); others would be satisfied with finding any kind of order in the convoluted pattern of life, such as a sequence in the winning numbers of a lottery (Massy in *Tether*, 117). In 'Heart of Darkness', Marlow is confronted by an inconsequential and incomprehensible reality, in which people care little whether soldiers live or die as they disembark into the surf ('HD', 29-30). He asks himself 'what it all meant' (44) and 'what did it matter?' (66), and his journey into the forest is fundamentally one of a number of attempts in Conrad's novels to answer these questions in keeping with literary convention. Generally, the answer which emerges is not encouraging. Almayer whiles away his 'empty days' with material considerations,

when nothing mattered to him but the quality of guttah and the size of rattans; where there were no small hopes to be watched for; where to him there was nothing interesting, nothing supportable, nothing desirable to expect; nothing bitter but the slowness of the passing days; nothing sweet but the hope, the distant and glorious hope – the hope wearying, aching and precious, of getting away. (*Outcast*, 238)

'Nothing' is also the verdict pronounced by the white man on Arsat's quest for purpose ('Lagoon', 230), and by Davidson in response to the 'Samburan mystery' (*Victory*, 310).<sup>105</sup>

According to Glendening, in Conrad, 'the forests of the Malay Archipelago and of Africa invite nihilism' because they are pervaded by the mortality and oblivion which threaten all mankind:

The chief significance of raw nature is its horrifying absence of significance, because the mind balks at the sheer meaninglessness of a godless universe that offers no clues about how conscious beings should live faced with certain death and the nothingness that lies beyond. There appears no adequate answer to the mortality that dominates even the most intense manifestations of life. The darkness that permeates the fecundity and the profusion of Conrad's forests also looms over individual men and women, over civilisations, and over the human species.<sup>106</sup>

Certainly, Conrad was fixated by the idea that the universe would eventually dwindle into 'cold, darkness, and silence',<sup>107</sup> and his forests are profoundly suggestive of the 'curse of decay – the eternal decay that will extinguish the sun, the stars, one by one, and in another instant shall

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<sup>105</sup> In 'Heart of Darkness', Marlow is only a little less blunt when he says that the most you can hope for from life is a little self-knowledge, the realisation of futility ('HD', 112-13).

<sup>106</sup> Glendening, '*An Entangled Bank*', p. 137.

<sup>107</sup> 'Letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1898', in *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame Graham*, C.T. Watts (ed.), p. 65.



spread a frozen darkness over the whole universe'.<sup>108</sup> A 'conquering darkness' ('HD', 117) positively 'oozes' and 'flows' from between the trees ('Lagoon', 218; *Tether*, 116; *Rescue*, 311 & 348), ambushing and 'devouring' its 'feeble enemy' light (*Outcast*, 169; *LJ*, 192), and obliterating all form (*AF*, 117). Similarly, the 'unseen presence of victorious corruption' seems to physically 'wither' and 'consume' Kurtz ('HD', 81 & 101), just as the smell of dead hippo threatens Marlow's sanity ('HD', 70). The jungle and its creatures possess a Dionysian longing to dismember and decompose the human body (*Outcast*, 254; 'HD', 24), and all man-made structures, like Cornelius's trading-post (*LJ*, 207 & 216), Kurtz's inner station ('HD', 86), and the abandoned sheds of the Tropical Belt Coal Company (*Victory*, 133). Conrad's jungle is engaged in the task of turning the world into one great wasteland, just as the concept of entropy meant that the universe would become relentlessly more disordered. There was nothing especially radical about this conviction. The second law of thermodynamics, that energy tends spontaneously to diffuse, was first outlined by Sadi Carnot with regard to heat engines in 1824, and used by William Thomson to predict the 'heat-death' of the universe in 1862.<sup>109</sup> Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling, and Wells were all preoccupied with the prospect of universal, human, and cultural extinction.<sup>110</sup> However, they were generally able to reconcile long-term dissipation with a degree of teleology<sup>111</sup> and human progress, of which Conrad saw no hope.<sup>112</sup>

Can we therefore regard Conrad as the exception among the authors of the period, who were generally unwilling to tolerate the void left by God, and style him 'a materialist'? As a combination of density ('impenetrable forest', thick air, etc.) and vacuity (the 'empty stream', deserted waterway, etc.) ('HD', 59), and as a location of formation and transformation, his forest setting certainly recalls ancient Greek physics. He probably had knowledge of classical atomism and Epicureanism, having learnt ancient history, 'tolerably good' Latin, and 'a certain amount' of Greek at the *gymnasium* in Poland;<sup>113</sup> but whether his views more closely resemble

<sup>108</sup> 'Letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1897', in *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame Graham*, C.T. Watts (ed.), p. 53.

<sup>109</sup> See Carnot's *Reflections on the Motive Power of Fire* (1824) and Thomson's 'On the Age of the Sun's Heat' (1862).

<sup>110</sup> In Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* (1887), the eponymous hero contemplates a ruined, overgrown city, saying: 'Nothing may endure. That is the inexorable law. Men and women, empires and cities, thrones, principalities, and powers, mountains, rivers, and unfathomed seas, worlds, spaces, and universes, all have their day and all must go. In this ruined and forgotten place the moralist may behold a symbol of universal destiny.' (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1887, p. 20.)

<sup>111</sup> As Oswald Spengler would later do in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*): 'What the myth of *Götterdämmerung* signified of old ... the myth of entropy signifies today – the world's end as *completion of an inwardly necessary evolution*.' (trans. C.F. Atkinson, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1927, p. 424.)

<sup>112</sup> Conrad famously told Wells, 'You don't care for humanity, but think they are to be improved. I love humanity but know they are not!' ('The Diary of Hugh Walpole, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1918', in *Joseph Conrad: Interviews and Recollections*, Martin Ray (ed.), Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1990, p. 135). McCarthy writes, 'Conrad's pessimism, it must be admitted, is deeper and more profound than that of Huxley or Wells: there is in the later Conrad none of the simple enthusiasm for utopias that we find in the later Wells' ('"Heart of Darkness" and the Early Novels of H.G. Wells', p. 58).

<sup>113</sup> Zdzisław Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, trans. Halina Carroll-Najder, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1983, pp. 31-38.

the determinism of the former or the contingency of the latter is debatable. It has been said that, in terms of science, Conrad had one foot planted in the 'post-Darwin, post-Kelvin' world of law-bound biological evolution and stable elements, but was also stretching towards a more volatile 'pre-Mendel and pre-Einstein' reality.<sup>114</sup> He often describes nature in rigidly mechanistic terms, from the dog snapping at a fly outside the courtroom in *Lord Jim* (54) to the mist in 'Heart of Darkness' falling 'smoothly, as if sliding in greased grooves' (68). In an 1897 letter to Cunninghame Graham, Conrad laid out his vision of the universe as like a knitting machine which has 'evolved itself ... out of a chaos of scraps of iron', 'without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident – and it has happened.'<sup>115</sup> Glendening rightly compares this image to the inexorable Greek *Moirai*,<sup>116</sup> but Conrad also stresses the accidental origins of the machine, which at any moment may collapse into the chaos whence it arose.<sup>117</sup>

Of machine-like nature, Conrad writes in the abstract, 'I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. I feel it ought to embroider – but it goes on knitting.' Glendening draws on this statement to infer that, as an ex-Catholic, 'Conrad is "appalled" by the non-existence of a God he can neither believe in nor forget'.<sup>118</sup> 'Appalled' is a strong word that can certainly be applied to some of his characters,<sup>119</sup> but Conrad himself was more resigned than the other authors discussed here. Elsewhere, he reflects on humanity 'condemned to perish from cold' in 'a universe made of drops of fire and clods of mud': 'If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy.'<sup>120</sup> Conrad tends not to 'take it to heart', and instead observes that the pointless, 'remorseless process is sometimes amusing'. And yet, though he may have believed that materialism offered the most accurate explanation of the modern world, he was far from enamoured with its conclusions. He was not so extreme in his pessimism as Schopenhauer,<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, pp. 20 & 29. For example, in an 1898 letter to Edward Garnett, Conrad recounts a whisky-fuelled evening in Glasgow during which the possibility of multiple universes was discussed, 'all (the universes) composed of the same matter, matter, *all matter* being only that thing of inconceivable tenuity through which the various vibrations of waves (electricity, heat, sound, light, etc.) are propagated, thus giving birth to our sensations – then emotions – then thought'. ('Letter to Edward Garnett, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1898', in *Letters from Joseph Conrad*, p. 143.)

<sup>115</sup> 'Letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1897', in *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame Graham*, C.T. Watts (ed.), p. 56.

<sup>116</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', p. 145. It was surely a conscious allusion on Conrad's part, for it appears again more explicitly in *The Rescue* when Mrs Travers refers to the thread of fate. "You talk like a pagan." says Mr Travers in response (*Rescue*, 228).

<sup>117</sup> 'Therefore, Marlow may be too complacent when he imagines that 'a law regulates your luck in the throwing of dice' (*LJ*, 233).

<sup>118</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', pp. 137 & 145.

<sup>119</sup> Like Almayer, who hysterically and fruitlessly demands of 'the man of science', 'a materialist' (*Outcast*, 276), "'Where's your Providence? Where's the good for anybody in all this? The world's a swindle!'" (*Outcast*, 279).

<sup>120</sup> 'Letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1898', in *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame Graham*, C.T. Watts (ed.), p. 65.

<sup>121</sup> In *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* ('The World as Will and Idea'), Arthur Schopenhauer expressed his disdain for the Hegelian idea of the world working providentially towards a perfect state, and his belief

nor the excessively detached Heyst and his hypocritical father in *Victory*.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps he was closer to Marlow in 'Heart of Darkness', who has no truck with 'careless contempt', preferring instead Kurtz's 'victorious' exclamation of regret and despair ('HD', 114). Therefore, it would be more accurate to describe Conrad as a 'disillusioned idealist'.

The early disenchantment which Conrad experienced with religion was echoed in 1874 by his rejection of Polish nationalism and emigration from his homeland (which Romantics like Adam Mickiewicz dubbed 'Christ among nations'<sup>123</sup>), and by the realisation he experienced regarding heroic imperialism on his 1890 Congo journey. For Martin Green, Conrad underwent a quite straightforward journey from 'boyhood enthusiasm' for an adventure ideal to 'mature disillusionment';<sup>124</sup> however, others paint a more complex picture, with Conrad continuing to hold past heroes in high regard, while rubbishing the possibility of men emulating their achievements in his own day. Cedric Watts, for example, refers to Conrad as 'both romantic and anti-romantic'.<sup>125</sup> Andrea White claims that the gap which Conrad measured in the Congo between Livingstone and Stanley awoke him reluctantly from his dream of noble deeds amid blank spaces to the dark reality of the present, which smothered such possibilities:<sup>126</sup> 'The nostalgia, the romantic yearning for a more heroic past, is mixed with the realistic appraisal of man's universal imperfection, an understanding that all men are base and that "into the noblest cause men manage to put something of their baseness"'.<sup>127</sup> Linda Dryden argues along the same lines that Conrad was a 'troubled sceptic', for whom heroic action was the mark of a splendid, bygone age:<sup>128</sup> 'His work displays an awareness of the Empire's glorious past, but shows its late nineteenth-century present to be fraught with unease and doubt about the existence of absolute truths [such as European superiority]'.<sup>129</sup>

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that it is the fate of humanity to be unsatisfied. Conrad speculated whether 'our appointed task on this earth' might be to 'bear true testimony' to the 'sublime spectacle' of the universe: 'I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view – and in this view alone – never for despair! Those visions, delicious or poignant, are a moral end in themselves.' (*A Personal Record*, New York and London, Harper and Brothers, 1912, pp. 150-1.)

<sup>122</sup> Outwardly, Heyst's father emulates Schopenhauer (and possibly Conrad) in a number of respects, but the scepticism which he passes on to his son is a response to a failed romanticism, and therefore insincere. Before dying, he prays to God (*Victory*, 151). See Robert Hampson, *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*, p. 240.

<sup>123</sup> See his poetic drama *Dziady* ('Forefathers' Eve'), originally published 1832, (trans. Charles S. Kraszewski), London, Glagoslav, 2016.

<sup>124</sup> Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 303.

<sup>125</sup> Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Conrad*, London, Harlow, 1982, p. 46.

<sup>126</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, pp. 188 & 191.

<sup>127</sup> White, p. 108.

<sup>128</sup> Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 106.

<sup>129</sup> Dryden, p. 8. Martine Hennard Dutheil also discusses Conrad's use of romance archetypes to draw attention to the end of a chivalrous era, replaced by 'routine, boredom, loneliness and decay' ("Heart of Darkness" as a Modernist Anti-Fairy Tale', p. 2).

In all three idealist strands outlined above, what Conrad repudiated was the modern 'distortion' of their values into unachievable ambitions or delusions. Of Christianity, Conrad wrote:

I am not blind to its services but the absurd oriental fable from which it starts irritates me. Great, improving, softening, compassionate it may be but it has lent itself with amazing facility to cruel distortion and is the only religion which, with impossible standards, has brought an infinity of anguish to innumerable souls.<sup>130</sup>

Similarly, Conrad criticised Napoleon for having engendered in Poles 'a false hope of national independence'.<sup>131</sup> In response to Cunninghame Graham's ambition to bring about a utopian fraternity of humankind, Conrad chided him for perpetuating a futile cause, while admitting he would have more sympathy if he 'had a grain of belief left in him':

You with your ideals of sincerity, courage and truth are strangely out of place in this epoch of material preoccupations ... You are a most hopeless idealist – your aspirations are irrealisable. You want from men faith, honour, fidelity to truth in themselves and others ... What makes you dangerous is your unwarrantable belief that your desire may be realised. That is the only point of difference between us.<sup>132</sup>

Conrad does not subvert ideals themselves, for he believed in their past existence, but rather the hypocritical language used to promote them in a present 'threatened by jungles without and within'.<sup>133</sup> This was the substance of another letter written in June 1898:

There are no converts to ideas of honour, justice, pity, freedom. There are only people who ... drive themselves into a frenzy with words ... without believing in anything but profit, personal advantage, satisfied vanity. And words fly away; and nothing remains, do you understand? Absolutely nothing, oh man of faith! Nothing. A moment, a twinkling of an eye and nothing remains – but a clot of mud, of cold mud, of dead mud cast into black space, rolling around an extinguished sun. Nothing. Neither thought, nor sound, nor soul. Nothing. [Translated into English from French by Laurence Davies.]<sup>134</sup>

Just as the trees of Conrad's forest are being swamped by 'a mass of tangled creepers' (*AF*, 106), and the once orderly universe is returning by fits and starts into illogicality, so words, stories, the law have ceased to be truthful, and become comforting, untrustworthy illusions, veiling egoistic concerns. Thus the tropical forest of his novels evokes an exclusively material world where ideals are revealed to be tenuous apparitions that will never be realised.

I have attempted to show how the period between the years 1885 and 1914 in Britain was a time of iconoclastic devastation and an increasingly relativistic, materialist outlook, but

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<sup>130</sup> 'Letter to Edward Garnett, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1914', in *Letters from Joseph Conrad*, p. 245.

<sup>131</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*, p. 81.

<sup>132</sup> 'Letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1898', in *The Selected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Laurence Davies (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 90-91.

<sup>133</sup> Glendening, '*An Entangled Bank*', p. 149.

<sup>134</sup> 'Letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1898', in *The Selected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, p. 100.

that simultaneously a competing effort was made to shore up a binary, idealist view of nature.<sup>135</sup> This process of filling the ideological waste where shared Christian beliefs had once stood has been named *Umbesetzung* ('reoccupation') by Hans Blumenberg.<sup>136</sup> In his book *Narratives of Empire*, Zohreh T. Sullivan takes a similar line, arguing that it was not an age of faith but 'an age obsessed with the disintegration of faith and of the old structures of religion. The old structures, however, were not discarded; rather, the age found suitable surrogates for them in such secular systems as work, home, imperialism, and nationalism – and each was a construction designed to ward off its undesirable Other.'<sup>137</sup> I agree with him that imperialism, which promoted Anglo-Saxon man to the divine role of ordering and illuminating the world, was one strand of this reoccupation, but my contention is that the process was also comprised of neo-Lamarckian evolutionary theory, which ousted the biblical story of the Creation while providing for a purposeful cosmos; and social Darwinism, which depicted non-Western cultures as chaotic and debased, requiring elevation. These ideas too were soon discarded or amended during the first half of the twentieth century,<sup>138</sup> but in the intervening years they were remarkably successful in dampening the traumatic impact of materialism. Almost uniquely for a British author before the Great War, Conrad did not engage in this reoccupation.

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<sup>135</sup> At the time (1892), Karl Pearson wrote something similar in his book *The Grammar of Science*, calling it an era in which 'the extremes of religious faith and of unequivocal free thought are found jostling each other', sometimes within the same individual mind (*The Grammar of Science*, in *The Fin de Siècle*, Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 235).

<sup>136</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (*The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*), trans. Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press, 1983.

<sup>137</sup> Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire*, p. 5.

<sup>138</sup> That also seems to have been the impression of many at the time, including Charles Masterman, who lamented in *The Condition of England* (1909), 'The large hopes and dreams of the Early Victorian time have vanished: never, at least in the immediate future, to return.' The ambitions of science, commerce, psychical research, the spirit of invention, 'all these have become recognised as remote and fairy visions' (C.F.G. Masterman, *The Condition of England*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., London, Methuen and Co., 1909, p. 215).

## Chapter Three

### Neo-Lamarckism

#### The 'eclipse of Darwinism'

It is a relatively common misconception that the 1859 publication of *On the Origin of Species* kick-started a 'Darwinian revolution', whereby the theory of natural selection was swiftly and unequivocally absorbed into public discourse.<sup>1</sup> In reality, the implications of the mechanism Darwin pinpointed as driving evolution were so repugnant to the Victorians' tastes and devastating to their worldview that it wasn't until the beginning of the twentieth century that it emerged as the leading evolutionary model in Britain.<sup>2</sup> Alternative ideas did not recede into obscurity before the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> This period has been called by historians the 'eclipse of Darwinism'. Criticism of natural selection was led by members of the conservative scientific establishment like John Herschel and Richard Owen, who were unwilling to accept that a series of inherited mistakes, or 'arbitrary variation', and not 'an intelligence, guided by a purpose',<sup>4</sup> could account for the apparent order to be found in the organic world. The thought of selfishness being rewarded through unfettered competition, while the poorly equipped products

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<sup>1</sup> Bowler (*Evolution*, p. 24) cites the examples of evolutionary historians Michael Ruse (*The Darwinian Revolution*, 1979) and Thomas Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962). Bowler himself eschews the term 'Darwinian revolution' because the initial conversion to evolution which Darwin facilitated had to be supplemented by a further 'change of paradigm' around 1900 (p. 179).

<sup>2</sup> Greenslade ('The concept of degeneration', p. 31) claims that August Weismann had dislodged Lamarckian theory by 1894, creating a climate in which Mendel's law of heredity, neglected since the 1860s, could be rediscovered in 1900. Another blow against neo-Lamarckism was struck by Ernest Rutherford between 1903 and 1907, when he overturned by radiometric dating Lord Kelvin's reduced estimates of the age of the earth ('a moderate number of millions of years' – 'On the Miracle of Life', May 1889), and of the sun (1864 estimate – 20 to 400 million years; 1897 estimate – 20 to 40 million). Weismann and Mendel's theory, by separating the gene from the blood, effectively rescued Darwinism from the problem raised by Fleeming Jenkin concerning dilution of characteristics. However, some geneticists went further in arguing that adaptation (whether by Lamarckian use and disuse, or Darwinian selection) was irrelevant to evolution. Such proponents of 'mutation theory' believed that sudden and random variations were the driving force of evolution (Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 226). It wasn't until the 1920s that Darwinian adaptation and genetics were fused in a genetical theory of natural selection (Bowler, p. 261). Arguably, the extreme gradualism of Darwin's natural selection has still not been reconciled with saltation by gene mutation.

<sup>3</sup> As is evident from Austrian biologist and ardent socialist Paul Kammerer's falsified experiments on the midwife toad, and his subsequent suicide, during the mid-1920s (see Arthur Koestler's *The Case of the Midwife Toad*). Some eminent figures, like Ernst Haeckel and George Bernard Shaw, would never be divested of their Lamarckian convictions (Greenslade, 'The concept of degeneration', p. 32). The concept of epigenetic inheritance has in fact made a comeback in recent years.

<sup>4</sup> John Herschel, *Physical Geography of the Globe*, Edinburgh, Adam and Charles Black, 1861, p. 12.

of random nature faced inevitable annihilation, was enough to incite Owen to develop his own, theistic model of evolution during the 1860s.<sup>5</sup> In anticipation of such criticism, Darwin had already played down the role of chance in natural selection and sought to represent it as just one of the ‘laws impressed on matter by the Creator’,<sup>6</sup> insinuating that although nature is apparently violent, it is hierarchical, progressive, and benevolent in essence. At the conclusion of his famous treatise, he writes, ‘Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows.’<sup>7</sup> In later editions of *Origin* and in subsequent works, Darwin sought to placate his critics by drawing increasingly upon an evolutionary theory first propounded by the French biologist Jean-Baptiste de Monet, chevalier de Lamarck (1744-1829).

Although Lamarck did not believe in a supernatural power, he did envision nature as a progressive hierarchy, in which species are arranged according to sophistication, and evolve to become ever more complex. There is no extinction, but as animals move higher up the chain of being they are replaced at the bottom by new, spontaneously generated organisms. On the top rung of the ladder is humanity.<sup>8</sup> The mechanism which Lamarck believed would enable this process to occur has been dubbed the ‘inheritance of acquired characteristics’, and is comprised of two laws: first, a change in an organism’s habit or circumstance leads to development or enfeeblement of its organs in proportion to the amount they are used or disused; and second, these changes, acquired by individuals in their lifetime, are passed onto any offspring if both parents exhibit the same modification.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, Lamarck suggested that life is not only endowed with an inherent urge to progress, but that each organism has the capacity to realise this desire and to express it through intelligent choices regarding its own habits and form.<sup>10</sup>

While Darwin admitted that the outcomes of his ‘blind’ evolution were similar to the ‘sighted’ force described by Lamarck, he was initially ill-disposed towards the concept of acquired characteristics and especially towards self-directed adaptation, which he found absurd in the case of plants.<sup>11</sup> In an 1844 letter to Joseph Hooker, he had written: ‘Heaven forbid me from Lamarck nonsense of a “tendency to progression”, “adaptations from the slow willing of

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<sup>5</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, London, John Murray, 1859, p. 488. Bowler notes that Darwin disliked using such religious language except that it helped to separate him from radical materialists and their notions of spontaneous generation.

<sup>7</sup> Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, p. 490.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Watson, *Ideas*, p. 868.

<sup>9</sup> Lester Frank Ward, ‘Neo-Darwinism and Neo-Lamarckism’ (1891), Kessinger Legacy Reprint, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Brain V. Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 106. Lamarck refers to certain invisible bodily-fluids, the same ‘very strange and wonderful agent’ responsible for generating emotions, ideas, and acts of intelligence, which transform cellular tissue and fabricate new organs (*Philosophie zoologique*, trans. Hugh Elliot, London, Macmillan and Co., 1914, p. 314).

<sup>11</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin, 1809-1882*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2005, p. 98.

animals”, & c.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the Lamarckian process of ‘use and disuse’ became a necessary and extensive feature of the 1859 *Origin*,<sup>13</sup> being cited in the case of species that have become blind through the retreat of successive generations into cave systems, for example.<sup>14</sup> In the Introduction, Darwin also conceded that ‘Natural Selection has been the main but not the exclusive means of modification’.<sup>15</sup> Darwin’s attitude to Lamarckism only softened with time and in response to the scientific establishment’s growing criticism. William Thomson’s 1864 estimate of the earth’s age as between twenty and four-hundred million years was lower than had previously been postulated by Charles Lyell, and this favoured a non-Darwinian vision of evolution as will-directed.<sup>16</sup> In 1867, the polymath Fleeming Jenkin queried how ‘hard heredity’ could result in diversity of characters rather than uniformity. By the early 1870s, Darwin’s stance was unquestionably Lamarckian. In *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), he attributed human intelligence to the ‘inherited effect’ that language must have had upon the brain,<sup>17</sup> and in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), he asserted that some behaviours have been passed down after repeated performance in previous generations.<sup>18</sup> Darwin formally announced his loss of faith and agnosticism six months before his death in 1882,<sup>19</sup> but these theoretical ambiguities, coupled with confusion resulting from Darwin’s growing tendency in his later works to resort to metaphor,<sup>20</sup> would encourage multiple and conflicting interpretations of his works.

The growing sway of Lamarck’s ideas, fifty years after they were formulated, can be attributed in part to the endorsement they received from Herbert Spencer, a favourite philosopher of Darwin and the country at large.<sup>21</sup> Spencer was no orthodox Christian, but he retained the deist concept of a ‘Watchmaker’ God in the guise of an impersonal, deterministic

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<sup>12</sup> *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, Vol. I, Francis Darwin (ed.), New York, D. Appleton and Company, 1896, p. 384.

<sup>13</sup> To the extent that the eminent geologist Charles Lyell apparently referred to natural selection as merely ‘a modification of Lamarck’s [theory]’ (*The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, Burkhardt & Smith (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 11:223).

<sup>14</sup> Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>15</sup> Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 201.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, John Murray, 1874, p. 610.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, London, John Murray, 1872, pp. 103-4. Darwin was not alone in this journey of abnegation. During the 1860s, Alfred Russel Wallace began to contest the idea of an animal-human continuum, writing a paper in 1870, entitled ‘The Limits of Natural Selection applied to Man’, suggesting that a supernatural occurrence in humanity’s evolutionary development had elevated it above the beasts. Wallace continued on this trajectory in later life. (Bowler, *Evolution*, pp. 215-16.)

<sup>19</sup> Foster, Clark, and York, *Critique of Intelligent Design*, p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> John Glendening, ‘An Entangled Bank’, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Brian W. Shaffer, “Rebarbarising Civilisation”: Conrad’s African Fiction and Spencerian Sociology’, *PMLA*, Vol. 108, No. 1, Jan., 1993, p. 46. Alfred Russel Wallace was likewise an admirer. However, Shaffer notes that Darwin also had private reservations about Spencer’s conclusions (p. 55).



force or law of progress,<sup>22</sup> whereby all natural phenomena, be they physical, social or individual, evolve through ‘beneficent necessity’ from a simple, homogeneous, and disintegrated state to a complex, heterogeneous, yet coherent whole. What is known as his ‘Theory of Universal Progress’ was first laid out in his 1857 essay ‘Progress: Its Law and Cause’. As part of the liberal, utilitarian tradition, Spencer shied away from ‘hard heredity’ because it seemed to exclude the possibility of incremental improvements through education and social reform. His model of a purposeful nature was driven by Lamarckian self-willed improvements and acquired characters;<sup>23</sup> however, he went on to incorporate the Darwinian notion of selection by imagining progressive adaptation as being prompted by individuals grappling with a competitive environment.

As I have already indicated, it was the tendency of Spencer and his followers to depict nature as fundamentally progressive which drove Huxley to break from him during the 1870s.<sup>24</sup> Whereas Spencer thought of the struggle for existence as inherently good and not to be hindered by mankind, for Huxley, uninhibited nature was amoral, and as likely to ‘work towards degradation’ as enhanced complexity.<sup>25</sup> The *Prolegomena* of his ‘Evolution and Ethics’, which he delivered as the second Romanes memorial lecture in 1893, encapsulates this Huxleyan vision of a ‘cosmic process’ of struggle and selection. If left unchecked, he imagines the result as a ‘state of nature’ such as existed in Britain before the arrival of the Romans (i.e. interventionist mankind): ‘a time when ... the vegetation of what land lay nearest, was as different from the present Flora of the Sussex downs, as that of Central Africa now is’.<sup>26</sup> Huxley’s mention of Central Africa is an indirect reference to Stanley’s disastrous expedition up the Congo River to rescue the Emin Pasha: the subject of his 1890 book *In Darkest Africa*, which contributed to the establishment of the tropical forest as a symbol for an untamed and degenerative nature that ‘heroic’ European mankind must penetrate, resist, and conquer. The more direct allusion is to a book that Huxley mentions in his 1894 preface to ‘Evolution and Ethics’, William Booth’s *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), which takes up the same view of the Congo as an inimical impediment and influence:

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *God’s Funeral*, p. 198.

<sup>23</sup> Spencer published an article (‘A Theory of Population’) which drew heavily upon Lamarckian theory as early as 1852.

<sup>24</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 218.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Letter from Huxley to W. Platt Bald, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1890’, in *Life and Letters of Thomas Huxley*, Leonard Huxley (ed.), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., New York, Appleton and Co., 1901, p. 284.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Huxley, ‘Evolution and Ethics – *Prolegomena*’, in *Collected Essays*, Vol. IX, p. 3, [website] <http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/CE9/E-EPro.html>, (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016). In tracing nature back to the deep past, when life could not be separated into animal and plant, Huxley dismisses the possibility of a supernatural power or ‘archetypal ideas’ shaping chaos; however, he does hint at an intrinsic lawfulness: ‘That our earth may once have formed part of a nebulous cosmic magma is certainly possible, indeed seems highly probable; but there is no reason to doubt that order reigned there, as completely as amidst what we regard as the most finished works of nature or of man.’ (p. 8)

In all that spirited narrative of heroic endeavour, nothing has so much impressed the imagination, as [Stanley's] description of the immense forest, which offered an almost impenetrable barrier to his advance. The intrepid explorer, in his own phrase, "marched, tore, ploughed, and cut his way for one hundred and sixty days through this inner womb of the true tropical forest". The mind of man with difficulty endeavours to realise this immensity of wooded wilderness, covering a territory half as large again as the whole of France, where the rays of the sun never penetrate, where in the dark, dank air, filled with the steam of the heated morass, human beings dwarfed into pygmies and brutalised into cannibals lurk and live and die. Mr Stanley vainly endeavours to bring home to us the full horror of that awful gloom.<sup>27</sup>

In opposition to the state of nature, Huxley proposes a 'state of art, produced by human intelligence and energy', the maintenance of which depends on the constant counteraction of the cosmic process. To illustrate this idea, he resurrects the venerable allegory of the *hortus conclusus* ('walled garden'):

Three or four years have elapsed since the state of nature, to which I have referred, was brought to an end, so far as a small patch of the soil is concerned, by the intervention of man. The patch was cut off from the rest by a wall; within the area thus protected, the native vegetation was, as far as possible, extirpated; while a colony of strange plants was imported and set down in its place. In short, it was made into a garden ... That the 'state of Art', thus created in the state of nature by man, is sustained by and dependent on him, would at once become apparent, if the watchful supervision of the gardener were withdrawn, and the antagonistic influences of the general cosmic process were no longer sedulously warded off, or counteracted. The walls and gates would decay; quadrupedal and bipedal intruders would devour and tread down the useful and beautiful plants; birds, insects, blight, and mildew would work their will; the seeds of the native plants, carried by winds or other agencies, would immigrate, and in virtue of their long-earned special adaptation to the local conditions, these despised native weeds would soon choke their choice exotic rivals. A century or two hence, little beyond the foundations of the wall and of the houses and frames would be left, in evidence of the victory of the cosmic powers at work in the state of nature, over the temporary obstacles to their supremacy, set up by the art of the horticulturist.<sup>28</sup>

It is especially clear from this passage that Huxley visualises the state of nature as something akin to a powerful, hostile and cruel jungle, which would dominate and degrade the creations of humankind under ordinary circumstances. The abundance or 'luxuriance' of this jungle is particularly anathema, just as the single greatest cause of the cosmic struggle is multiplication. It is only the ongoing 'horticultural process' that keeps the deleterious jungle at bay by adjusting conditions so as to eliminate competition (though it too may involve an element of artificial selection), and allows 'the survival of those forms which most nearly approach the standard of the useful, or the beautiful, which he has in his mind'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, London, Funk and Wagnall, 1890, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics – *Prolegomena*', p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Huxley, p. 14. Huxley goes on to admit that the possibility of untroubled happiness is an illusion which can never be attained, for the battle between the state of art and the state of nature will go on 'until the evolution of our globe shall have entered so far upon its downward course that the cosmic process resumes its sway; and, once more, the State of Nature prevails over the surface of our planet'.

During the 1880s, the schism in evolutionary theory between those who believed that changes to an organism's body during the course of its lifetime could be passed on to its offspring and those who thought this impossible, had become more extreme and formalised. The American scientist Lester Frank Ward states, in a footnote to the published version of his 1891 Presidential Address to the Biological Society of Washington, that Professor A. S. Packard was the first to use the terms 'neo-Lamarckian' and 'neo-Lamarckianism' to refer to the former group, in his introduction to the *Standard Natural History* (Vol. I, Boston, p. iii) in 1885.<sup>30</sup> The term subsequently entered popular use and was paired by Ward with an opposite term, 'neo-Darwinism'.<sup>31</sup> Bowler asserts that neo-Darwinism itself originated with a cousin of Charles Darwin, Francis Galton. He is said to have been convinced by the idea of the hereditary predetermination of characters, and the ineffectuality of improved environmental conditions on the genotype, after developing an unfavourable impression of African natives during an 1850-52 expedition.<sup>32</sup> He expounded the former view in his 1869 book *Hereditary Genius* and intensified his criticism of Lamarckism in his essay 'A Theory of Heredity' (1875). However, the most staunchly dogmatic champion of hard heredity was the German biologist August Weismann, whose first lectures and essays rubbishising every evolutionary theory apart from natural selection appeared in 1883.<sup>33</sup>

John Glendening tells us that neo-Lamarckism at the end of the nineteenth century also tended to be more 'stringent and doctrinaire' than its Spencerian incarnation.<sup>34</sup> Some fin-de-siècle animal welfare supporters even used the theory to justify their belief that carnivorous species could be weaned onto a vegetarian diet.<sup>35</sup> One embodiment of the neo-Lamarckian trend was the author Samuel Butler, son of the Bishop of Lichfield, who lost his faith in God suddenly one night in 1859 at the start of a voyage to New Zealand, as a consequence of reading *On the Origin of Species*.<sup>36</sup> Not that he agreed with Darwin. He later wrote of the theory of natural selection, 'To state this doctrine is to arouse instinctive loathing; it is my fortunate task to maintain that such a nightmare of waste and death is as baseless as it is repulsive.'<sup>37</sup> Like many at this time, Butler accepted the verity of evolution but not a version that denied a

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<sup>30</sup> Lester Frank Ward, 'Neo-Darwinism and Neo-Lamarckism', p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> George John Romanes would do the same in his survey *Darwin and after Darwin*, 1892-97 (Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 236).

<sup>32</sup> Bowler, p. 256.

<sup>33</sup> These were translated into English in 1889, but there is some evidence that his ideas began to exert an influence on anthropologists like E. Ray Lankester from 1887 onwards (Greenslade, 'The concept of degeneration', p. 32).

<sup>34</sup> Glendening, '*An Entangled Bank*', p. 47. Lester Frank Ward contradicts this, claiming that he and his fellow neo-Lamarckians recognise 'natural selection as the more potent of the two agencies' ('Neo-Darwinism and Neo-Lamarckism', p. 12).

<sup>35</sup> Schell, 'Tiger Tales', in *Victorian Animal Dreams*, p. 233.

<sup>36</sup> Wilson, *God's Funeral*, pp. 314 & 318.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Butler, 'The Deadlock in Darwinism', in *Essays on Life, Art, and Science*, R.A. Streatfeild (ed.), London, A.C. Fifield, 1908, p. 308.

purposeful intelligence in nature. Instead, he laid out in his *Evolution, Old and New* (1879) a neo-Lamarckian model of the universe in which God acts through organisms as a 'Life Force', driving their development in a fixed and positive direction.<sup>38</sup> Butler's version was explicitly supernatural, but more generally neo-Lamarckism implied a teleological element: far from being the captive of its random inheritance, an organism was instead the master of its biological destiny, which it shaped through its own efforts and habits.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, neo-Lamarckism could be seen as a continuation of the natural theology which had dominated science from the Enlightenment to the 1870s, itself an attempt to conserve aspects of Christian doctrine, in contrast with the materialism of Darwin's 'haphazard' natural selection.

### Evolutionary theory through jungle stories

All of Conrad's jungle-writing coevals subscribed to one or another form of Lamarckism. Just as his father Thomas had attempted to reconcile evolution with ecclesiastical doctrine in an 1868 essay,<sup>40</sup> so Robert Louis Stevenson was unwilling to accept the full implications of natural selection. Instead, possibly under the guidance of Fleeming Jenkin, he followed the hybrid scheme espoused by the 'persuasive rabbi' Herbert Spencer.<sup>41</sup> In 'The Beach of Falesá', the bigoted and mysteriously tabooed Wiltshire is taught the Lamarckian lesson that superstition is not an irremediable consequence of hard heredity, and confined solely to the native population, but that it 'grows up in a place like the different kind of weeds' ('Falesá', 52). This disturbing insight punctures the trader's haughty scepticism while he wanders alone through a dark, tangled, and menacing wood that seems to be actively trying to deceive and disorientate him:

But the queerness of the place it's more difficult to tell of, unless to one who has been alone in the high bush himself. The brightest kind of a day it is always dim down there. A man can see to the end of nothing; whichever way he looks the wood shuts up, one bough folding with another like the fingers of your hand; and whenever he listens he hears always something new – men talking, children laughing, the strokes of axe a far way ahead of him, and sometimes a sort of a quick, stealthy scurry near at hand that makes him jump and look to his weapons. It's all very well for him to tell himself that he's alone, bar trees and birds; he can't make out to believe it; whichever way he turns the whole place seems to be alive and looking on. Don't think it was Uma's yarns that put me out; I don't value native talk a fourpenny-piece; *it's a thing that's natural in the bush, and that's the end of it.*<sup>42</sup> ('Falesá', 51)

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<sup>38</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 239.

<sup>39</sup> Lester Frank Ward uses the example of piano practice to attest that the work of antecedent generations has been rewarded with improvements in present-day players, whom he believes are incontrovertibly more accomplished ('Neo-Darwinism and Neo-Lamarckism', p. 68).

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Stevenson, 'The Immutable Laws of Nature in Relation to God's Providence' (1868), cited in Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> Harman, p. 72. Stevenson said of Spencer, 'no more persuasive rabbi exists'.

<sup>42</sup> My emphasis.

The densely wooded landscape is fundamental to ‘The Beach of Falesá’. It was amid the three hundred acres of vegetation surrounding his property at Vailima (meaning ‘embowered in forest’), ‘alone in that tragic jungle’<sup>43</sup> and full of dread in spite of his ‘insensibility’ to irrationality,<sup>44</sup> that Stevenson was struck by the idea for a tale set in a place he originally thought of naming Ulufanua (‘land of trees’).<sup>45</sup> In this context, one can understand Roslyn Jolly’s claim that, in Stevenson’s writing, the forests of the South Pacific islands ‘gave concrete form and dramatic expression’ to his evolutionary beliefs.<sup>46</sup>

The religious undertones of Kipling’s jungle do not prevent it from representing an evolutionary vision of the universe. It is a place of trial and development, including that of the Law itself (*JB2*, 153). Mowgli’s death-defying deeds prove his un-bestial fearlessness and allow him to recapitulate humanity’s ascent:

‘Mowgli the Frog have I been,’ said he to himself, ‘Mowgli the Wolf have I said that I am. Now Mowgli the Ape must I be before I am Mowgli the Buck. At the end I shall be Mowgli the Man. Ho!’ (*JB2*, 293-4)

Judging by the emphasis that he places on environment altering the behaviour and physiology of an organism and its progeny, Kipling’s conception of biology was neo-Lamarckian. In the case of Gisborne from ‘In the *Rukb*’, virgin nature initially mellows his habits:

He spends much time in saddle or under canvas – the friend of newly planted trees, the associate of uncouth rangers and hairy trackers – till the woods, that show his care, in turn set their mark upon him and he ceases to sing the naughty French songs he learned at Nancy, and grows silent with the silent things of the underbrush. (‘*IR*’, 157)

Subsequently, his lifestyle appears to endow him with the faculty to ‘listen as a man can who is used to the stillness of the *rukub*’ (‘*IR*’, 165). Similarly, Mowgli boasts that he has acquired the ability to see in the dark (‘*IR*’, 156); however, the more cultivated setting of the Indian village quickly dulls his animal attributes (*JB2*, 189). Kipling discloses more decisively Lamarckian thinking in the scene where Mowgli severs the tail of the red dhole, and taunts him with the prospect that ‘there will now be many litters of little tailless red dogs, yea, with raw red stumps that sting when the sand is hot’ (*JB2*, 296). In ‘How the Leopard Got His Spots’, the manner in which the Ethiopian and the animals will their skins to change colour in accordance with their new forest environment is also redolent of Lamarckism:

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Letter to Sidney Colvin, November 1890’, in *Vailima Letters*, London, Methuen and Co., 1895, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Letter to Sidney Colvin, November 1890’, in *Vailima Letters*, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> Roslyn Jolly, ‘1996 Oxford World’s Classics edition of Stevenson’s *South Sea Tales*’, p. 264.

<sup>46</sup> Roslyn Jolly, ‘Stevenson and the Pacific’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, Penny Fielding (ed.), Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2010, p. 127.

Then said Baviaan, 'The aboriginal Fauna has joined the aboriginal Flora because it was high time for a change; and my advice to you, Ethiopians, is to change as soon as you can.' ('HLGHS', 35-6)

So he changed his skin then and there, and the Leopard was more excited than ever; he had never seen a man change his skin before. ('HLGHS', 41)

Of all Kipling's jungle tales, the one most infused with notions of evolutionary theory is probably 'The Tomb of His Ancestors', in which John Chinn has inherited from his father and grandfather a 'noiseless jungle-step' ('THA', 102) and a 'fever-proof' constitution ('THA', 114). That story also depicts an aboriginal tribe that has been dehumanised over a relatively short space of time:

Centuries of oppression and massacre made the Bhil a cruel and half-crazy thief and cattle-stealer, and when the English came he seemed to be almost as open to civilisation as the tigers of his own jungles. ('THA', 99)

It is evident from *The Lost World* that Doyle's evolutionary perspective emphasised the importance of struggle as a condition for adaptation and progress. The novel deals with two locations where this ruthless but fundamental law of nature has been disrupted: London and Maple White Land. In London, the clement conditions of modern society facilitate the profusion of a bovine population. In the second instance, seismic activity has isolated a plateau of land and its inhabitants from surrounding species, thus 'Creatures survive which would otherwise disappear' (*LW*, 42), including iguanodons (*LW*, 113). Fortunately, a tribe of Indians has relatively recently found a way into Maple White Land 'under the stress of famine or of conquest' and, through a bitter fight with wild beasts and ape-men (*LW*, 165), proves their fitness to dominate nature. The mechanism by which Doyle imagines biological modification taking place is clearly Lamarckian. In his personal life, Doyle's decision to abstain periodically from alcohol could be taken as evidence that he was worried about inheriting his father's dipsomania.<sup>47</sup> In *The Lost World*, the hero, Challenger, regards Weismann's neo-Darwinian theory as a 'fallacy' (*LW*, 16), and speculates that the newly discovered dinosaurs will soon die out due to the stupidity which makes it 'impossible for them to adapt themselves to changing conditions' (*LW*, 145). Furthermore, the novel asserts that plants 'which have never been known to climb elsewhere learn the art as an escape from that sombre shadow' of the forest floor (*LW*, 75).

W.H. Hudson had already been vexed by the problem of reconciling the brutality and callousness of nature with a benevolent Creator, when he was challenged at the age of eighteen by his brother, Edwin, to familiarise himself with Darwin's theory of natural selection.

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<sup>47</sup> Booth, *The Doctor, The Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*, pp. 74 & 221.

Hudson's immediate reaction was disgust and inward despair at so bleak a picture of life on earth:

One day an elder brother, on his return from travel in distant lands, put a copy of the famous *Origin of Species* in my hands and advised me to read it. When I had done so, he asked me what I thought of it. 'It's false!' I exclaimed in a passion, and he laughed, little knowing how important a matter this was to me, and told me I could have the book if I liked.<sup>48</sup>

The anguish that Hudson felt must have been heightened by the recent loss of his mother in October 1859. Only after a second reading, and many years of consideration, was he willing to accept at least some aspects of evolution.<sup>49</sup> *Green Mansions* is part of this attempt to reconcile Darwinism's futile lives and cruel deaths with Hudson's need to intuit in the world some higher purpose.<sup>50</sup> The novel's sub-title is 'A Romance of the Tropical Forest', and Mr. Abel's story mimics some conventions of that genre. Having participated in a failed coup, he flees into the wilderness of Guyana, where he wanders for six months and falls seriously ill. After renouncing his dream of literary renown, Abel miraculously returns to health with the help of a wretched Venezuelan trader; 'for we know that even cruel savage brutes and evil men have at times sweet, beneficent impulses, during which they act in a way contrary to their natures, like passive agents of some higher power' (*GM*, 14). The cinchona trees, the vistas, and the birdsong are all evidence of a benignity which subsequently refreshes Abel's body and cleanses his soul of the material desire for gold (*GM*, 21). He arrives in an idyllic wood, where nature is 'kindly' and 'tender', and monkeys chatter inoffensively like 'mountebank angels' 'in a half-way heaven' (*GM*, 32-4). Abel regards this place as a gift to him from the 'Author of my being' (*GM*, 61), until he encounters Rima, a girl so highly evolved as to be almost supernatural. In keeping a beautiful but deadly realm in order, she seems to embody the impersonal god or principle which bestows evolutionary gifts, 'a fragrance, a melody, a special instinct, an art, a knowledge', on every kind of animal (*GM*, 199). However, Rima's violent death robs Abel of this consolation, and he feels that he is in a universe without any deity (*GM*, 297). The forest becomes a darker, more chthonic location, full of hostile, creeping beasts, which are more mechanical than alive (*GM*, 289), and whose calls are like the wailing of the dead (*GM*, 286-7). Only after a prolonged spell in this hell does he reach a philosophical compromise that rejects Christianity but retains a place for the soul: 'That is my philosophy still: prayers, austerities, good works – they avail

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<sup>48</sup> W.H. Hudson, *The Book of a Naturalist*, London, New York, and Toronto, Hodder and Stoughton, 1919, p. 214.

<sup>49</sup> Tomalin, *W.H. Hudson*, p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> According to Tomalin, the theme of *Green Mansions* is 'rooted in the old struggle between Darwin and the Book of Genesis. Abel finds that he cannot go back and live innocently in Eden. There is no such place for man;' (p. 198).

nothing, and there is no intercession, and outside of the soul there is no forgiveness in heaven or earth for sin' (*GM*, 314).

Hudson's criticism in 1870 of an aspect of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was not only published, but his letter also elicited a long reply from the illustrious naturalist and a correction to the 1888 edition of the book.<sup>51</sup> In Chapter VIII on 'Instinct', Darwin claims that 'Mr. Hudson is a strong disbeliever in evolution'. More accurately, Hudson was unenthusiastic about the theory of natural selection, which he referred to as 'the giant tree in whose shadow ... perhaps all men must come and sit with [Darwin and Joseph John Murphy] forever'.<sup>52</sup> Hudson imagined an 'unconscious intelligence' in nature, struggling blindly towards a definite goal.<sup>53</sup> In the case of the individual, he supposed that most adaptation 'is accomplished through a superabundance of vital energy, and urge to realise one's potentialities, and, particularly among the more advanced forms of life, the guidance of the intelligence'.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Hudson was much closer to the supernatural strain of neo-Lamarckism expounded by Samuel Butler.<sup>55</sup> Until his death in 1922, when such a viewpoint had become unfashionable, Hudson continued to praise Butler as the man who 'smashed the Darwin idol and finally compelled the angels of science to creep cautiously in where the jeered fool had rushed'.<sup>56</sup>

As with his religious beliefs, H.G. Wells's perspective on evolutionary biology was characterised by fluctuation. Although consistently disdainful of Samuel Butler's supernatural vitalism, Wells was inspired by *Erewhon* (1872) and shared its disquiet regarding the implications of *On the Origin of Species*.<sup>57</sup> For this reason, he was initially seduced by Lamarckian theory,<sup>58</sup> but, under the tutelage of Huxley at the Normal School of Science during the mid-1880s, Wells began to abandon progressionism. In his 1891 essay 'Zoological Retrogression', he declared that the widespread, 'pleasing' conception of nature as a 'great scroll' unfolding to reveal successively higher species 'receives neither in the geological record nor in the studies of the phylogenetic embryologist any entirely satisfactory confirmation'. In biology, he continued, advance is almost always complemented by its shadow, 'degradation', so that the path of life is less like some

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<sup>51</sup> The matter which Hudson addressed in a letter to Dr. Sclater, Secretary of the Zoological Society, concerned Darwin's reference to a South American woodpecker, the Carpintero (Tomalin, *W.H. Hudson*, pp. 88, 90 & 91).

<sup>52</sup> 'Letter to Dr. Sclater, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1870', in *Zoological Society of London Proceedings*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1870, as quoted in Tomalin, *W.H. Hudson*, p. 90.

<sup>53</sup> W.H. Hudson, *A Hind in Richmond Park*, London and Toronto, J.M. Dent and Sons, 1922, p. 57.

<sup>54</sup> Richard E. Haymaker, *From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs*, Bookman Associates, 1954, as quoted in Miller, *W.H. Hudson and the Elusive Paradise*, p. 78.

<sup>55</sup> Hudson's predilection for this branch of evolutionary thought is evident from his interest in human and animal cases of 'pre-natal suggestion', like the one brought to his attention by a shepherd in the 1880s, of a lamb born with fur because its mother had been frightened by a hare during pregnancy (Tomalin, *W.H. Hudson*, p. 174).

<sup>56</sup> W.H. Hudson, *Men, Books, and Birds*, London, Cape, 1925, as quoted in Miller, *W.H. Hudson and the Elusive Paradise*, p. 79.

<sup>57</sup> Marina Warner, 'Introduction to the 2005 Penguin Classics edition of *The Time Machine*', p. xviii.

<sup>58</sup> Glendening, *An Entangled Bank*, p. 48.



steadily-rising mountain slope than the course of a busy man moving about a great city: 'upward and downward these threads of pedigree interweave, slowly working out a pattern of accomplished things'.<sup>59</sup> By 1895, he was a reluctant follower of August Weismann<sup>60</sup> and, in an essay of that year, announced his antipathy towards 'Biological Optimism'.<sup>61</sup> Even then, he believed that human intelligence could exercise a degree of control over the selective evolutionary process.<sup>62</sup> According to Sherborne, Wells could not long preach the discouraging lessons of neo-Darwinism: by the time he wrote *Anticipations* in 1901, he had lapsed 'into a naïve secularisation of religious ideas', including the notion that evolution is purposeful and driven by a cosmic will.<sup>63</sup>

Glendening maintains that *The Island of Doctor Moreau* exhibits the author's internal equivocation between Lamarckism and neo-Darwinism, calling it a 'hazy evolutionary allegory torn between two contrary impulses'. He judges that the Lamarckism to which Wells still clung informs the novel's overall tenor. The neo-Darwinian challenge was either ditched during composition<sup>64</sup> or is supplied through interpolations to the text: for example, Montgomery's admission that, among the Beast People's offspring, "There was no evidence of the inheritance of the acquired human characteristics' (*IDM*, 82).<sup>65</sup> I agree that *The Island* is dominated by Lamarckian ideas, but the dialectic strikes me as rather more intrinsic to the text: Moreau and Montgomery represent confidence in the possibility of swift, positive, and lasting alterations to their bestial subjects; Prendick, the student of Huxley (*IDM*, 29), grasps the unpredictability and stubbornness of neo-Darwinian nature. After Moreau is killed, Montgomery strongly opposes a lethal response: "We can't massacre the lot, can we?" I suppose that's what *your* humanity would suggest? ...But they'll change. They are sure to change." (*IDM*, 107) Prendick abstains from wholesale slaughter only due to a lack of cartridges (*IDM*, 126).

In his book *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, Redmond O'Hanlon claims that Conrad's 'guiding biological conceptions are late Darwinian, Lamarckian; he believes, as did most of his scientist-contemporaries ... in the inheritance of acquired characteristics, in the lasting effects of use and disuse, of habit, as well as of natural and sexual selection'.<sup>66</sup> The claim that Conrad was a Lamarckian is somewhat puzzling, and does not tally with the evidence supplied by his fiction and biography. I do not object to O'Hanlon's assertion that Conrad possessed

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<sup>59</sup> H.G. Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression' (1891), in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), pp. 6-7. Observe that Wells still believed there was a 'path' and a 'pattern' in evolution.

<sup>60</sup> Greenslade, 'The concept of degeneration', p. 31.

<sup>61</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', p. 48.

<sup>62</sup> Page, *The Literary Imagination*, pp. 153 & 190.

<sup>63</sup> Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, p. 149.

<sup>64</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', p. 50. Glendening suggests this may have been because Wells realised that neo-Darwinism was irrelevant to the immediate future of mankind.

<sup>65</sup> Glendening, p. 49.

<sup>66</sup> O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, p. 11.

'Darwinian convictions',<sup>67</sup> which some critics observe most distinctly in 'Heart of Darkness': Stanley Renner has written about the novella's concentrated Darwinian motifs; while Cedric Watts maintains that it has 'a more richly Darwinian atmosphere than any other major work of fiction'.<sup>68</sup> We know from Richard Curle that A.R. Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago* was Conrad's 'intimate friend for many years',<sup>69</sup> and although that tome may not have explicitly addressed natural selection, it perhaps served as an induction to such ideas. In communicating that the cosmic process of natural selection is counterproductive to moral progress, Conrad also displays the influence of 'Evolution and Ethics'. As Glendening points out, Conrad's luxuriant jungle corresponds to the point in Huxley's figurative landscape at which peaceful utopia, having resulted in Malthusian profusion, is about to collapse in a flurry of death and destruction.<sup>70</sup> However, as long as one distinguishes between the beliefs of Marlow and those of the author himself, there is little to suggest that Conrad credited the inheritance of acquired characters, and few signs of Lamarckian teleology and positivity.

Conrad's tropical forest illustrates his view that evolution is a tumultuous, trial and error affair. He once uses the term 'Nature's workshop' (*Outcast*, 57), which on the surface has a reassuring air of purpose, but the context of Willems being 'soothed and lulled' should alert the reader to the use of irony. More typically, it is a 'mass of green leaves that are forever born and forever dying' (*Rescue*, 306). It is a place where feeble demonstrations of harmony, altruism, and beauty belie a warlike and egotistical reality, such as the perfumes which distract from plants noiselessly stampeding over each other (*AF*, 45); the moribund trees upon whose remains feast assertive and garishly coloured parasites (*AF*, 107); or, the 'thin twitter' of a bird 'in the great silence full of struggle and death' (*Outcast*, 250). In *The End of the Tether*, a collapsed riverbank reveals a horrifying subterranean scene, 'a mass of roots intertwined as if wrestling underground; and in the air, the interlaced boughs, bound and loaded with creepers, carried on the struggle for life' (*Tether*, 110). This struggle to survive and reproduce entails violence: a paradox that is experienced by Ricardo when he sees Lena ('Ravish or kill – it was all one to him' (*Victory*, 218)); that is obvious to an undeluded character like Heyst ('To slay, to love' (*Victory*, 162)); and revealed to Kayerts after he murders Carlier ('Outpost', 256). And so, the values of life, love, light, and energy are not arrayed in triumphant opposition to death, loneliness, darkness, and stasis, but are complicit in veiling the latter attributes; just as the shimmering sea of leaves hides 'the uniform and impenetrable gloom' beneath (*Outcast*, 225). To the two traders in 'An Outpost', the wilderness is 'rendered more strange, more

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Stanley Renner, 'The Garden of Civilisation: Conrad, Huxley, and the Ethics of Evolution', *Conradiana*, VII (1975), pp. 109-20; C.T. Watts, "'Heart of Darkness": The Covert Murder Plot and the Darwinian Theme', *Conradiana*, VII (1975), p. 139.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Curle, 'Joseph Conrad: Ten Years After', in *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 10 (1934), p. 431.

<sup>70</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', p. 146.

incomprehensible by the mysterious glimpses of the vigorous life it contained' ('Outpost', 235). It throbs with life, and yet is 'like a great emptiness' disclosing 'nothing intelligible' ('Outpost', 238). Similarly, Karain's arboreal dominion is 'full of a life that went on stealthily with a troubling effect of solitude; of a life that seemed unaccountably empty of anything that would stir the thought' ('Karain', 2).

It is a Conradian refrain that the scents, calls, and colours of the forest serve to thwart awareness and understanding of a deeper, deathly truth.<sup>71</sup> Willems is at first overawed by 'the intensity of that tropical life ... which seems to be all grace of colour and form, all brilliance, all smiles, but is only the blossoming of the dead; whose mystery holds the promise of joy and beauty, yet contains nothing but poison and decay' (*Outcast*, 54). The mystery of which the narrator speaks is gradually disclosed to Willems later in the novel, when he sees 'death looking at him from everywhere':

He saw the horrible form among the big trees, in the network of creepers, in the fantastic outlines of leaves, of the great indented leaves that seemed to be so many enormous hands with big broad palms, with stiff fingers outspread to lay hold of him; hands gently stirring, or hands arrested in a frightful immobility, with a stillness attentive and watching for the opportunity to take him, to enlase him, to strangle him, to hold him till he died; hands that would hold him dead, that would never let go, that would cling to his body forever till it perished – disappeared in their frantic and tenacious grasp.

And yet the world was full of life. (*Outcast*, 254)

Near the end, Willems discovers in the forest that those qualities commonly thought ideal, such as life and love, are not ends in themselves, but the means to expedite a mindless and hideous routine.

The air was full of sweet scent, of the scent charming, penetrating and violent like the impulse of love. He looked into that great dark place odorous with the breath of life, with the mystery of existence, renewed, fecund, indestructible; and he felt afraid of his solitude, of the solitude of his body, of the loneliness of his soul in the presence of this unconscious and ardent struggle; of this lofty indifference; of this merciless and mysterious purpose, perpetuating strife and death through the march of ages. (*Outcast*, 258)

As I shall show, this knowledge ought to be enough to transform his perception of his and humanity's place in nature.

As part of the attempt to counteract the idea of nature as amoral and random, it was common for authors of the period to marshal the jungle setting in expounding Lamarckian evolutionary perspectives, specifically in portraying the wilful adaptation of species or

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<sup>71</sup> Glendening (p. 137) comes to the same conclusion: 'Death is the chief focus [of Conrad's early novels and stories], and it bears a Darwinian cast evidenced in the pervasive imagery of entanglement and lost meaning.' Likewise, Peter Childs writes, 'The "way of death" seeming to be the way of progress forward is the underlying story of ["Heart of Darkness"]' (*Modernism and the Post-Colonial*, p. 94).

bloodlines in response to the environment. By contrast, Conrad exhibits Darwinian and Huxleyan influences, but no clear-cut endorsements of Lamarckian progressionism. His forests substantiate an image of nature as evolving not towards physical and cerebral perfection, despite some misleading indications, but devolving through illogicality into chaos.

### **The modified anthropocentrism of Darwin and late-Victorian authors**

I have contested claims about the immediacy of the impact that Darwin himself had upon Victorian conceptions of universal and biological nature. The same claims have been made about his influence on nineteenth-century dogma regarding the origins, status, and bearing of humanity. Dinah Birch has claimed that Darwin contributed hugely to Victorian pessimism by exploding the anthropocentric myth that the earth had been created expressly for the benefit of mankind, that the human form and intellect constituted the *telos* towards which evolution had progressed, and by raising the possibility that we will in time evolve into something inhuman:<sup>72</sup> all of which configured humanity as just another species of animal, permanently irredeemable and insignificant. The implications of *On the Origin of Species* for mankind, subsequently addressed by A.R. Wallace in his paper 'The Origin of the Human Race' (1864) and by Darwin himself in *The Descent of Man* and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, have elsewhere been represented as 'a profound shock to the Victorian system',<sup>73</sup> instigating a sea-change in the British national psyche: from a forward-looking, liberal outlook, which prevailed prior to the 1860s, to a pervasive gloom during the later Victorian and the Edwardian years. However, the idea of decline towards the bestial has been a perennial facet of human culture,<sup>74</sup> and biological degeneration featured in the eighteenth-century evolutionary theory of Buffon.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, the notion of human exceptionality had been undermined decades before Darwin by, among other things, extensions to the geological timescale;<sup>76</sup> by Karl Ernst von Baer's model of nature as non-hierarchical;<sup>77</sup> by Schopenhauer's contempt for the idea that reason elevates humans morally above other animals;<sup>78</sup> and by Robert Chambers's assertion that our intelligence is a product of physical rather than metaphysical processes.<sup>79</sup> One could therefore question whether the shock of Darwin's tentative animal-human relativism was

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<sup>72</sup> 'Victorian Pessimism', *In Our Time*, BBC Radio Four, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2007, [radio programme].

<sup>73</sup> Margaret Atwood, 'Introduction to the 2005 Penguin Classics edition of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*', p. xviii.

<sup>74</sup> A phenomenon discussed by Hesiod, according to Griffith (*Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 100).

<sup>75</sup> According to Watson (*Ideas*, p.855), Buffon believed that the two hundred mammalian species known to him were derived from thirty-eight 'original' forms.

<sup>76</sup> Hutton's theory of Vulcanism or Plutonism appeared in his *Theory of the Earth* (1788).

<sup>77</sup> Von Baer's attack on 'parallelism' was published in 1828, according to Bowler (*Evolution*, p. 124).

<sup>78</sup> In *Über die Grundlage der Moral* ('On the Basis of Morality', 1840), Schopenhauer argued that reason is morally ambivalent, and only used by people to realise their ends more effectively.

<sup>79</sup> A theme of Chambers's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844).

indeed responsible for an immediate bout of collective depression. A contradictory explanation for this perceived melancholy is that it was not the sudden result of Darwinian materialism, but part of a continuing teleology, the dark side of Victorian optimism.<sup>80</sup>

Just as Darwin moderated his own conclusions regarding the non-directional, non-hierarchical character of evolution generally in the final paragraph of *On the Origin of Species* by referring to 'higher animals',<sup>81</sup> so he sanctioned a teleological vision of human nature in *The Descent of Man*. On the one hand, he attempted to prove that mankind is part of a continuum with nature by humanising the higher animals and animalising our prehistoric ancestors, but he also sought to reassure his audience by uplifting 'modern' mankind. Darwin's assault on the division between human and animal was something like a reversal of the revolution in thinking sparked by Socrates, who had held humanity to be a thing aloof from nature and had extrapolated principles from the realm of human activity in his interpretation of natural processes, not vice-versa like his materialist predecessors and modern descendants.<sup>82</sup> But Darwin was no evangelist for materialism. At most, he was responding to the tenet of natural theology that species were created directly and miraculously by God. He preferred to stress the more palatable concept of divinely instituted laws over chaos and contingency: 'I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may call chance', he wrote in a private letter of 1860.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, his elevation of modern humans encouraged neo-Lamarckians to adhere to the old, moralising interpretation that human reason is the upshot of natural law, while stupidity and vice are consequences of its absence.<sup>84</sup>

By the 1890s, it was unusual for British fiction to depict the entire human species as a supernatural creation, decreed unique and favoured among the animals.<sup>85</sup> Even the earliest examples of imperial romance question the idea of human singularity. For example, when a Boer in R.M. Ballantyne's *The Settler and the Savage* (1877) tries to shoot a pair of baboons, a

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<sup>80</sup> As Peter Bowler suggests in *Evolution* (p. 235), or Rosemary Ashton on *In Our Time*, 'Victorian Pessimism' [radio programme].

<sup>81</sup> Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, p. 490.

<sup>82</sup> In his *History of Materialism* (1866), Friedrich Lange wrote, '[Socrates'] entire conviction is that the reason which has created the world structure proceeds after the manner of human reason' (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1925, p. 64). John Tyndall spoke only of 'primeval man' falling back upon experience drawn 'not from the study of nature, but from ... the observation of men' (Ledger & Luckhurst, p. 228), and yet he was in the vanguard of those pulling down the twenty-three-century-old legacy of Socrates by applying evolutionary science to human society.

<sup>83</sup> 'Letter to Asa Gray, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1860', quoted in Foster, Clark, and York, *Critique of Intelligent Design*, p. 121.

<sup>84</sup> According to Bowler (*Evolution*, p. 243), neo-Lamarckians (especially American 'psycho-Lamarckians') reinstalled humanity at the acme of the natural hierarchy by claiming that the ordained goal of evolution is the development of the human soul.

<sup>85</sup> Edward Bulwer-Lytton's final novel, *Kenelm Chillingly* (1873), is arguably an example of a late nineteenth-century British novel which does so. According to Michael Page (*The Literary Imagination*, p. 127), this novel denies the human-animal continuum and holds Darwin's theory to be 'just another romance of human origins'.

Scottish character calls him a 'brute' and the attempted poaching 'murder'.<sup>86</sup> Haggard moots a similar equivalence in *The Witch's Head* (1884) through Mr. Alston's scepticism that 'for us is reserved a heaven ... for [ants], annihilation';<sup>87</sup> and via the apelike physique of Holly in *She*. Predation, degradation, and the futility of human endeavour are constant threats in such works. However, I think it would be a mistake to follow John Miller in interpreting these challenges to 'the absoluteness of the human/animal divide' as an attempt to corrode the dualistic values of idealism as a whole, including those underpinning imperial ideology and authority.<sup>88</sup> With one or two exceptions, such as Conrad, authors of this genre were eager to reconcile mankind's necessary participation in a pitiless struggle with the faculty of some individuals or groups to harness its brutality, through government, willpower, and horticulture. For them, the tropical forest's variability between pandemonium and idyll made it a useful device in demonstrating that so long as humans insulate themselves from brutal nature, they cannot hope to make meaningful progress towards more docile circumstances.

In *The Jungle Books*, Kipling does come close to portraying mankind's superiority as supernaturally ordained.<sup>89</sup> It is the opinion of the animals that humans are different and to be dreaded: "Ye know, children," [Hathi] began, "that of all things ye most fear Man." There was a mutter of agreement.' (JB2, 161) According to their mythology, it is this 'Fear' which presently underwrites the Law maintaining a semblance of prelapsarian order: "And only when there is one great Fear over all, as there is now, can we of the jungle lay aside our little fears, and meet together in one place as we do now." (JB2, 167) Kipling's vision of mankind as the scourge of rebellious nature is most obvious in its dealings with the nearest thing it has to a rival, the tiger. Man seems able to command the jungle to persecute this devilish, serpent-like creature, by making "the ground to open under thy feet, and the creeper to twist about thy neck, and the tree-trunks to grow together about thee higher than thou canst leap, and at the last he shall take thy hide to wrap his cubs when they are cold" (JB2, 166). Only occasionally is Man vulnerable, 'as though [tigers] were judges of the jungle and masters of all things' (JB2, 165), and therefore Mowgli, Gisborne, and John Chinn all despise man-eaters and deem them 'vermin, to be killed as speedily as possible' ('IR', 162). Through such victorious contests, these men are able to maintain a harmonious dominion over nature.<sup>90</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact that Kipling's humans tend to degenerate when they become estranged from the natural environment proves they are biologically adjacent to the beasts. The Indian population shuns the surrounding jungle ("The man pack do not love jungle-tales"

<sup>86</sup> R.M. Ballantyne, *The Settler and the Savage*, London, James Nisbet and Co., 1877, p. 149.

<sup>87</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *The Witch's Head*, London, Spencer Blackett, 1884, p. 254.

<sup>88</sup> John Miller, *Empire and the Animal Body*, pp. 2 & 183-4.

<sup>89</sup> Somewhat like Adam in the Garden, Mowgli is told that "All the jungle is thine" (JB1, 20), and he too is cast out, forced to wear cloth and learn about ploughing among the villagers until he attains redemption (JB1, 59).

<sup>90</sup> Gisborne is able to lay aside 'his little-used gun altogether' ('IR', 159).

(JB2, 316)), and consequently they have come to resemble the lawless Monkey-folk, who inhabit a ruined city and use words they don't understand, while believing themselves to be enlightened (JB1, 35-6): “‘*Bah!*’ said Mowgli. ‘Chatter – chatter! Talk, talk! Men are blood-brothers of the *Bandar-log*.’” (JB2, 198) The villagers’ attempts to distance themselves from the harsh ‘Law of the Jungle’ precipitates a sudden and devastating reassertion of nature’s power, when the animals stream out of the tree line one night to destroy crops and irrigation ditches; a fate which the aboriginal and nomadic Gonds, ‘little, wise, and very black hunters, living in the deep jungle’, are in no danger of suffering. The decadent inhabitants try to cling on for a season, but ‘the more they kept to their village, the bolder grew the wild things that gambolled and bellowed on the grazing-grounds by the Wainganga’ (JB2, 211). Ultimately, unnatural mankind can do little to resist the jungle:

They had no heart to patch and plaster the rear walls of the empty byres that backed on to the jungle; the wild pig trampled them down, and the knotty-rooted vines hurried after and threw their elbows over the new-won ground, and the coarse grass bristled behind the vines. The unmarried men ran away first, and carried the news far and near that the village was doomed. Who could fight, they said, against the jungle, or the gods of the jungle, when the very village cobra had left his hole in the platform under the peepul? So their little commerce with the outside world shrank as the trodden paths across the open grew fewer and fainter. And the nightly trumpetings of Hathi and his three sons ceased to trouble them; they had no more to go. The crop on the ground and the seed in the ground had been taken. The outlying fields were already losing their shape, and it was time to throw themselves on the charity of the English at Khanhiwara. (JB2, 211)

I would agree with Jan Montefiore’s claim that the key theme of *The Jungle Books* is both the correlation and difference between man and beast, but that the enduring lesson is the superiority of jungle-men. She writes that wild nature is an otherworld in which Mowgli realises ‘the human capacities whose full development would ineluctably drive him beyond it. For all the apparently human qualities of the “Jungle People” [the animals], Mowgli is finally defined by his difference from them.’<sup>91</sup>

In *Green Mansions*, W.H. Hudson grapples with the apparent inconsistency of the natural world, with its intricate artistry and senseless cruelty, as well as the ambiguous status of humanity as both protégé and prey. He also suggests that a degree of intimacy with wild nature is more beneficial than human society and reason alone, which explains Rima’s ‘look of intelligence’, ‘the alertness one remarks in a wild creature, even when in repose and fearing nothing; but seldom in man, never perhaps in intellectual or studious man’ (GM, 82). Mr Abel becomes convinced that natural humankind is indeed the special creation of a gift-giving nature

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<sup>91</sup> Jan Montefiore, ‘Kipling as a children’s writer and *The Jungle Books*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, Howard J. Booth (ed.), pp. 102 & 108.

(199), in spite of some disturbing, Darwinian intrusions upon his fantasy, such as the unnervingly humanlike face of an araguato (49) or the local Indians' malice:

Ah that return to the forest where Rima dwelt, after so anxious a day, when the declining sun shone hotly still, and the green woodland shadows were so grateful! ... I likened myself to a child that, startled at something it had seen while out playing in the sun, flies to its mother to feel her caressing hand on its cheek and forget its tremors. And describing what I felt in that way, I was a little ashamed and laughed at myself; nevertheless the feeling was very sweet. At that moment Mother and Nature seemed one and the same thing. (*GM*, 195)

Having ignored the intrinsic volatility of nature, Abel's illusion that the ethereal Rima constitutes the height of intelligent creation is shattered when the Indians cause her to fall to her death:

Alas! This bright being, like no other in its divine brightness, so long in the making, now no more than a dead leaf, a little dust, lost and forgotten for ever – O pitiless! O cruel!

But I knew it all before – this law of nature and of necessity, against which all revolt is idle: often had the remembrance of it filled me with ineffable melancholy; only now it seemed cruel beyond all cruelty. (*GM*, 275)

For some time, Abel is the 'hated stepchild' of 'cruel nature' (290 & 300), whose only confederate is the flat-headed snake with 'icy-cold, human-like, fiend-like eyes' (299). Birds scream, thorns scratch, and clouds of venomous insects 'stab him with their small, fiery needles' (298 & 310).<sup>92</sup> Abel is made to realise the futility of his imprecations: 'All my bitterness and hatred and defiance were as empty, as ineffectual, as utterly futile, as are the supplications of the meek worshipper, and no more than the whisper of a leaf, the light whirr of an insect's wing.' (276) However, this is a reminder that nature's cruelty, as with its kindness, is part of 'that infinite variety of decoration in which she revels, binding tree to tree in a tangle of anaconda-like lianas, and dwindling down from these huge cables to airy webs and hair-like fibres that vibrate to the wind of the passing insect's wing' (34). And with a renewed sense of humility and purpose, Abel is at last able to rediscover the earth's 'everlasting freshness and beauty' (314).

In Doyle's *The Lost World*, doubts concerning the distinctiveness of the human species are raised before the adventurers have even departed London, when a lecturer singles out a heckler from his boisterous audience and sardonically asks, "Was this gentleman to be taken as the final type – the be-all and end-all of development?" (*LW*, 49) The expedition into the upper reaches of the Amazon, and of time itself, serves to eliminate any lingering complacency about mankind's predestined supremacy. The indomitability and scale of the Brazilian rainforest reduces the heroes to 'tiny, dark, stumbling figures', whom monkeys berate with 'gleaming,

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<sup>92</sup> The armadillo-hunting Nuflo is likewise toppled by nature when his former prey apparently 'revenged themselves by devouring his flesh when they found him dead' (*GM*, 285).



mocking eyes' (75 & 79). They find themselves the target of a hostile world. Wading through a swamp, they are attacked by vipers which 'will always attack man at first sight' (95). Upon the plateau of Maple White Land, the trees emanate 'a constant menace' (114) and the very shadows seem to 'prowl upon padded feet' (139). Both Malone and the Indian population are hunted by dinosaurs, 'deliberately' and with 'relentless purpose and horrible activity' (142 & 178). To the horror of the companions, these episodes confirm that humanity remains inextricably entwined in competition with other species:

That these monsters should tear each other to pieces was a part of the strange struggle for existence, but that they should turn upon modern man, that they should deliberately track and hunt down the predominant human, was a staggering and fearsome thought. (LW, 142)

Further evidence of the association between man and beast is supplied in the form of the callous ape-men (or 'Missin' Links', as Lord John Roxton calls them (151)), who possess disturbingly familiar faces (130). The parallel is strengthened by the use of the word 'rookery' to describe their capital, a pterodactyl breeding ground, and The Albany in Piccadilly;<sup>93</sup> as well as by Challenger's later comparison of the clamour of his London audience to the anthropoid apes' screeching (199). There are grave doubts about whether humans are fated to prevail in these alien, prehistoric conditions ('It was surely well for man that he came late in the order of creation. There were powers abroad in earlier days which no courage and no mechanism of his could have met.' (122)). However, the conduct of the heroic adventurers ultimately defines humankind in opposition to the beasts and pacifies the environment, albeit conditionally.

The tenuousness of human identity, and its constant disruption by animalistic attributes, is likewise a recurring theme of Wells's fiction. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, according to Sherborne, 'Wells offers us a shocking model of human nature – we are not, as Christianity claims, heavenly spirits trapped in material bodies but animals whose evolution has left us tormented by regressive desires and impossible ideals'.<sup>94</sup> Of course, the Beast Folk bear enough of a physical resemblance to people initially to deceive Prendick, which points towards a human body 'both hybridised and prone to reversion'.<sup>95</sup> But even more terrifying are their behavioural similarities, such as their need for religion to curb their brutal instincts. Given this entanglement of human and animal categories, Glendening finds it apposite that Prendick should finally recognise 'the fact of [the leopard-man's] humanity' through the tropical forest's 'polygon of green' (*IDM*, 93).<sup>96</sup> The hunt for the leopard-man also lays bare the human characters' bestial love of the chase. Kelly Hurley points out that none of them successfully

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<sup>93</sup> See Philip Gooden's footnote on p. 341 of the 2001 Penguin Classics edition of *The Lost World*.

<sup>94</sup> Sherborne, *H.G. Wells*, p. 113.

<sup>95</sup> Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p. 103.

<sup>96</sup> Glendening, *An Entangled Bank*, p. 60.

vanquish such urges and are all law-breakers in one way or another, from vague hints of homosexuality to an enthusiasm for inflicting pain on animals. Indeed, as the personification of human intellect, Moreau is at least as pitiless as anything to be found in nature.<sup>97</sup>

In his 1891 essay 'Zoological Retrogression', Wells attempts to strike a blow against what Griffith calls 'the anthropological fallacy' that nature's development has always been tending towards the creation of the human species,<sup>98</sup> that our pre-eminence over other species is assured, and that the secure lifestyle which Europeans currently enjoy will continue indefinitely. On the contrary, Wells claims the journey of life has been fitful and uncertain, and there is 'no guarantee in scientific knowledge of man's permanence or ascendancy'.<sup>99</sup> He does not take the neo-Darwinian position that competition, selection, and elimination are the sole mechanisms of evolution, but outlines a 'second great road of preservation – flight', which entails at least a temporary, sometimes strategic, Lamarckian deterioration in sheltered exile. This was the fate of the lively vertebrates that became sea squirts, or *Ascidians*, and of the 'mud-fish', which 'retired from an open sea too crowded and full of danger to make life worth the trouble'.<sup>100</sup> That civilised people have made the same decision may result in two consequences fatal to our dominance: we will cease to be restless, lose our willpower, our mobility, and become parasitic, living 'henceforth in an idyll of contentment'; a fool's paradise, for at the same time nature is busily equipping some other creature with the capacity to sweep *homo sapiens* into 'the darkness from which his universe arose'. 'The Coming Beast' was once mankind, 'the last of the mud-fish family', who now goes down to the sea to take revenge upon the children of those who drove his ancestors out of the water.<sup>101</sup>

Wells wrote several short stories in which a species originating from the jungle poses a danger to human lives and civilisation. 'The Treasure in the Forest' is an obvious attempt to imitate Conrad's distinctive setting, in which poisonous thorns account for the deaths of three men driven by greed. As the fortune-hunters lie dying, we are told that 'a profound silence brooded over the forest', and 'the white petals of some unknown flower came floating down through the gloom' ('TF', 321). In 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', a vampiric plant kills a collector in the Andaman Islands, and is only prevented from doing the same to a gentleman in England by a vigilant housekeeper. In 'Empire of the Ants', intelligent and venomous ants threaten to overrun British Guiana and then the rest of the world. In *The Time Machine*, the Morlocks represent the return of the cosmic process (or 'Mother Necessity' (*TM*, 79)) to the benign world of the Eloi, though they are a branch of humanity rather than a separate species, and the laboratory whence they arise is subterranean, not arboreal. Wells's message is that

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<sup>97</sup> Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>98</sup> Griffith, *The Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 85.

<sup>99</sup> Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression', in *The Fin de Siècle*, Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), pp. 11 & 12.

<sup>100</sup> Op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>101</sup> Op. cit., p. 12.

progress towards *logos* and the continuation of human superiority cannot be achieved in a civilised and tranquil environment alone, but through confronting the brutality and danger inherent in nature. In the words of the time traveller, 'There is no intelligence where there is no change and no need of change' (*TM*, 79). The jungly England of the future is just such an insecure, stimulating environment, where he feels 'intense fear' (51) and heightened awareness (59), like a vulnerable bird (22) or 'a strange animal in an unknown world' (36). Likewise, the interior of Noble's Island puts Prendick at a disadvantage to the relapsed Beast People, who are able to move easily on all-fours where the upright human labours (*IDM*, 92), and he finds himself in numerous life-or-death struggles. By killing the Hyena-Swine, he arguably secures his place at the top of a new hierarchy based on the 'capacity for inflicting trenchant wounds' (*IDM*, 121), but his departure from the island is ominously reminiscent of the *Ascidian* choosing safety and atrophy over strife and the role of the Coming Beast.

### **Human insignificance in Conrad's unfeeling forest**

The perceived disposition of nature towards mankind is a matter of some ambiguity in Conrad's writing. The mood of his world, and that of his forest specifically, modulates between pity, vengefulness, ambivalence, and indifference.<sup>102</sup> Drawing on the example of 'Heart of Darkness', Glendening points out that there are some instances where Marlow describes the jungle as being unmoved, and others where it appears to possess an active, hostile consciousness, like a malevolent god or devil. He explains this as an expression of Marlow's subconscious guilt for his own part in an evil enterprise, and his projection of that human evil onto the blank face of the forest.<sup>103</sup> I think he is right that such anthropomorphic details often reflect a narrator or character's experience, and the inner contest between a naturalistic and an idealistic outlook. The attribution of motives of pity or revenge to nature implies intentionality and a meaningful humanity, while an unresponsive environment expresses the image of an insignificant species of ape amid a mindless universe. One example of this tussle occurs in 'The Lagoon', where Arsat's words try to persuade 'the white man' that the Malay previously failed to intervene in the killing of his own brother because ignoble, erotic desire overcame honour and fraternal love, a defeat for which he is being punished; the wordless murmur of the surrounding forest provides a competing explanation of cruel and selfish indifference. As Arsat begins his story, the white man stares into the deathly darkness and appears to fall into an enchanted state:

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<sup>102</sup> According to O'Hanlon, Conrad's universe is inherently hostile to life in general because of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, with humanity ultimately condemned to perish with the cold demise of the Sun (*Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, p. 18).

<sup>103</sup> Glendening, *'An Entangled Bank'*, p. 167.

The ever-ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him – into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence. In that fleeting and powerful disturbance of his being the earth enfolded in the starlight peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battle-field of phantoms terrible and charming, august or ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears.

A plaintive murmur arose in the night; a murmur saddening and startling, as if the great solitudes of surrounding woods had tried to whisper into his ear the wisdom of their immense and lofty indifference. ('Lagoon', 222)

My interpretation is that the inclination to intuit supernatural causes behind life is innate to mankind;<sup>104</sup> but it is a temptation to which the white man is alive, while Arsat continues in a 'dreamy tone'.

It is rare in Conrad's fiction for nature to be genuinely well-disposed towards mankind. The few descriptions of nature as loving and harmonious are generally tinged with irony, such as Jim's complacent fancy in the moments before the Patna incident that safety and peace 'could be read on the silent aspect of nature like the certitude of fostering love upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face' (*LJ*, 13). Similarly, the jungle's concealment of the decaying Tropical Belt Coal Company headquarters is far from 'kind' (*Victory*, 133), for we have been informed that tropical vegetation is 'more jealous of men's conquests than the ocean' (*Victory*, 25). There is an even greater nonchalance about the way the woods engulf Marlow ('HD', 61-2) and the Eldorado Expedition ('HD', 59).

The forest is 'ready to swallow up anything' as Conrad writes in his note on the 1919 edition of *An Outcast* (*Outcast*, 283). Where natural phenomena are retributive in that novel, such as the intense tropical sunshine that falls on Sambir 'as if flung down by an angry hand' (67),<sup>105</sup> or the raindrops which dash at Willems 'as if flung from all sides by a mob of infuriated hands' (218), they appear to reflect the anti-hero's sense of victimhood.<sup>106</sup> When Willems seeks refuge amid the forest, the sentiments imputed to the trees are generous, though ambiguous: 'contemptuous pity' (52), 'disdainful compassion', and 'scornful pity' (119). And when his fate hangs in the balance, the very clouds are 'undecided – as if brooding over its own power for good or evil' (165). It is only in moments of lucidity that Willems perceives the truth of the universe's indifference, through the stillness of the forest, for example: 'This silence, this immobility of his surroundings seemed to him a cold rebuke, a stern refusal, a cruel unconcern.' (63) Babalatchi's melancholic angst stems from exactly this wisdom:

<sup>104</sup> See the similar conviction of Makola in 'An Outpost' (and possibly some Europeans) that an 'Evil spirit rules the lands under the equator' (p. 234).

<sup>105</sup> There is irony here too, because the murderous instrument of this notional deity's 'glorious and cruel' tyranny is sunlight, usually associated with goodness, life, and imperial civilisation.

<sup>106</sup> Hampson has also noted the way in which Conrad's anonymous narrative voices can take on the outlook and sentiments of a character, specifically Willems's rejection of alterity in *An Outcast* (*Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*, p. 115).

...a deep sigh was his answer to the selfish discourse of the river that hurried on unceasing and fast, regardless of joy or sorrow, of suffering and of strife, of failures and triumphs that lived on its banks. The brown water was there, ready to carry friends or enemies, to nurse love or hate on its submissive and heartless bosom, to help or hinder, to save life or give death; the great and rapid river: a deliverance, a prison, a refuge or a grave.

Perchance such thoughts as these caused Babalatchi to send another mournful sigh into the trailing mists of the unconcerned Pantai. (*Outcast*, 165-66)

Just as the dispassion of the river reminds Babalatchi of his own insignificance, so Babalatchi reminds Lingard that his mastery of the land is unreal and transient: “‘Tell me, Tuan, do you think the big trees know the name of the ruler? No. They are born, they grow, they live and they die – yet they know not, feel not. It is their land.’” (174) Willems remains caught somewhere between this awareness and ‘the immovable conviction of his own importance’ (251), even after he has been abandoned by Lingard. Therefore, he views himself as both peripheral and central, and the forest as both moved and unmoved:

The world seemed to end there. The forests of the other bank appeared unattainable, enigmatical, forever beyond reach like the stars of heaven – and as indifferent. Above and below, the forests on his side of the river came down to the water in a serried multitude of tall, immense trees towering in a great spread of twisted boughs above the thick undergrowth; great, solid trees, looking sombre, severe, and malevolently stolid, like a giant crowd of pitiless enemies pressing round silently to witness his slow agony. He was alone, small, crushed. (*Outcast*, 252)

It seems to dawn on Willems that the world does not exist with him and his destruction as its sole concern. It may be ‘watching for the opportunity to take him, to enlase him, to strangle him, to hold him till he died’, but there is also life around him that goes on and will continue to go on regardless of his fate (‘After he had died all this would remain! ... What for then? He would be dead.’ (254)). As he stares into the depths of the forest, with its mysterious combination of life and death, it appears that Willems too has been liberated from romantic illusions of grandeur and has fathomed once-and-for-all the torpid relativism which pervades existence, with all its implications:

For the second time in his life he felt, in a sudden sense of his insignificance, the need to send a cry for help into the wilderness, and for the second time he realised the hopelessness of its unconcern. He could shout for help on every side – and nobody would answer. He could stretch out his hands, he could call for aid, for support, for sympathy, for relief – and nobody would come. Nobody. There was no one there – but that woman. (*Outcast*, 258)

However, at the very last, he proves himself utterly incapable of resisting the teleological chimera. Failing to realise that he has been shot, he purports to understand ‘the triumphant delight of sunshine and of life’, before immediately being overtaken by darkness and death (275).

Inconsistency also characterises Marlow's impression of the forest in 'Heart of Darkness', so that it may be seen as a dialectic between a fallen nature to be fathomed, conquered, and redeemed, and one that is inflexibly amoral. At the Central Station, Marlow is engaged in conversation by the brickmaker, a shallow evangelist for the civilising mission of the Company. While his companion jabbars, Marlow's thoughts demonstrate his propensity for scepticism and truth-telling, and his fear of becoming "as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims":

'I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us? I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there? I could see a little ivory coming out from there, and I had heard Mr Kurtz was in there. I had heard enough about it too – God knows! Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it – no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there.' ('HD', 49)

Marlow sees the jungle as vastly powerful, but fundamentally unmoved by mankind, "a rolling wave of plants, piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek, to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence. And it moved not." ('HD', 54) By contrast, the brickmaker views it as supernaturally malevolent, and observes that, unlike animals, "no man here bears a charmed life" ('HD', 52). He also reintroduces to Marlow the word 'Kurtz' as a source of enlightenment, a 'special being' in the Manichean struggle against savagery. Perhaps this is why he is so anticipative when the manager seems to beckon 'to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness' of the land:

'It was so startling that I leaped to my feet and looked back at the edge of the forest, as though I had expected an answer of some sort to that black display of confidence. You know the foolish notions that come to one sometimes. The high stillness confronted these two figures with its ominous patience, waiting for the passing away of a fantastic invasion.' ('HD', 58)

At this juncture, Marlow ridicules the idea of the wilderness as inimical to mankind; but immediately upriver, while hippos and alligators sun themselves, the powerful forest possesses 'an inscrutable intention', which to his mind is 'vengeful' ('HD', 60). This, he tells his audience, was the last occasion he witnessed the enmity of the wilderness: "I got used to it afterwards; I did not see it any more; I had no time." He concludes that it is much better to feel no bigger and more remarkable than a small, grimy beetle, or to behave like the violent 'savages' we are, than to elevate ourselves to the pinnacle of the universal scheme ('HD', 61 & 95). And upon meeting the Russian 'harlequin' at the Inner Station, Marlow once more evinces his naturalistic credentials by characterising unfettered nature as never before seeming "so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness" ('HD', 91). But this is not his final word. Returning to Europe, where he finds people 'so full of stupid importance'

(‘HD’, 114), he perhaps intends to promulgate the lesson of Kurtz’s final ‘burst of sincerity’, ‘so withering to one’s belief in mankind’ (‘HD’, 107). However, upon entering the home of the Intended, he semi-deliriously imagines the triumphant wilderness as “an invading and vengeful rush which, it seemed to me, I would have to keep back alone for the salvation of another soul” (‘HD’, 117-18). At that point, Marlow is obliged to cast man in the role of nature’s heroic adversary to salvage a desirable illusion of significance for both the Intended and himself.<sup>107</sup>

A number of fin-de-siècle writers use the tropical forest to construct a new, ‘Darwinian’ vision of mankind as possessing bestial origins and instincts; however, most also assign to some men the capacity to master and rise above this brutal component, thus guaranteeing that we retain a unique position in a fundamentally anthropocentric universe. The fiction of Conrad, and to a lesser extent that of Wells, places individuals who believe themselves at the forefront of their kind in immense, silent, and ‘immovable forests rooted deep in the soil’ (*LJ*, 177), where they do not triumph but die, to the prodigious indifference of their surroundings. Glendening writes that the Conradian forest ‘stands in for all of cosmic nature, accentuating the smallness of individual human lives, of settlements that are like specks in the forests, of civilisation, and of the whole species’.<sup>108</sup> It is also my view that Conrad intended his jungles to throw ‘a new and sinister light on men and nature’ (*Tether*, 106), to be shocking to mankind’s conception of itself. There, man appears a transient interloper, ‘a handful of ashes and dust’, perhaps even ‘an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation’ (*Victory*, 266 & 150), whose achievements are no less futile than the ‘insignificant cleared spot’ of a trading post (‘Outpost’, 239).

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<sup>107</sup> A comparison could be made to the moment in *Victory* when the forest of Samburan ceases to express to Lena ‘the perfect immobility of patience’ (*Victory*, 258), and instead surrounds her ‘not so much with gloom, but with a sullen, dumb, menacing hostility’ (*Victory*, 265). Her fancy that she and Heyst are the subjects of divine punishment provides the incentive for her subsequent act of attempted recompense and salvation.

<sup>108</sup> Glendening, ‘*An Entangled Bank*’, p. 166.

## Chapter Four

### Social Darwinism

#### Mid-nineteenth-century hereditarianism

From the 1870s to the mid-twentieth century, there prevailed in Europe a set of principles regarding human nature which I shall demonstrate were as much a reaction against materialism as its symptom, being hierarchical, law-bound, and purposive. In the fiction that sought to justify such ideas, the jungle often featured as a figure for the lowest rung of human development: stagnant, bestial groups to be improved or walled off by civilised Europeans. However, it was also a setting associated with the new driving force of progress, struggle. Therefore, the literary tropical forest is uniquely expressive of the complex fin-de-siècle attitude to 'savagery', which contemptuously denied a general overlap with nobility, while sanctioning the circumscribed primitivism of writers such as Kipling.<sup>1</sup>

The term 'social Darwinism' is misleading for several reasons, first because the emphasis was on heredity at least as much as factors one might label 'social', such as environment, culture, and upbringing. This was a departure from the liberal, Lockean model of a unified humanity, in which everybody begins life with identical mental and moral faculties, and it meant that individuals and societies could be placed on a scale of merit, justifying discrimination on the basis of class and race. The shift towards such explanations for human behaviour began some time before the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, though precisely when and why it occurred is a matter of uncertainty among scholars. Andrea White states that ideas of racial difference had been noted as early as 1530, but it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that it was first viewed as the cause of 'culture' and 'savagery'.<sup>2</sup> During the 1860s, there was a surge of interest in biological determinism among intellectual circles in London and Paris, and by the 1870s it was normal to view heredity as a key driver of social

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Ridley, writing of the German author Friedrich Gërstacker's *Tabiti* (1868), believes such admiration for 'savages' in later decades was merely one of the 'conventional poses of exotic literature' (*Images of Imperial Rule*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1983, p. 22).

<sup>2</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 30. Rod Edmond ('Home and away: degeneration in imperialist and modernist discourse', in *Modernism and Empire*, Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (eds.), Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 40) cites Captain Marryat's *Masterman Ready* (1841) as evidence that the attitudes to race of a previous generation were very different to those of the late nineteenth century.



trends.<sup>3</sup> The need to replace or reinforce the existing hierarchies seems to have been an important incentive. Peter Watson claims that the social Darwinian perspective originated in the Enlightenment view of the human condition as biological rather than theological.<sup>4</sup> A similar but later change in the basis of British superiority, from Christianity to ‘science’ and race, has been posited by Linda Dryden.<sup>5</sup> In *Rule of Darkness*, Brantlinger sees racial theory as providing a sought-after hierarchical alternative to waning domestic class divisions.<sup>6</sup>

The early proponents of biological determinism may have agreed that, in the words of Robert Knox, ‘hereditary descent is everything’ and all culture is an expression of racial character;<sup>7</sup> but they were less clear on the question of whether ‘lesser’ races had deteriorated from a more advanced state,<sup>8</sup> or had been permanently beneath and apart from Europeans. On the one hand, James Brooke gave an account of ‘the Malayan nations’, published in 1853, as having been ‘in a state of deterioration since we first became acquainted with them; and the records of our early voyagers together with the remains of antiquity still visible in Java and Sumatra, prove that once flourishing nations have now ceased to exist, and countries once

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<sup>3</sup> C.C. Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience from Carlyle to Foster*, London, Macmillan, 1996, pp. 156 & 160. See also Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> Watson, *Ideas*, p. 914.

<sup>5</sup> Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 184. Elsewhere, Brantlinger attributes growing racism in mid-century Britain to the need to justify colonial involvement in Africa (‘Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent’, in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1, “‘Race”, Writing, and Difference”, 1985, p. 167), and Bowler agrees with him that exaggeration of racial difference was motivated by a desire to feel more comfortable about exploiting native peoples (*Evolution*, p. 293). To my mind, this argument appears flawed. The first racial theorists commonly held the view that each race has its own natural environment, making acclimatisation by Europeans to the tropics impossible and thus undermining the case for imperial expansion (which did not take off in Africa for some decades, in any case). As Brantlinger himself points out, one such theorist called Robert Knox declared, in a lecture subsequently published under the title of *The Races of Men* (1850), that only the ‘blacks’ were adapted to tropical conditions, and that ‘the Saxons’ should keep out of other parts of the world to avoid the deadly fate of the 1841 Niger expedition (Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 22). Likewise, in a lecture on ‘The Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races’ (Mobile, Dade and Thompson, 1844), the American physician Josiah Nott lists a number of exotic species and declares that ‘None of these plants and animals can be propagated out of the climate to which they are adapted by nature – and man forms no exception to the general law. The white man cannot live in tropical Africa, or the African in the frigid zone’ (p. 19). (See also Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 133.) These misgivings were shared by liberals and radicals, like J.A. Roebuck, J.S. Mill, and Anthony Trollope, and further proliferated following a series of imperial setbacks (Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, pp. 5 & 23). It is true, however, that Knox does not condemn enslaving a native population to work the land where white men cannot: ‘neither Celt nor Saxon can labour in a tropical country; they may seize a country, as we have done in India, and hold it by the bayonet, as we do in that vast territory; but he cannot colonise it; it is no part of Britain in any sense, and never will be; the white race can never till the fields of Hindostan’ (Robert Knox, *The Races of Men*, Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard, 1850, pp. 175-76).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Knox, *The Races of Men*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Georges Cuvier described Africans in 1812 as ‘the most degraded of human races, whose form approaches that of the beast and whose intelligence is nowhere great enough to arrive at regular government’ (*Recherches sur les ossements fossils de quadrupèdes*, Vol. 1, Paris, Deterville, 1812, p. 105 (trans. Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 72)). Hegel, in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* (‘Lectures on the History of Philosophy’, 1822-30, published posthumously in 1837), accounted for social decline as the inevitable final stage of an organic development (Griffith, p. 101). Kershner describes this metaphor of growth and decay as ‘probably old for the ancient Greeks’ but revived by the Romantics (*The Georgia Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 426-7).

teeming with human life, are now tenantless and deserted'.<sup>9</sup> And during the 1860s, Archbishop Whately of Dublin and the Eighth Duke of Argyll both postulated that some peoples were offshoots of the original mankind, who had degenerated after being driven into harsher environments; hence the reports of 'primitive' peoples living in the ruins of advanced civilisations.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Julien-Joseph Virey had presented a paper in 1841 at *L'Académie de Médecine* in Paris on the topic of 'the biological causes of civilisation', in which he described African culture as 'constantly imperfect' and black people 'the natural prey of the white human'.<sup>11</sup> Another paper, entitled 'On the Negro's Place in Nature', was put to the British Academy in 1863 by James Hunt, who insisted that the African has demonstrated no capacity for improvement since antiquity and could be classified as a separate species.<sup>12</sup> Some prototypical racial theorists simultaneously adhered to 'polygenism',<sup>13</sup> often regarding Africans, and 'degenerationism', for example regarding Indian culture.<sup>14</sup> Arthur de Gobineau, the foremost such figure, saw little discrepancy, stating in *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853-5) that communities fail due to a latent tendency towards deterioration, but also due to breeding with 'inferior' races.<sup>15</sup>

De Gobineau imagined original mankind as a beautiful, intelligent, and Aryan race,<sup>16</sup> since diluted, though surviving among the French and German aristocracies.<sup>17</sup> However, during the 1870s, it became more common to equate prehistoric humans with present-day, dark-skinned natives, who were neither separate nor degenerate, but under-developed. This shift was due largely to the influence of Spencer and Darwin.<sup>18</sup> In the closing paragraphs of *The Descent of Man*, Darwin surmises that 'we are descended from barbarians' resembling the indigenous

<sup>9</sup> *The Private Letters of Sir James Brooke*, John C. Templer (ed.), Vol. 1, London, Richard Bentley, 1853, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> R.G. Lienhardt, *Social Anthropology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 9. Hurley states that the idea of some modern humans having undergone a Fall from grace heavily influenced the first degenerationists (*The Gothic Body*, p. 68).

<sup>11</sup> Watson, *Ideas*, p. 914.

<sup>12</sup> Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 95.

<sup>13</sup> The tradition of polygenism includes the medieval theory of the humours and the biblical explanation for racial difference, whereby each population was descended from a member of Noah's family, with Africans purportedly derived from Ham, who became a slave (White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 30). Bowler tells us that some mid-nineteenth-century polygenists insisted that black people were not even descended from Adam and Eve (*Evolution*, p. 294).

<sup>14</sup> Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 27; and, Watson, *Ideas*, p. 919.

<sup>15</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, pp. 101 & 102. The debate also found its way into W.D. Arnold's 1853 novel *Oakfield*, in which the generally sanctimonious title-character opines that Indians are not 'hopelessly' inferior brutes; whereupon he is contradicted by the savvier Middleton, who sees the British Raj as an almost unending attempt 'to clear away some of the jungle of falsehood and absurdity' endemic in native culture (*Oakfield; or, Fellowship in the East*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Vol. 1, London, Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854, p. 170).

<sup>16</sup> Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> Watson, *Ideas*, p. 915.

<sup>18</sup> Darwin's opinions regarding race are somewhat equivocal, but he appears to have hardened in his attitudes to native peoples as he got older, and by the 1870s to support the idea of higher and lower races; the latter sharing many of the traits of our unevolved ancestors.

inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego:<sup>19</sup> ‘a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practises infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions’.<sup>20</sup> He does not specify a setting for these nefarious activities, but it is notable that his diaries of the *Beagle* voyage accentuate the relationship between the Fuegians and the ‘thick, dusky mass of forest’<sup>21</sup> constituting their homeland, from his first sighting of a group ‘partly concealed by the entangled forest’<sup>22</sup> to later comments about their ‘entangled hair’.<sup>23</sup> Like a number of ancient creation myths, as well as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, Darwin located the ‘pre-social state’ of humanity in woodland: a dense, dark, and tropical forest.<sup>24</sup>

Darwin did not condemn all quarters of humanity to chaotic irrationality and vice. While he concludes *The Descent* with the ominous statement that ‘Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin’, he also sought to reassure his readership that they had risen ‘to the very summit of the organic scale’, and may rise yet further, through sympathy, benevolence and that ‘god-like intellect’ resulting from an upright posture and free hands. According to O’Hanlon, this placed Europeans and non-Europeans in ‘a vertical hierarchy of values, more familiar to Christendom’.<sup>25</sup> Not only did Darwin go too far in equating non-European languages to animal noises, in Bowler’s opinion,<sup>26</sup> but he was ‘certainly inclined to hope that the white race did indeed represent the high point of an inevitable (if irregular) advance towards higher things’.<sup>27</sup>

Darwin himself believed cooperation and altruism are products of evolutionary success, not the causes of failure,<sup>28</sup> and he did not sanction unscrupulous acts of self-interest in a social

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<sup>19</sup> Who in turn were related in a linear fashion to ‘wild animals’.

<sup>20</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 619.

<sup>21</sup> Darwin, ‘Journal and Remarks’, p. 233. He makes an unfavourable comparison with the tropical rainforest: ‘The entangled mass of the thriving and the fallen reminded me of the forests within the tropics; –yet there was a difference; for in these still solitudes, Death, instead of Life, seemed the predominant spirit.’ (p. 231).

<sup>22</sup> Darwin, ‘Journal and Remarks’, p. 227.

<sup>23</sup> Darwin, ‘Journal and Remarks’, pp. 228 & 235.

<sup>24</sup> Actually, Darwin located mankind’s primordial birthplace in the sea, followed by the estuary mudflats (‘a shore washed by the tides’), and eventually the forest (*The Descent of Man*, p. 161); but all these locations are associated with Christian or pre-Christian notions of chaos. Specifically, Darwin believed that *Pithecanthropus alalus*, or the fossilised ‘missing link’ between apes and humans, would be found in tropical Africa. Some late-nineteenth-century naturalists departed from this hypothesis to a certain extent, like Ernst Haeckel, or Eugene Dubois, who discovered *Pithecanthropus erectus* or ‘Java Man’ during the years 1891-2 (Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 280). But it wasn’t until Davidson Black mounted an expedition to China in 1919, discovering *Pithecanthropus*-like remains there between 1926 and 1928, that a location for the cradle of humankind beyond the tropical forest was seriously considered (Bowler, p. 283).

<sup>25</sup> O’Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 212.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution*, p. 144.

<sup>28</sup> There is a legitimate debate about the extent to which Darwin himself held social Darwinian views. Darwin did write in a letter to Charles Lyell that he observed the process of selection operating among mankind, leading to ‘the less intellectual races being exterminated’ (‘Letter to Charles Lyell, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1859’, in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, Vol. II, Francis Darwin (ed.), New York and London, D.

environment.<sup>29</sup> However, arguably as a result of his erosion of the animal-human boundary, it became commonplace for other intellectuals to apply their own ideas derived from the observation of the natural world to human society.<sup>30</sup> Spencer popularised the belief that competition between individuals and communities is part of a universal (or divinely underwritten) instrument for improvement. Absence of ‘struggle’ was equivalent to the absence of God’s grace, and such environments could lead to decline. This contradicted the traditional Christian message that the path to divine reason could only be navigated through virtues like sympathy for the down-trodden, and therefore uncoupled human development from various altruistic norms. The eventual result would be the emergence of social Darwinian theories advocating the ruthless exposure of the human population to selection pressures, and the ‘re-barbarisation’ of Western culture to ward off the new degenerative perdition.<sup>31</sup>

### **The social philosophies of Spencer, Galton, and Huxley**

A common narrative of the period is that the supposed degeneracy uncovered by tropical exploration and colonial engagement, in combination with Darwinian hereditarianism, led directly to pessimism about the ability of native peoples to ‘improve’.<sup>32</sup> Brantlinger implies that the 1857 Indian Mutiny constitutes a clear dividing line between the early-nineteenth-century attitude that the civilising process was a matter of teaching Christianity and implementing free trade, and Victorians like Dickens, who thought all attempts to refine the natives futile.<sup>33</sup> Beforehand, British writers were open to the possibility of Indians making progress; afterwards, India was seen as ‘mired in changeless patterns of superstition and violence’.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, the argument runs, enslavement and genocide became accepted solutions to native recalcitrance.<sup>35</sup> In my view, this is an oversimplified interpretation, which

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Appleton and Co., 1911, p. 7). And he predicted to Charles Kingsley that in five hundred years ‘the Anglo-Saxon race will have spread & exterminated whole nations; & in consequence how much the Human race, viewed as a unit, will have risen in rank’ (‘Letter to Charles Kingsley, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1862’). Perhaps he was pushed in this direction by his colleagues, such as Huxley, who argued against abolition on the grounds that the liberated ‘negro’ would be fatally exposed to selective forces (‘Emancipation – Black and White’, 1865).

<sup>29</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 300. However, he was interpreted by social Darwinists as saying that sympathy for the weak acts counterproductively on selection, and therefore would instigate degeneration.

<sup>30</sup> Such as Walter Bagehot’s *Physics and Politics* (1872), for example.

<sup>31</sup> In this idea, the social Darwinists and Lamarckians had been anticipated by the Greek sophists Antiphon and Thrasymachus, who claimed that human ethics tend to subvert natural law, invoked by the weak to thwart their otherwise dominant compatriots (Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, p.188).

<sup>32</sup> See Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 77. Rod Edmond makes a similar claim that contemplating the demise of native peoples raised the possibility of British decline (*Modernism and empire*, Booth and Rigby (eds.), p. 42).

<sup>33</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 178.

<sup>34</sup> Brantlinger, p. 199.

<sup>35</sup> As evidence, Brantlinger quotes an 1850 letter from Australia regarding the native population: ‘It was of no use; no kindness – nothing, in fact – will teach them the law of *meum* and *tuum* but the white man’s gun and his superior courage.’ (pp. 125-26)

wrongly assumes the speedy absorption of hard heredity into popular discourse and does not adequately take account of the variations within the late-Victorian approach to human history and social policy.

In using the term social Darwinism, it is helpful to make a distinction between those thinkers, like Spencer, who were influenced as much by Lamarckian as Darwinian biology, from the adherents of hard heredity, like Francis Galton. The idea of 'struggle' was crucial to both branches, but in 'social Lamarckism', a competitive environment was the catalyst for wilful changes in habits and thus heritable self-improvements, while the rest believed that physical and mental adaptations on the part of a race or species can only be achieved through elimination of the 'unfit' and breeding of the 'fit'. Social Lamarckism grew in popularity during the 1870s and 1880s, before being surpassed midway through the 1890s by the Galtonian version, which reigned in Britain until the First World War before declining over the ensuing decades.

As evidence of mankind's great antiquity and evolutionary origins began to accumulate,<sup>36</sup> the early degenerationists and polygenists were challenged by the founders of a new discipline, anthropology. These 'developmentalists' wondered whether there wasn't 'a definite assured law of progress in human affairs – a slow gradual ascent from the lower to the higher'.<sup>37</sup> The leading British anthropologists during the 1860s and 1870s were Edward B. Tylor and Sir John Lubbock. In *The Origin of Civilisation* (1870), Lubbock drew on archaeological discoveries of prehistoric human tools, as well as Epicurean philosophy and Lamarckian biology, to devise a new model of human history as advancing through a series of cultural phases, from stone, to bronze, and then iron.<sup>38</sup> Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1865) and *Primitive Culture* (1871) posited a similar developmental hierarchy based on a society's beliefs, with the most primitive preoccupied by magic, the more advanced by religion, and modernity by science: "Tylor envisioned only one Culture, with different levels of development and a clear goal toward which it was progressing."<sup>39</sup> As I have already written, Spencer incorporated Darwinian competition into his 'Theory of Universal Progress' to provide a mechanism (more demonstrable than just the 'beneficent necessity') by which all phenomena evolve 'from the simple to the complex'.<sup>40</sup> In *Principles of Sociology* (1876, 1882 & 1896), he argued

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<sup>36</sup> Including the discovery of man-crafted flints in Brixham Cave, Torquay, in 1859.

<sup>37</sup> As John Lubbock ponders in his preface to the American edition of *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1879, p. iv). As Bowler makes clear, before the last years of the century, little thought was given to the possibility that different cultures might exist simultaneously.

<sup>38</sup> According to Epicurus, human society had evolved through a series of stages corresponding to his manipulation of stone, wood, bronze, and finally iron (Foster, Clark, and York, *Critique of Intelligent Design*, p. 63). This was in contrast to Ovid's account of a gradual deterioration from a Golden age, to Silver, to Brazen, and then to the Iron Age of the present.

<sup>39</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 286. In this, Tylor was influenced by Auguste Comte's 'Law of Three Stages' in *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830-42), translated into English by Harriet Martineau in 1853.

<sup>40</sup> Herbert Spencer, 'Progress: Its Law and Cause', in *Progress: Its Law and Cause, with Other Disquisitions*, New York, J. Fitzgerald, 1881, p. 243.

that human society develops from incoherent, bellicose and repressive barbarity to coherent, industrial, and democratic civilisation through the struggle of competing individuals.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the immediate effect of Spencer's philosophy, and the Lamarckian element in Darwin's biology, was not to buttress hereditarian fanatics like de Gobineau, but to boost linear progressionism.

It is an interesting paradox that Spencerian confidence in development as a numinous quality of nature led not only to the widespread belief that welfare systems undermine progress by sheltering the 'unfit' from competition, and hence to the promotion of *laissez-faire* domestic policies,<sup>42</sup> but also to the stimulation of a markedly interventionist colonialism. Like the polygenists, the developmentalists assumed that present-day native peoples and cultures are inferior to Europeans, but they salvaged some of the positivity of 'blank slate' liberalism by asserting that most 'primitive' peoples had merely stalled on their largely one-way journey towards the *telos* of European 'civilisation'.<sup>43</sup> The first upshot was that native peoples became objects of study. Contemporary cultures with basic tools or animist beliefs were portrayed as stupid and immoral relics; Neanderthal snapshots of a European past.<sup>44</sup> 'In effect, modern "primitives" became a model for the missing link – indeed, it was almost as though the link were not missing at all, because it was preserved by these living fossils even though the actual fossils were not available.'<sup>45</sup> It had been customary to view the tropics as resembling the climate of primeval Europe since the French paleobotanist Adolphe Brongniart's *Histoire des végétaux fossils* (1828-37),<sup>46</sup> but according to the 'comparative method' such analogies now included the very inhabitants. Tylor reckoned there to be 'scarce a hand's breadth difference between an English ploughman and a negro of Central Africa'.<sup>47</sup> J.G. Frazer, one of his disciples, was bold enough to refer to Greek and Roman culture in *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) as a mere developmental rung beneath modernity, with the result that by the end of the 1890s parallels between modern Africa and Roman Britain were almost hackneyed.<sup>48</sup> The surge of European

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<sup>41</sup> Shaffer, "Rebarbarizing Civilisation", p. 47

<sup>42</sup> As Spencer argued in *The Man versus the State* (1884).

<sup>43</sup> They did not rule out degeneration altogether. E. Ray Lankester (who contradicted himself about Lamarckism over the course of his life) listed 'the Fuegians, the Bushmen, and even the Australians' as the 'degenerate descendants of the higher and civilised races' (*Degeneration*, p. 59).

<sup>44</sup> This was the particular thesis of Gabriel de Mortillet during the 1880s, according to Bowler (*Evolution*, p. 285).

<sup>45</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 211.

<sup>46</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 115.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, Vol. I, London, John Murray, 1920, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 112. Andrew Lang was also confident that Homeric Greece resembled an African society of the current epoch (David Adams, *Colonial Odysseys: Empire and Epic in the Modernist Novel*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 19); while Francis W. Newman thought Homer's poetry must originally have sounded 'like an elegant and simple melody from an African of the Gold Coast' (quoted by Matthew Arnold, *On Translating Homer*, London, Smith, Elder, and Co., 1896, p. 172). The clichéd comparison between classical Europe and modern

curiosity in tropical peoples and lands during the second-half of the nineteenth century was therefore a form of navel-gazing.<sup>49</sup>

The second upshot was that native peoples became objects of salvation. Progressionists drew on Lamarckian evolutionary theory to explain the divergence between European and native rates of development. For example, the German anthropologist Theodor Waitz (*Die Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, 1860-72) supposed that civilisation was an acquired characteristic, which easily withered through indolence and indiscipline if not properly embedded over a number of generations.<sup>50</sup> Such failures of conscious willpower to develop the habit of civilised behaviour could only be remedied by the energetic influence of British missionaries and colonists.<sup>51</sup> In the words of Tylor, 'Civilisation is a plant much oftener propagated than developed'.<sup>52</sup> The same notion is expressed in G.A. Henty's *By Sheer Pluck* (1874), where Mr. Goodenough claims that, 'Living among white men, [negroes'] imitative faculties enable them to attain a considerable amount of civilisation. Left alone to their own devices they retrograde into a state little above their native savagery.'<sup>53</sup>

Environment was a crucial part of developmentalism because Lamarck's 'zoological principle' had described it as the stimulant for organisms to adjust their habits, and consequently their forms: 'Progress in the structure (*composition*) of the organisation undergoes here and there in the general series of animals anomalies brought about by the character of the habitat (*circonstances d'habitation*), and by that of habits contracted.'<sup>54</sup> With the 'blank slate' model of human nature having fallen out of favour, the environmental element of Lamarck's theory had been part of its attractiveness for so many mid-century liberals seeking to temper the hereditarian enthusiasm of the age.<sup>55</sup> However, it was as much a source of unease for some Europeans as it was of optimism, for 'cultures that had apparently advanced so far in such a short time could ill-afford to be confident of their inevitable ascendancy; nor could they

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Africa was employed with irony by Conrad in 'Heart of Darkness' (because Europe remains a place of savagery), and again by Virginia Woolf in *A Voyage Out* (see Adams, p. 19).

<sup>49</sup> For James Frazer, comprehension of native peoples was just a means to identify 'certain weak points on which modern society is built', with a view to eliminating any unnatural, religious irrationalism (*The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Vol. I, London, Macmillan, 1917, pp. xv-xvi).

<sup>50</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 136.

<sup>51</sup> Griffith, p. 81.

<sup>52</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> G.A. Henty, *By Sheer Pluck*, London, Glasgow and Bombay, Blackie and Son, 1883, p. 118.

<sup>54</sup> Ward, *Neo-Darwinism and Neo-Lamarckism*, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Butler, in *Life and Habit* (1877), being one example. Another was Jean Finot, who wrote in his essay 'The races myth' (*Review of Reviews*, April 1911, pp. 363-4): 'Under the influence of external conditions we are transformed and adopted to the current type. Immigrants become absorbed physiologically and mentally to the dominant type.' However, Bowler says that neo-Lamarckism reinforced racial division by equating the evolution of a species with the development of an individual, thus encouraging comparisons between the mental capacities of a native and those of a European child (Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 294).

rationally deny to other cultures the capacity for progress'.<sup>56</sup> Neo-Lamarckian biology pads the gap between the individual and its primordial ancestors with millennia of exposure to favourable surroundings and with generations who wilfully altered their own biological heritage, but for an entire people the division is more fluid: challenging environments and sound habits, not to mention deleterious environments and debauchery, have augmented consequences.<sup>57</sup> From the neo-Darwinian perspective by contrast, the role that environment plays in determining which characteristics are perpetuated is less drastic.<sup>58</sup> Hard heredity may imply that millions of years of brutish characteristics persist within the human genotype,<sup>59</sup> but it provides the consolation of a comparatively stable pedigree, the glacially slow evolution of which depended more on long-term patterns of survival and breeding.<sup>60</sup> Thus the declining popularity of social Lamarckism in Britain during the 1890s can partly be attributed to the insufficient security it provided the imperial race against the loss of their 'civilised' pre-eminence.

After two or three decades during which Lamarckism had shaped anthropological discourse, in the last years of the century the notion of hard heredity became once again in vogue, and with it returned some of the preoccupations of mid-century jeremiahs like Knox and de Gobineau. There were doubts about a race's ability to adjust to environments not naturally its own,<sup>61</sup> although now Francis Galton insisted that white acclimatisation was indeed possible

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<sup>56</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 115. Dryden attributes the rise of racialism to fears about the future of the nation in the face of challenges to empire (*Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, pp. 28-9).

<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, men like Henry Maudsley argued that changes in climate or culture could initiate adaptive changes in mankind, which might include the loss of positive evolutionary traits (Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 217; and O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, p. 44).

<sup>58</sup> Of course, environment also played an important role in the neo-Darwinian model, but it was limited to stimulating or stifling selection within a population, and could not motivate alterations to an individual's biological legacy. Bowler says that this interpretation, spelt out by Lankester, was more popular by the beginning of the twentieth century, but until then Lamarckism held sway (Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 231).

<sup>59</sup> For Wells, the human body bears resemblance to 'the anatomy of a fish twisted and patched to fit a life out of water' ('Zoological Retrogression', in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 10).

<sup>60</sup> Ward gives this as a particular cause of his aversion towards Weismann's theory that only previously inherited characteristics can be transmitted; for therefore, 'in the loins of the highest types of man there is something which was still living in the lowest primordial worm and even in the bathybian ooze of those primeval waters which in the earliest Cambrian times succeeded the formation of the original crust of the globe' (Ward, *Neo-Darwinism and Neo-Lamarckism*, p. 43). Behind Ward's late nineteenth-century aversion to the 'bathybian ooze' lingers the more venerable revulsion of the idealist for primal matter and the possibility that mankind hails from such a state. As Kelly Hurley points out, slime was a source of unease for Victorian writers because it called attention to the body's materiality, and 'the infectious quality of matter renders the human subject a Thing, contingent, indifferent, foundationless' (Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p. 35).

<sup>61</sup> In his 1898 book entitled *The Control of the Tropics*, Benjamin Kidd seeks to dispel any notions of the lone white man in the tropics as a civilising influence:

In climatic conditions which are a burden to him; in the midst of races in a different and lower stage of development; divorced from the influences which have produced him, from the moral and political environment from which he sprang, the white man does not in the end, in such circumstances, tend so much to raise the level of the races



through a programme of selective breeding.<sup>62</sup> He and his disciples envisaged a largely stable hierarchy of races within humanity, and were inclined to view non-white peoples, especially Africans, as separate and unlikely ever to acquire ‘civilisation’. For the anatomist Arthur Keith, the different races had run in parallel for a significant amount of human history,<sup>63</sup> with conflict between them driving progress.<sup>64</sup> Galton himself wrote of ‘Negroes’ in the prefatory chapter to the 1892 edition of *Hereditary Genius* that ‘their races, numerous and prolific as they are, will in course of time be supplanted and replaced by their betters’.<sup>65</sup> Such peoples were either ‘dying nations’<sup>66</sup> or, as the phrenologist<sup>67</sup> Georges Vacher de Lapouge claimed, nascent species whose inherent difference was already ineradicable.<sup>68</sup> By the last decade of the nineteenth century, a belief in the un-improvability of many colonial populations had permeated public discourse, so that one visitor to rural India in 1892 could write in a letter, ‘The real fact is that these men are a different species of animals to ourselves – their physical constitution is feeble and weedy and often disgustingly sensual’.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, the late-Victorian gentry were horrified by the fecundity of their ‘inferiors’ in the cities and the colonies. They suspected the selective struggle did not function in these places as it should and needed to be artificially implemented through the exclusion of the biologically undesirable; a policy they applied at an individual level through what Galton termed ‘eugenics’,<sup>70</sup> and at a cultural level as racial segregation. Without this course of action, they

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amongst whom he has made his unnatural home, as he tends himself to sink slowly to the level around him. (New York and London, Macmillan and Co., 1898, pp. 50-1)

Similarly, a 1901 essay by James Bryce echoes Knox by declaring direct rule in sweltering plains of India impossible due to the extinction of the English race within three or four generations (‘The Roman empire and the British empire in India’, in *Studies in History and Jurisprudence*, Vol. I, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1901, p. 33). As Rich states, the sustained belief of the British public in racial difference based on climate is evident from fundraising campaigns to provide warm clothing for African troops during the Great War (*Race and Empire*, p. 40).

<sup>62</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 132.

<sup>63</sup> Arthur Keith, *The Antiquity of Man*, London, Williams and Norgate, 1915, p. 70.

<sup>64</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 283.

<sup>65</sup> Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences*, London and New York, Macmillan and Co., 1892, p. xxvi.

<sup>66</sup> Lord Salisbury in *The Times*, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1898, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Social Darwinists were often proponents of phrenology (‘another expression of the reassertion of materialism’, according to Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 128), a new branch of psychology based on the idea that the shape and size of a person’s cranium, being roughly the same as the brain, provides an indication of personality and mental capacity.

<sup>68</sup> Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea*, Washington DC and Baltimore, The Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 292. The racist worldview of some involved a combination of polygenism and degenerationism, such as William Archer, who had a sense of ‘ineradicable’ African subordination, but felt ‘fundamental equality’ with Indians, and ‘wonder as to how they happen to have such a position of ... inferiority’ (*India and the Future*, London, Hutchinson, 1917, p. 23).

<sup>69</sup> ‘Letter from Herzel Cary to Graham Wallas, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1892’, in *Graham Wallas Collection*, 1/12, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London, as cited in Rich, *Race and Empire*, p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> Expanding on his cousin Charles Darwin’s fixation with the correlation between the breeding and the health of a species, or even a human family like the Wedgwood-Darwins, he came to the conclusion in

feared their own gradual downfall through interbreeding, long after victory in war had been achieved.<sup>71</sup> There were a few liberals who proposed a degree of 'interbreeding' between poor white women and African men. In 1859, Anthony Trollope had envisaged the creation of a new people fitted for the tropical sun, 'in whose blood shall be mixed some portion of Northern energy, and which shall owe its physical prowess to African progenitors'.<sup>72</sup> And, in *In Darkest England* (1890), William Booth saw intermarriage between destitute European women and Africans as a solution to native debasement.<sup>73</sup> But, in general, the *bête noire* of these years was 'miscegenation': the idea, re-stated in Alfred Schultz's *Race or Mongrel* (1908), that it is a 'law of nature' that 'only the bad qualities of the whites and the negro are transmitted to the mongrel offspring'.<sup>74</sup> Galton warned that the British could go the same way as 'mongrel races' like the Egyptians or the Carthaginians.<sup>75</sup> Negative and disdainful European attitudes towards their colonial subjects contributed to a change in the imperial ethos. I think it would be an exaggeration to say that British imperialism as a whole became indistinguishable from genocide, as Brantlinger does,<sup>76</sup> but it certainly expressed fewer proselytising aspirations. Instead, there was a tendency among British policymakers to see segregation as a solution to the political problems of the Empire, particularly during the years when the group of Viscount Milner's staff which called itself 'the Round Table' was most influential (c. 1902-1923).<sup>77</sup>

During the 1890s, Huxley parted ways with most other social Darwinists by calling it a 'fallacy' to think that the mechanism of a pitiless and arbitrary universe should be taken as a moral lodestar by humans. In 'Evolution and Ethics', he blamed people's misconception of natural selection as an improving force on the proliferation of the phrase 'survival of the fittest', which muddles suitability with superiority by conferring an implicit value-judgement on organisms which experience evolutionary success. This in reality is determined by capricious circumstance, which frequently favours simpler life-forms: 'If [our hemisphere] became hotter, the pleasant valleys of the Thames and Isis might be uninhabitable by any animated beings save those that flourish in the tropical jungle. They, as the fittest, the best adapted to changed

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the 1860s that mental ability is entirely predetermined by pedigree. By 1883, Galton was arguing that it should be an urgent matter of social policy to cultivate an intelligent population by curtailing the reproduction of the 'unfit' and introducing a marriage policy for the aristocracy based on aptitude and fecundity, not beauty and wealth. This movement's popularity peaked in the first years of the twentieth century. During the Boer War, Galton's disciple Karl Pearson was responsible for attributing the ill-health of British army recruits to biological decline. And, in 1907, a lobby group called the Eugenics Education Society was founded, although it had little impact beyond the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act. (Bowler, *Evolution*, pp. 309-310)

<sup>71</sup> A neurosis already outlined in 1870 by James Hunt, regarding the Americas: 'the almost exterminated savages will be amply revenged by a slow, gradual degeneracy, and perhaps final extinction, of their ... conquerors' (quoted in Kershner, *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 429).

<sup>72</sup> Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*, 1859 edn., London, Frank Cass, 1968, p. 64.

<sup>73</sup> Booth, *In Darkest England*, p. 221.

<sup>74</sup> Alfred P. Schultz, *Race or Mongrel*, Boston, L.C. Page and Co., 1908, p. 150.

<sup>75</sup> Kershner, *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 430.

<sup>76</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 186.

<sup>77</sup> Rich, *Race and Empire*, pp. 57-58, & 64.

conditions, would survive.<sup>78</sup> Huxley was fond of using the longstanding imagery of the tangled wilderness and the garden to illustrate the contrast between the state of nature and the state of art, respectively; and, in the *Prolegomena* to 'Evolution and Ethics', he extends the same metaphor into his discussion of human nature.

To his credit, Huxley dissented from the majority of social Darwinists by asserting that, in the absence of 'some administrative authority, as far superior in power and intelligence to men, as men are to their cattle', 'the gardening of men by themselves is practically restricted to the performance, not of selection, but of that other function of the gardener, the creation of conditions more favourable than those of the state of nature'.<sup>79</sup> However, native peoples are not part of this exemption and Huxley's unthinking association of them with wild nature has disturbing implications. He asks his audience to imagine 'a shipload of English colonists sent to form a settlement' in an untouched setting:

On landing, they find themselves in the midst of a state of nature, widely different from that left behind them in everything but the most general physical conditions. The common plants, the common birds and quadrupeds, are as totally distinct as the men from anything to be seen on the side of the globe from which they come. The colonists proceed to put an end to this state of things over as large an area as they desire to occupy. They clear away the native vegetation, extirpate or drive out the animal population, so far as may be necessary, and take measures to defend themselves from the re-immigration of either. In their place, they introduce English grain and fruit trees; English dogs, sheep, cattle, horses; and English men; in fact, they set up a new Flora and Fauna and a new variety of mankind, within the old state of nature. Their farms and pastures represent a garden on a great scale, and themselves the gardeners who have to keep it up, in watchful antagonism to the old regime.<sup>80</sup>

One might at first doubt whether Huxley means to include native peoples in this general process of 'extirpation', but the following passage disperses any uncertainty that this is a war not only between man and nature, but between man and 'brute-man' also:

Under the conditions supposed, there is no doubt of the result, if the work of the colonists be carried out energetically and with intelligent combination of all their forces. On the other hand, if they are slothful, stupid, and careless; or if they waste their energies in contests with one another, the chances are that the old state of nature will have the best of it. The native savage will destroy the immigrant civilized man; of the English animals and plants some will be extirpated by their indigenous rivals, others will pass into the feral state and themselves become components of the state of nature. In a few decades, all other traces of the settlement will have vanished.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics', in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 238.

<sup>79</sup> Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics – *Prolegomena*', p. 43

<sup>80</sup> Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics – *Prolegomena*', p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics – *Prolegomena*', p. 17.

And later, Huxley again describes attempts to preserve the colony from the cosmic process like a gardener does a garden, 'by thoroughly extirpating and excluding the native rivals, whether men, beasts, or plants'.<sup>82</sup>

What is striking is how much Huxley's supposedly radical outlook, being based on Darwinian materialism, resembles the teleological conception of nature as consisting of two opposing poles, the cultivated ideal and the wild abomination. As Glendening observes, Huxley's 'scientifically informed views of nature lend support to the old idea that wilderness, including the quasi-humans native to it, is the enemy of civilisation whose morality justifies the subjugation or destruction of that which is wild'.<sup>83</sup> After annihilating the vile 'state of nature', he believed like his Christian forebears that civilisation could only be maintained through virtues like industry and reason, as well as laws that restrain mankind's natural tendency to resort to self-interest:

In place of ruthless self-assertion it demands self-restraint; in place of thrusting aside, or treading down, all competitors, it requires that the individual shall not merely respect, but shall help his fellows; its influence is directed, not so much to the survival of the fittest, as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive.<sup>84</sup>

And, with the laws of a nation or colony playing the role of garden walls, the result is the same: 'an earthly paradise, a true garden of Eden, in which all things should work together towards the well-being of the gardeners: within which the cosmic process, the coarse struggle for existence of the state of nature, should be abolished; in which that state should be replaced by a state of art; where every plant and every lower animal should be adapted to human wants, and would perish if human supervision and protection were withdrawn'.<sup>85</sup>

However, like Darwin's *Origin*, Huxley's essay contains its own ambiguity. Having conjured a tantalising image of the bliss resulting from an altruistic society, he goes on to say that this ideal state can never be permanently achieved unless through the 'gardening' of mankind's heritable qualities, which is impossible in the absence of godlike judgement. Huxley comes to the un-Christian conclusion that 'the prospect of attaining untroubled happiness' is 'as misleading an illusion as ever was dangled before the eyes of poor humanity', for the benign environment created by sympathy facilitates a population explosion and the resumption of competition. ('What would become of the garden if the gardener treated all the weeds and slugs and birds and trespassers as he would like to be treated, if he were in their place?') He observes that, 'just as the self-assertion, necessary to the maintenance of society against the state of nature, will destroy that society if it is allowed free operation within; so the self-restraint, the

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<sup>82</sup> Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics – *Prolegomena*', p. 18.

<sup>83</sup> Glendening, *An Entangled Bank*, p. 150.

<sup>84</sup> Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics', in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 239.

<sup>85</sup> Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics – *Prolegomena*', pp. 19-20.

essence of the ethical process, which is no less an essential condition of the existence of every polity, may, by excess, become ruinous to it'. Ultimately, Huxley equivocates between social Darwinian endeavour and materialist pessimism. On the one hand, he proposes the artificial selection not 'of those who may happen to be the fittest, in respect of the whole of the conditions which obtain, but of those who are ethically the best';<sup>86</sup> and, by thus transforming the instinctively lupine mankind into a 'faithful guardian of the flock', with will and intelligence, he envisions the 'dwarf' of humanity subduing the 'Titan' of nature 'to his higher ends'. On the other hand, he admits that the quest will last for centuries; indeed, it can never be completed, for cosmic nature will be 'a tenacious and powerful enemy as long as the world lasts'. We must for ever endure pain and sorrow, facing the evil 'with stout hearts set on diminishing it'.

Social Darwinism as a whole was a purposive model of human nature, which replaced dwindling religious ideals and profanities with a new hierarchy based on heredity.<sup>87</sup> It was popular because it presented the modern European as supreme, separated and safeguarded from any relativistic comparisons with residual 'primitives' which might prove unsettling.<sup>88</sup> It also had its own imperatives for a lawful and yet competitive society. The followers of both Spencer and Galton identified the battle for existence as leading to the ultimate good of physical and intellectual development, embodied by European man. While Huxley himself upheld what might be considered more 'traditional' virtues, many of his contemporaries venerated what he called the 'cosmic process', in which strength and self-assertion are the essential attributes. The addition of these qualities to the Decalogue of late-Victorian morality is evident in their contempt for those individuals and peoples which avoided conflict and submitted themselves placidly to domination, and in their appreciation of the warlike tribes who put up a fight and died in droves, like the Zulus. Bowler states that 'for Spencer, whatever is successful is good. The world determines what our morality should be, not a conscience reflecting eternal moral values.'<sup>89</sup> The Galtonian Karl Pearson also felt that Darwin's insight 'has compelled us to remodel our historical ideas and is slowly widening and consolidating our moral standards'.<sup>90</sup>

### **The social Darwinian ideas of jungle writers**

A number of social Darwinian themes emerge through the jungle stories of Conrad's contemporaries. These are less clear in the fiction of Wells or 'The Beach of Falesá' by Stevenson, where Wiltshire's narration often challenges ideas of European superiority; but

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<sup>86</sup> Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics', in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 239.

<sup>87</sup> According to Street, one of the main factors in the development of Victorian racism was 'the replacement of faith in the Bible by faith in the precise, rigid and laboratory-orientated principles of science' (*The savage in literature*, p. 105).

<sup>88</sup> Street, p. 130; Bivona, *Desire and contradiction*, p. 82.

<sup>89</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 221.

<sup>90</sup> Karl Pearson, *The Grammar of Science*, London, Walter Scott, 1892, p. 2.

authors such as Kipling, Haggard, Hudson, and Doyle tend to envision humanity as composed of a hierarchy of clearly defined races, and reiterate the elevated status of white men. Progress is achieved through existential contests between tribes or species, like the dholes and the wolves in *The Jungle Books* (JB2, 300), or the Indians and ape-men in *The Lost World* (LW, 173-74). Haggard's attitudes to other races are somewhat ambiguous: a mixture of sympathy and superiority. In his 1926 autobiography *The Days of My Life*, he describes experiencing a vision of life as a black tribesman, the vestige of a previous existence.<sup>91</sup> He also identified the Zulus as a sensitive people with long memories, and may in his youth have had an affair with a Zulu woman.<sup>92</sup> And in *Allan Quatermain*, the adventurer descants at length on the idea of a fixed human nature, which is identical in both the society debutante and the female 'savage'.<sup>93</sup> However, his admiration for the Zulus as resembling ancient Europeans does not extend to Africans in general, whom he regarded as unfavourably as he did modern Europeans of the lower classes, and his novels caution against miscegenation. According to Brantlinger, Haggard 'maintains a sharp division between savage and civilised; his white heroes penetrate the darkness as representatives of vastly higher levels of social evolution ... they cleave to their own kind and return to the light'.<sup>94</sup> He cites the example of Foulata in *King Solomon's Mines*, whose dying words proclaim that "'the sun cannot mate with the darkness, nor the white with the black'".<sup>95</sup>

In *Green Mansions*, W.H. Hudson credits the concept of fixed racial attributes, such as the nervousness of Hispano-Americans, or the phlegm of a 'blue-eyed Saxon of the cold north' (GM, 4). According to him, climate plays its part in forging the character of a people, and the turbulence of Venezuelan politics is 'in harmony with the physical conditions of the country and the national temperament' (8). Language, religion and clothing are all portrayed as superficial and ineffectual vessels of civilisation compared to biological heritage (82, 111 & 199-200). Mr Abel repeatedly asserts the superior intelligence and rationality of Europeans (35, 53, 56 & 260), and is particularly affronted when Kua-kó offers in marriage his younger sister, a 'copper-coloured little drab of the wilderness' (70). However, Hudson also shows that white men with 'unpurged' souls can be just as 'brutish', superstitious (48), and diabolical as any native (279-80); and Abel looks forward to the distant time when 'all the existing dominant races on the globe and the civilisations they represent have perished' (157), replaced by a prodigious people from the South American forest, 'the blameless spiritualised race that shall come after us to possess the earth, not for a thousand years, but for ever' (136). Like Hudson and Haggard, Doyle countenances equality between natives and some Europeans, like 'the average Londoner' (LW, 30-31), as well as cherishing the ideal of an aristocratic superman. His biographer, Martin

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<sup>91</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life*, Vol. II, C.J. Longman (ed.), pp. 168-69.

<sup>92</sup> Higgins, *Rider Haggard*, pp. 35 & 217.

<sup>93</sup> Haggard, *Allan Quatermain*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>94</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 192.

<sup>95</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, New York, Longmans, Green and Co., 1901, p. 241.

Booth, claims that the author's attitudes to indigenous peoples shifted during his lifetime from ambivalence and suppressed disdain to outright hostility.<sup>96</sup>

Conrad's fiction is full of allusions to social Darwinism. There is disdain for the 'cowardly toleration of strength, that exists, infamous and irremediable, at the bottom of all hearts, in all societies' (*Outcast*, 238). But there are also characters who promote these values, such as Ricardo in *Victory*, who sees life as 'a game of grab' in which there are 'many possibilities of failure' (*Victory*, 223 & 197). Unlike Heyst, his disillusionment does not take the form of 'passive renunciation' but 'a particularly active warfare', in which contest his natural adversaries are 'all the tame creatures of the earth' (197 & 203). His companion Jones 'firmly' believes in racial superiority (287). In *An Outcast*, there is Willems with his 'strange principles', who believes in the 'unquestionable superiority' of white men almost as much as Aïssa (*Outcast*, 7, 59, 190 & 255), "a damned mongrel, half-Arab, half-Malay" (209). Marlow, in *Lord Jim*, both supports and ironises white superiority.<sup>97</sup> And there are those who go as far as suggesting that advancement can only be achieved through the eradication of native peoples, like Carlier ('An Outpost', 250), Kurtz ('HD', 84), and Mr Travers, who reasons that "if the inferior race must perish, it is a gain, a step toward the perfecting of society which is the aim of progress" (*Rescue*, 127).<sup>98</sup> Even allowing for the personal opinions of certain characters and narrators, it is possible that Conrad himself accepted the notion of durable racial characteristics; for instance, that white men are naturally restless ('Lagoon', 222), or Arabs 'lack the true seamanlike instincts' (*Outcast*, 87).<sup>99</sup> Consequently, he apprehends that the 'progress' of which Carlier, Kurtz, and Travers speak cannot but amount in the end to extirpation.

This is not to say that Conrad believed in the racial superiority of modern Europeans.<sup>100</sup> It is now as much an illusion as any other ideal in his writing. Carlier and Kayerts represent an

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<sup>96</sup> Booth, *The Doctor, the Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*, pp. 75, 295 & 339. *The Lost World* contains references to racial characteristics, such as a 'foolish, irresistible Latin impulse to be dramatic' (*LW*, 102-3), and testifies to the negative effects of miscegenation (66, 67 & 73).

<sup>97</sup> For example, Marlow describes Dain Waris as having a 'European mind', with 'an unobscured vision, a tenacity of purpose, a touch of altruism' (*LJ*, 190). He connects the fact that Jewel's mother was 'no ordinary woman' with her white father (200). And he attributes the venality of a chief clerk to his 'two races ... and the climate' (28).

<sup>98</sup> As a whole, *The Rescue* is to an extent a discussion of civilisation, its prospects, and the influence of race. Lingard himself sees race as unimportant compared to class (*Rescue*, 135, 141 & 215). But the opening paragraph of the novel rejects the Lamarckian assumption that European conquest and administration facilitate the regeneration of depraved native populations, for 'the race of men who had fought against the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Dutch and the English, has not been changed by the unavoidable defeat', keeping 'all their lawful and unlawful instincts' (15). And while Travers makes his pernicious statement about racial destruction, d'Alcacer is mentally juxtaposing his associate's wife with Immada, 'the beginning and the end, the flower and the leaf, the phrase and the cry': one of several doom-laden references to the 'inevitable victory' of the western over the eastern races in *The Rescue*.

<sup>99</sup> Linda Dryden has even greater misgivings on this score, believing that beneath Conrad's ironic treatment of Willems lingers the disturbing suggestion that he actually endorses the notion of racial purity (*Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 82).

<sup>100</sup> His attitude is perhaps best summarised by Marlow's protestation that "Nobody, nobody is good enough" (*LJ*, 232).

obvious dropping-off from their Enlightenment counterparts. The crew of the Patna yap, bark, bay and bow-ow like dogs (*LJ*, 86). Jim, the ‘costermonger’s donkey’ who loves to imagine himself a ‘glorious racehorse’ (109), proves that even the finest-looking of Britons may conceal a hidden weakness, like a deadly snake in a bush (32). Gentleman Brown is ‘supposed to be the son of a baronet’ (256), but his habit of embellishing egoistic urge as divine edict is exactly that ‘which could induce the leader of a horde of wandering cut-throats to call himself proudly the Scourge of God’ (269). Despite the meritorious words of Jones that his ‘origin’, ‘breeding’, ‘traditions’ and ‘early associations’ precludes ‘violence and ferocity of every sort’ (*Victory*, 288 & 285), the *sang-froid* with which he murdered Pedro’s brother was that of a gentleman, according to the feline Ricardo (108).

Willems has been a degenerate all his life, ‘hopelessly at variance with the spirit of the sea’ and with ‘an instinctive contempt for the honest simplicity of that work which led to nothing he cared for’ (*Outcast*, 17). He is swamped by ‘savage’ emotions (49 & 51), and his ‘faith’ in himself and his race is a charade enacted manically, ‘like a tall madman making a great disturbance about something invisible’ (209); from moment to moment, he alternately wishes to discard (258) or to save it (269). In that novel, Conrad’s recourse to the Malay perspective only adds to the impression that Europeans are degraded creatures. After a caretaker witnesses a nocturnal fracas between Willems and Lingard, he relates that they ‘fought without arms, like wild beasts, after the manner of white men’ (31). To Babalatchi, white men are ‘always the slave of their desires’ and ‘never satisfied’ (48 & 182);<sup>101</sup> they are irrational in being ‘foolishly cruel to their friends and merciful to their enemies’ (185). Above all, Conrad’s non-European characters cast into doubt the omni-benevolence of European imperialists, representing them more often as malign, enchanting witches and devils than gods (*Outcast*, 80 & 175; ‘Lagoon’, 219; ‘Outpost’, 249; *Rescue*, 202).

### **The convention of the corrupt, jungle-like native in fiction**

A gloomy presentiment of a lapse into the brutality of hyle has been almost as constant in the teleological worldview as the promise of perfection,<sup>102</sup> and so it proved with the new idealism. According to the Western traditions which exerted so much influence on the suppositions of science and anthropology, when any individual or group is perceived as having fallen outside the laws of nature or God, their entire situation regresses into confusion and

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<sup>101</sup> Almayer’s servant Ali also feels that white men ‘Wanted everything at once. Like children...’ (*Outcast*, 230).

<sup>102</sup> Kelly Hurley makes the same point with regard to ‘entropic narratives’. She says that they are ‘in their own way highly *directive*: they accomplish a straightforward reversal of narratives of “progress”, and thus can be seen as moving steadily towards a *telos*, the negative *telos* of loss of specificity. This is in contrast with narratives written from a more materialist perspective, which she refers to as ‘Darwinian picaresque’ and are without meaning from the beginning, leading nowhere at all (*The Gothic Body*, pp. 89-90).



alienation. The same rationale applied in the late-nineteenth century, but what had changed with the advent of Darwin and Spencer was the perceived character of natural law. Between 1854 and 1862, A.R. Wallace wrote *The Malay Archipelago*, in which he contrasts the cooperative spirit of the Dyak natives with ‘that severe competition and struggle for existence, or for wealth’ that one finds in densely populated Europe. He goes on to bemoan the inequality of modern civilisation, ‘resulting mainly from our neglect to train and develop more thoroughly the sympathetic feelings and moral faculties of our nature’.<sup>103</sup> Wallace’s portrayal of untouched nature as fostering geniality in a people was something of a romantic throwback. By the middle of the century, the notion of the ‘noble savage’ was restricted to a selection of generally non-tropical indigenous peoples. It was more common to view ‘primitive’ peoples as inferior beings, like wild animals<sup>104</sup> or unruly children.<sup>105</sup> Spencer, for example, was worried that Britain might

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<sup>103</sup> Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-utan, and the Bird of Paradise*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1869, pp. 597 & 598.

<sup>104</sup> The connection in the European imagination between the native and the animal obviously predates Darwin. For example, in his essay ‘Panopticon versus New South Wales’ (1802), Jeremy Bentham referred to the aboriginal population of Australia as ‘a set of brutes in human shape – the very dregs even of savage life’ (*The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, [website] [https://archive.org/stream/worksjeremybent10bowrgoog/worksjeremybent10bowrgoog\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/worksjeremybent10bowrgoog/worksjeremybent10bowrgoog_djvu.txt), (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> November 2016)). However, the formation by respectable scientists of a theoretical link between animals and mankind’s primitive ancestors, and between these ancestors and modern ‘savages’, intensified the occurrence of such comparisons. These might consist of an oblique consonance of unproven attributes, such as a shared insensitivity to pain (H.N. Hutchinson, J.W. Gregory, and R. Lydekker, *The Living Races of Mankind*, Vol. II, London, Hutchinson and Co., 1900, p. 290), or the ability to sleep at will (L.P. Greene, *Tabu Dick*, cited in Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 75). Eldridge (*The Imperial Experience*, p. 162) writes of the stereotypes found in the literature of the period, ‘The attributes of blacks are usually those associated with animals: a superior sense of hearing, sense of smell, agility, strength, and stamina.’ A more explicit instance can be found in Huxley’s 1888 essay ‘The Struggle for Existence in Human Society’, where he calls ‘primitive peoples’ ‘man as a mere member of the animal kingdom’ (in *Collected Essays*, Vol. IX, New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1911, p. 203). Another case is Captain Charles Gilson’s description of the Batwa pygmies in a 1919 novel as hairy and malicious villains who do not talk but ‘jabber’. He writes, ‘Only those who know the Batwa pygmies at their worst can realise that, sometimes, man is very little above the beasts.’ Gilson also insists that the practice of hunting and eating mankind is instinctive among ‘primitive’ peoples, being ‘bestial, gorilla-like creatures, with exceptionally powerful jaws and teeth like fangs’ (*In the Power of Pygmies* (1919), quoted in Street, pp. 76 & 85). An earlier example of cannibalism as a marker of bestiality occurs in the second volume of Jules Verne’s *Les Enfants du capitaine Grant*, or ‘Among the Cannibals’ (1868), where Maori feasting on human flesh are seized by ‘the delirium and rage of tigers’ (quoted in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 25). Cannibalism has long been symbolic of evil or the absence of divine law, and was used to signpost the fallen, animalistic status of some natives (as Marina Warner asserts in ‘Fee fie fo fum: The Child in the Jaws of the Story’, in Barker, Hulme, and Iversen (eds.), Ch. 8). Felicitously, most European characters in imperial romance are blessed with the Lamarckian intuition that cannibalism is categorically wrong. So it is in Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), where ‘Hereditary instincts, ages old, usurped the function of [Tarzan’s] untaught mind and saved him from transgressing a world-wide law of whose very existence he was ignorant.’ (New York, A.L. Burt Company, 1914, p. 120.) In *Sanders of the River* (London and Melbourne, Lord, Lock, and Co., 1911, p. 192), Sanders finds it necessary to transfer this knowledge to local chieftains: “‘Only hyenas and crocodiles eat their kind,’” he said, “‘also certain fishes.””

<sup>105</sup> Natives were often identified with the child because it was thought, in line with recapitulation theory, that ‘Among savages ... the young children are bright, but development stops at a very early age’ (Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal*, New York, Scribner and Welford, 1890, p. 214). In 1864, the Anthropological Society of London had fixed the precise age when Africans cease to develop mentally at twelve-years-old (*The Anthropological Review*, cited in Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 73). Street (p. 68) states

have deviated from the natural decree ensuring moral improvement follows violent and disordered beginnings,<sup>106</sup> and that our artificial civilisation was sliding back into a state of militant and predatory barbarism. He asked in his 1859 essay 'The Morals of Trade', 'Why in this civilised state of ours, is there so much that betrays the cunning selfishness of the savage?'<sup>107</sup>

As Stephen Hinds demonstrates in his essay on landscape in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the practice in literature of creating a 'conventional symbiosis' between a setting and its inhabitants is an old one.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, perhaps it is not surprising to find in late-nineteenth-century British fiction a considerable overlap in the characteristics attributed to the tropical forest and tropical indigenes. These alleged common traits could be based on the age-old association between chaos, 'savagery', and wild woodlands; or, on the Enlightenment notion of a 'pre-social state'. It is conceivable that, much like the Romans, Victorian writers exaggerated the association between dense vegetation and the imperial periphery to play up the degenerative forces at work there and justify intervention.<sup>109</sup> However, there were more modern, pseudo-scientific reasons for the analogy between natives and the jungle: Darwin's sketch of 'entangled' Fuegians; the comparative method connecting prehistory with tropical Africa; and, Huxley's elision of wild natives and tropical vegetation as simpler life-forms which might be favoured by changed conditions. Of greatest importance was the influential role of the environment in Lamarckian evolution.

Many authors of imperial fiction appear to have believed that the tropical forest is the dark-skinned native's natural habitat, to which the European ingénue is (as yet) imperfectly

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that the link began with the Romantics as a positive connotation indicating innocence from corrupting civilisation, but this image darkened with the advent of the Darwinian model of human nature. While Speke soberly advised his readers in 1860 that the African 'grown child' requires 'a little fatherly severity' (*Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1864), by the end of the century the language had grown more scathing. In G.A. Henty's *By Sheer Pluck* (1884), Mr. Goodenough describes the local 'negro' population as 'just like children': "They are always either laughing or quarrelling. They are good-natured and passionate, indolent but will work hard for a time; clever up to a certain point, densely stupid beyond." (p. 118) Some even found the analogy insufficiently stark, like the writer of an 1892 letter who felt the typical Indian 'does not show as much reason as ordinary European children and is much more full of spite and meanness' ('Letter from Herzel Cary to Graham Wallas, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1892', as quoted in Rich, *Race and Empire*, p. 27).

<sup>106</sup> As outlined in *Social Statics*, London, John Chapman, 1851, p. 65.

<sup>107</sup> Herbert Spencer, 'The Morals of Trade', in *Essays: Moral, Political and Aesthetic*, New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1881, p. 139.

<sup>108</sup> Since, 'In the world of the *Metamorphoses*, the setting is always potentially more than just a setting: any water, tree, or bloom may not only symbolise or memorialise erotic victimhood, but actually embody a victim him- or herself.' (Stephen Hinds, 'Landscape with figures: aesthetics of place in the *Metamorphoses* and its tradition', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, Philip Hardie (ed.), p. 134.)

<sup>109</sup> For example, Joseph Chamberlain spoke of being unable 'to destroy the practices of barbarism ... which for centuries have desolated the interior of Africa, without the use of force' ('The True Conception of Empire', 1897, in *The Fin de Siècle*, Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 140). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said claims to identify a similar pattern in Kipling and Conrad of attributing laziness, deceitfulness, and irrationality to 'Orientals'; part of an 'imaginative demonology' of the 'mysterious Orient' to bolster British enthusiasm for imperialism (London and New York, Chatto and Windus, 1993, p. xi).

adapted. For example, Gisborne is noticeably less able than Mowgli to surmount ‘all the many agonies of a jungle-stalk’ (‘IR’, 161). In ‘How the Leopard Got His Spots’, Kipling suggests that the Ethiopian’s skin colour is a consequence of his deliberate adaptation to the tropical forest habitat, as it is “‘the very thing for hiding in hollows and behind trees’” (‘HLGHS’, 41). Such an environment struck the novelist Charles Gilson as having had an entirely negative effect: ‘Man was not meant to live in an interminable semi-darkness, as witness the stunted growth of the pygmies and the intellectual backwardness of the cannibal tribes of the Congo.’<sup>110</sup> And in *Green Mansions*, Abel’s inner monologue warns that it is easier for ‘the low-minded savage’ than for himself, with his ‘finer brain’, to withstand the climate and seclusion of the tropical wilderness (GM, 291). By contrast, the preferred milieu of the Europeans in *The Lost World* is ‘the open’, where they are able to outrun and defeat the ape-men (LW, 156). Heyst too refers to himself on Samburan as a ‘transplanted’ or ‘uprooted’ being, in ‘an unnatural state of existence’ (Victory, 165).

Natives and native society were often perceived as an entirely separate and external otherworld to British culture, as Kipling demonstrates in an 1885 letter to his cousin Margaret Burne-Jones: ‘immediately outside of our own English life, is the dark and crooked and fantastic, and wicked, and awe inspiring life of the “native”. Our rule, so long as no one steals too flagrantly or murders too openly, affects it in no way whatever – only fences it around and prevents it from being disturbed.’<sup>111</sup> He appears to imagine British authority establishing a garden wall, but one that shields the state of nature from the state of art. In ‘The Tombs of His Ancestors’, John Chinn’s pedigree allows him to experience this uncanny otherworld, though not at first to comprehend it:

When Bukta doffed uniform and reverted to the fragmentary dress of his own people, he left his civilisation of drill in the next world. That night, after a little talk with his subjects, he devoted to an orgie; and a Bhil orgie is a thing not to be safely written about. Chinn, flushed with triumph, was in the thick of it, but the meaning of the mysteries was hidden ... Gifts and loans, not all seemly, were thrust upon him, and infernal music rolled and maddened round red fires, while singers sang songs of the ancient times, and danced peculiar dances. The aboriginal liquors are very potent, and Chinn was compelled to taste them often, but, unless the stuff had been drugged, how came he to fall asleep suddenly, and to waken late the next day – half a march from the village? (‘THA’, 111)

When Chinn stumbles back to the village, he finds his companion Bukta in a surprisingly rational frame of mind, when ‘only a few hours before Bukta was yelling and capering with naked fellow-devils of the scrub’ (‘THA’, 112). At the end of the story, having defeated a tiger and an epidemic of smallpox, Chinn goes back to his own people in the lowlands ‘to the

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<sup>110</sup> Charles Gilson, *In the Power of Pygmies* (1919), quoted in Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 111.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Letter to Margaret Burne-Jones, 1885’, quoted in Patrick Parrinder, *Nation and Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 325.

triumphal chant of an escorting army three hundred strong'. But native life must remain in the forest and not overlap with English rule: 'When that army suddenly and noiselessly disappeared, as quail in high corn, he argued he was near civilisation, and a turn in the road brought him upon the camp of a wing of his own corps.' ('THA', 137)

Kipling's protected and re-vitalised jungle is almost unique in having a generally positive effect upon its aboriginal peoples, who compare very favourably with their 'semi-civilised' peers. The 'jungly' Bhils are 'sound in wind and limb ... the most *pukka shikarries* (out-and-out hunters) in all India', who would pursue a wounded tiger without a second thought ('THA', 98, 100 & 116). If they have become cruel, thieving and bestial, it is explicitly due to centuries of lawless oppression and massacre (99). The individual native who returns from corrupted ancestry to a pure state of nature is also superior, such as Mowgli and Little Toomai in *The Jungle Books*. Far from "a mud-head who never saw the jungle", Toomai likes to 'scramble up bridle-paths that only a little elephant could take', making him 'as useful as three boys' (*JB1*, 114 & 119). Although he is advised by his father not to mix with "dirty Assamese jungle-folk" and return to the smooth roads of the plains (115), Toomai quests after the legendary Elephants' Dance. After witnessing this sight, he is initiated into Petersen Sahib's select band of men by the great Machua Appa, 'who had never seen a made road in forty years' (127). Similarly, Mowgli is not only physically superior to the villagers (*JB1*, 59 & *JB2*, 306) and unaware of their worthless religious and social customs ('IR', 163, 168, & *JB1*, 59), but his countenance and voice are angelic, 'utterly different from the usual whine of the native' ('IR', 160). In the animal realm, the equivalents of the Hindu villagers are the malicious *Bandar-log*, who have no governance, no words, and no memory, but are unjustifiably self-important. They are associated with a dead and decaying civilisation: 'The monkeys called the place their city, and pretended to despise the Jungle-People because they lived in the forest. And yet they never knew what the buildings were made for nor how to use them.' (*JB1*, 44)

Where the 'natural justice' of imperial rule is inadequate or perverted, both the landscape and its inhabitants are depicted as possessed by brutal, chaotic forces. Since the 1735 publication of *Systema Naturae* by Carl Linnaeus, who described the African human 'type' as 'governed by caprice', the European caricature of subtropical cultures has often been defined by a lack of restraint.<sup>112</sup> The people of the African district in Edgar Wallace's *Sanders of the River* (1911) are characterised by a total estrangement from *logos*, having 'neither power to reason, nor will to excuse, nor any large charity'.<sup>113</sup> The supposed intemperance of natives allegedly made them vulnerable to egoistic desires and vices. These include an excessive libidinousness and

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<sup>112</sup> Carl Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae* (1735), quoted in M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 32. In contrast, Europeans are supposedly 'Governed by laws'.

<sup>113</sup> Wallace, *Sanders of the River*, p. 7.

fecundity that was contrasted unfavourably with European monogamy and chastity.<sup>114</sup> E.D. Morel claimed that ‘Sexually, [the African race] are unrestrained and unrestrainable.’<sup>115</sup> Of an Indian servant-girl in his story ‘Lispeth’, Kipling writes, ‘It takes a great deal of Christianity to wipe out uncivilised Eastern instincts, such as falling in love at first sight’.<sup>116</sup> Equally, natives were seen as covetous, greedy and voracious, either for possessions or food, including occasionally human flesh. In *Green Mansions*, the Indians allegedly possess ‘pottle-shaped’ stomachs ‘made to hold unlimited quantities of meat and drink’ (*GM*, 24), and they are ‘always anxious to become possessors of [Abel’s] belongings’ (40).<sup>117</sup>

Slaves to their irrational impulses, natives were also seen as hopelessly superstitious and the practitioners of hideous rituals.<sup>118</sup> Stevenson records that the Samoans ‘believe the woods to be quite filled with spirits ... Woe betide he or she who gets to speak with one of these! They will be charmed out of their wits, and come home again quite silly, and go mad and die’.<sup>119</sup> The ‘Kanakas’ in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ are petrified of the interior of the island, where Case has made them believe there are *aitus* or demons (‘Falesá’, 47). Wiltshire reckons that such fears are ‘a thing that’s natural in the bush’, where the tangled branches impede light and vision (51), and that the landscape is responsible for engendering irrationality in native inhabitants and European colonist alike (52). Still lacking the necessary degree of willpower derived from prolonged British governance, Kipling’s Bhils are plagued by intermittent fears, driving them to stampede, commit theft, abduction, and human sacrifice: “‘It is our fate, and we were frightened. When we are frightened we always steal.’” (‘THA’, 99, 120, 124, 126 & 130) The dacoits in ‘A Conference of the Powers’ run amok without British rule too, “‘filling women up with kerosene and setting ’em alight, and burning villages, and crucifying people’” (‘CP’, 27). And in *The Jungle Books*, the villagers are engrossed by grotesque tales of ‘ghost-tigers’ and ‘jungle-demons’ (*JB1*, 60 & 69), demonstrating that they have deviated from the natural justice and rationality represented by the Raj:

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<sup>114</sup> This is a characteristic that Douglas Hewitt claims the natives of Kipling’s writing share with female characters, who are lonelier, more primitive, and rely more on their impulses (*English Fiction of the Early Modern Period*, p. 51).

<sup>115</sup> E.D. Morel, ‘The black scourge in Europe’, in *The Horror on the Rhine*, London, Union of Democratic Control, 1920, p. 6.

<sup>116</sup> Rudyard Kipling, ‘Lispeth’, in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, London, Penguin, 2011, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> A typical lack of self-discipline makes it impossible for Kua-kó to master the art of fencing (*GM*, 30).

<sup>118</sup> In his account of travelling up the Bonny River in Nigeria, Doyle repeats the received wisdom that superstitious and inhuman rites abound in ‘primitive’ cultures. He claims to have seen natives, ‘all absolute savages, offering up human sacrifices to sharks and crocodiles’ (Booth, *The Doctor, Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 72). Booth suggests Doyle more probably witnessed a funeral: ‘a number of tribes in the area used to cast their dead into the sea where, inevitably, they were consumed’. *The Lost World* also contains two references to cannibalistic native peoples (*LW*, 77 & 151).

<sup>119</sup> ‘Letter to Miss Adelaide Boodle, January 1892’, in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Vol. IV, Sidney Colvin (ed.), New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911, p. 9.

After that [the villagers] would dispose of Messua and her husband, and divide their land and buffaloes among the village. Messua's husband had some remarkably fine buffaloes, too. It was an excellent thing to destroy wizards, Buldeo thought, and people who entertained wolf-children out of the jungle were clearly the worst kind of witches.

But, said the charcoal-burners, what would happen if the English heard of it? The English, they had been told, were a perfectly mad people, who would not let honest farmers kill witches in peace. (JB2, 192-93)

A deficiency of willpower also engendered a predilection for the extremes of anarchism and physical enslavement such as can be found in H.S. Merriman's *With Edged Tools* (1894).

Like the tropical forest, which encroaches on and obliterates any landmarks of human construction, so native cultures were frequently seen in the nineteenth century as having little or no written history. Hegel portrayed Africa as the 'land of childhood, removed from the light of self-conscious history and wrapped in the dark mantle of night'.<sup>120</sup> The image persisted, with the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describing the continent as 'practically without a history'.<sup>121</sup> This perceived lack of written chronicles placed Africa outside linear time, as Griffith notes: 'The past which is not written down disappears; and, for this reason, so-called primitive cultures can be seen paradoxically as both the 'old mankind' – trapped in the remote past – and child-like and young.'<sup>122</sup> Many native peoples are portrayed by imperial romance as frozen at an earlier and lower point on the evolutionary scale, resembling children or animals. The natives of *Green Mansions* possess 'ancient customs and character', but are also unadulterated 'children of nature', who fear woodland solitude 'as a nervous child ... fears a dark room' (GM, 9, 36 & 40).<sup>123</sup> Mowgli too stands at "'der beginnings of der history of man'", telling 'child-like tales' of the jungle ('IR', 168 & 178), while the Bhils are repeatedly cast in the role of John Chinn's wretched and deferential children (100, 114, 118 & 132). According to Wiltshire in 'The Beach of Falesá',

It's easy to find out what Kanakas think. Just go back to yourself any way round from ten to fifteen years old, and there's an average Kanaka. There are some pious, just as there are pious boys; and the most of them, like the boys again, are middling honest and yet think it rather larks to steal, and are easy scared and rather like to be so. ('Falesá', 55)

In Doyle's *The Lost World*, there are two types of native, the panther-like 'bravos' (LW, 67) and the more biddable 'mansos' ('willing as any horse' and 'faithful as a dog' (67 & 73)).<sup>124</sup> Without the improving influence of the British, Kipling's tigerish Bhils would quickly revert (due to their

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<sup>120</sup> Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, quoted in Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 76.

<sup>121</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1911), quoted in McLaughlan, *Re-imagining the Dark Continent*, p. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 75.

<sup>123</sup> There is in addition some quality in their 'bright and cunning' eyes, reminiscent of a lynx (GM, 56 & 92).

<sup>124</sup> The Beast Folk (or 'Children of the Law') in H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* are the parodic culmination of this triangular association between adolescents, animals, and 'primitive' natives.

earlier mistreatment) to being ‘Lawless and Predatory’ bravos (‘THA’, 122), just as the ‘man pack’ of the village have regressed to become mere ‘Jackal-Men’, ‘idle, senseless, and cruel’ (JB2, 206 & 327).

Individual natives were also depicted as lacking an understanding of time. Congo Free State official Léon Rom wrote in *Le Nègre du Congo* (1899), ‘The black man has no idea of time, and, questioned on that subject by a European, he generally responds with something stupid.’<sup>125</sup> As a result of the native’s supposed failure to achieve intellectual maturity, it was thought that he did not ‘acquire the white man’s faculty of memory’.<sup>126</sup> Examples of the notion of aboriginal forgetfulness occur in *Sanders of the River*, where the colonial superintendent Sanders is quick to administer punishment ‘in accordance with the spirit of the people he governed, for they had no memory’;<sup>127</sup> and in L.P. Greene’s *Tabu Dick* (1935), in which the hero gives some ‘savages’ the slip by stepping outside the jungle, whereupon they quickly lose interest in him because ‘the memories of savages are short-lived about some things’.<sup>128</sup>

The tropics and some native peoples were also united in their reputation for indolence. Warm climates have been described as a stagnating influence on humans since the eighteenth century, when Montesquieu claimed that they make individuals languid by expanding the nerve fibres.<sup>129</sup> Perhaps inspired by A.R. Wallace’s hypothesis that most evolution takes place in the harsh climes of the northern hemisphere, with new species driving earlier, feebler species into southern refuges or extinction,<sup>130</sup> developmental evolutionists theorised that the white-skinned races were more advanced than the dark-skinned because they had been exposed to stimulating northern settings. The Lamarckian embryologist E.W. Macbride believed that Anglo-Saxons were superior to the Celts because the latter supposedly evolved in the gentle climate of the Mediterranean.<sup>131</sup> Tylor records that the tropical combination of heat and abundance was deemed by some to be especially disruptive to the civilising process: ‘There is a theory afloat that ... In tropical countries the intensity of the heat makes men little disposed for exertion, and the luxuriance of the vegetation supplies him with the little he requires.’<sup>132</sup> It was this prejudice that caused Davidson Black during the 1920s to look for the cradle of humanity in the

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<sup>125</sup> Léon Rom, *Le Nègre du Congo* (1899), quoted in Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, London, Pan Books, 2006, p. 148. Rom was a possible inspiration for the character of Kurtz in ‘Heart of Darkness’.

<sup>126</sup> *The Anthropological Review* (1864), quoted in Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 73.

<sup>127</sup> Wallace, *Sanders of the River*, p. 195.

<sup>128</sup> L.P. Greene, *Tabu Dick* (1935), quoted in Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 74.

<sup>129</sup> Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois* (*On the Spirit of Laws*), XIV.ii, [website] [http://www.constitution.org/cm/sol\\_14.htm](http://www.constitution.org/cm/sol_14.htm), (accessed 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016).

<sup>130</sup> A.R. Wallace, *The Geographical Distribution of Animals*, New York, Harper and brothers, 1876, cited in Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 234.

<sup>131</sup> E.W. Macbride, *An Introduction to the Study of Heredity*, London, Williams and Norgate, 1924, cited in Bowler, p. 294.

<sup>132</sup> Edward Tylor, *Anahuac: Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern*, Re-issue of 1861 edn., London, Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1877, p. 192. One is reminded of Charles Kingsley’s Doasyoulikes.

unforgiving milieu of Central Asia, rather than the luxuriant jungles of Africa.<sup>133</sup> Léon Rom was greatly put out by the supposed lethargy of the Congolese, writing, ‘The black man’s principal occupation, and that to which he dedicates the greatest part of his existence, consists of stretching out on a mat in the warm rays of the sun, like a crocodile on the sand’.<sup>134</sup> Stevenson supposedly observed in the South Sea islanders (excluding Samoans) a comparable apathy or ennui, accompanied by a propensity for suicide, which he attributed to their racial decline.<sup>135</sup>

Just as the obscure jungle-otherworld is mysterious and unknowable, so the natives can be portrayed as inscrutable, having hidden purposes that are frequently malevolent. According to Brantlinger, darkness was thought by Victorian biologists to propagate an inclination towards scheming and nocturnal iniquities.<sup>136</sup> The ‘half-breed’ villain of Doyle’s *The Lost World*, Gomez, plots his revenge while maintaining a ‘demure smile and mask-like expression’ (*LW*, 102). In *Green Mansions*, Abel’s attitude to ‘savages’ replicates his relationship with tropical nature, as he needs to remind himself that it is impossible for them to be ‘perfectly open’: ‘however friendly they might be towards one of a superior race, there was always in their relations with him a low cunning, prompted partly by suspicion, underlying their words and actions’ (*GM*, 53). Later, he reiterates this sentiment: ‘No, I could not believe in their mildness; that was only on the surface, when nothing occurred to rouse their savage, cruel instincts.’ (72) He subsequently overlooks this innate deviousness of nature-peoples, until Rima’s murder reveals them to be truly ‘children of hell’ and ‘devils in human shape’ (252 & 257).

In European writing, both the tropical forest and the native give rise to almost simultaneous feelings of desire and fear, which are frequently presented as enticement. In Ballantyne’s *The Gorilla Hunters* (1861), the alarming physical strength of the jungle is beguilingly shrouded:

Rich luxuriance of vegetation was the feature that filled my mind most ... Thick tough limbs of creeping plants and wild vines twisted and twined round everything and over everything, giving to the woods an appearance of tangled impenetrability; but the beautiful leaves of some, and the delicate tendrils of others, half concealed the sturdy limbs of the trees, and threw over the whole a certain air of wild grace, as might a semi-transparent and beautiful robe if thrown around the form of a savage.<sup>137</sup>

The comparison in this instance is with the masculine form, but the more common analogy is between tropical fauna and women. Native females appear in imperial romance as Ovidian ‘jungle-nymphs’, embodying the element they inhabit. In Friedrich Gerstäcker’s *Tabiti*, the affair between a character called René and a native girl can go nowhere because she is seemingly fused

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<sup>133</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 283.

<sup>134</sup> Léon Rom, *Le Nègre du Congo* (1899), quoted in Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, p. 148.

<sup>135</sup> Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 365.

<sup>136</sup> Brantlinger, ‘Victorians and Africans’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 179.

<sup>137</sup> R.M. Ballantyne, *The Gorilla Hunters*, London, Edinburgh, and New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1861, pp. 18-19.



to the exotic land of her birth. If transplanted, 'like a greenhouse plant torn out of her home soil she was bound to wither and die'.<sup>138</sup> Ruth Tomalin believes Hudson's Rima to be 'a symbol of wild nature threatened by man, and perhaps symbolic also of some quality in Hudson, something primitive, innocent and savage, offset from the crowd'.<sup>139</sup> Writing about depictions of Indo-China in *Belle Époque* French literature, Milton Osborne argues that in general 'the menace of uncharted nature frames the cruelty of the unknowable Vietnamese' and serves to remind the European interlopers how comparatively short-lived and precarious is their regime. Just as the colonists are at once attracted and repelled by the tableau of immense, dark, and formless forests, so they respond to the local population with hatred and lust in equal measure.<sup>140</sup>

### **The unconventionality of Conrad's jungle-like natives**

Numerous scholars have criticised Conrad for propagating the same demeaning tropes regarding native people that are to be found throughout late-nineteenth-century imperial romance. Chinua Achebe's polemic *An Image of Africa* is well-known and its argument need not be reprised at length here.<sup>141</sup> Nor is it necessary to enlarge on Benita Parry's assessment that Conrad's attempts to subvert the Manichean imagery of the genre are inadequate and ultimately supportive of British colonialism.<sup>142</sup> Goonetilleke sees Conrad's 'conventional attitudes' and lack of knowledge regarding indigenous cultures as sources of weakness in his 'presentation of African realities'.<sup>143</sup> Writing specifically of the established association between 'savages' and entanglement, Glendening notes that the natives of 'Heart of Darkness' are likewise reduced to mere aspects of their 'natural environment', the forest.<sup>144</sup> Certainly, Conrad does not eschew the language and stereotypes used by many of his contemporaries to render non-European peoples into fiction; and, in terms of equating natives and the jungle, he arguably goes further than any other writer. The local population and the vegetation in 'Heart of Darkness' appear to be one great, physical entity. Marlow initially judges 'the jungle of both banks quite impenetrable' and entirely inimical to human existence, until he realises that 'eyes were in it, eyes that had seen us'

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<sup>138</sup> Friedrich Gerstäcker, *Tabiti: Roman aus der Südsee*, Jena, 1854, p. 28, quoted and translated in Ridley, *Images of Imperial Rule*, p. 23.

<sup>139</sup> Tomalin, *W.H. Hudson*, p. 24.

<sup>140</sup> Milton Osborne, 'Fear and fascination in the tropics: A reader's guide to French fiction on Indo-China', in Winks and Rush (eds.), pp. 163 & 165. Osborne refers in detail to Jules Boissière's 'Dans la forêt', in *Fumeurs d'opium* (1890s).

<sup>141</sup> See Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"', in *The Massachusetts Review* (18), 1977.

<sup>142</sup> See Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism*. She writes that, while associations with whiteness are 'rendered discordant', 'black and dark do serve in the text as equivalences for the savage and unredeemed, the corrupt and degraded, the abominable and the detestable, the cruel and atrocious' (p. 23).

<sup>143</sup> Goonetilleke, *Developing Countries in British Fiction*, p. 114.

<sup>144</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', pp. 163, 165 & 169.

(‘HD’, 73), that ‘the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour’ (‘HD’, 76). At the Inner Station, the natives are ‘poured into the clearing by the dark-faced and pensive forest’ (‘HD’, 97), and retreat ‘as if the forest that had ejected these beings so suddenly had drawn them in again as the breath is drawn in a long aspiration’ (‘HD’, 98).

One could argue that the melding of forest and human degrades the population in question, but to my mind this is not simply an example of the dehumanisation of one race or tribe; it is the naturalisation of all human beings. Conrad’s dark-skinned characters can be violent and irrational like nature itself, but that is not the same as the polygenist notion of inhumanity, which is predicated on a lofty humanity he does not accept. As well as natives and lower-class Europeans, Conrad reveals aristocratic specimens like Kurtz or Brown also to be jungle-like, containing nothing but the basest preoccupations. When Aïssa is described in *An Outcast* as possessing a ‘benighted heart’, we are told there is within it ‘the mud, the stones – and the flowers, that are at the bottom of every heart’ (*Outcast*, 197). As an erstwhile idealist in ‘Heart of Darkness’, Marlow is habituated to think in terms of extreme opposites, including inhuman savages, but he finds in the course of narrating that such devices cannot convey his experience:

‘The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to me. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar.’ (‘HD’, 62-3)

The real monsters are the European imperialists who treat nature and natural mankind as inferior adversaries to be subdued or destroyed, and who shell or squirt lead into the bush, causing it to ‘howl’ (‘HD’, 30 & 76).

One of Achebe’s contentions is that “‘Heart of Darkness’ projects the image of Africa as “the other world”, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant beastiality’.<sup>145</sup> Otherworldliness is a traditional quality of the literary wilderness, and the ‘other’ in question need not be negative. Linda Dryden sees just such a conventional, ‘Stygian’ quality in Patusan, which resembles ‘one of Haggard’s African kingdoms’.<sup>146</sup> There, the people are either noble, ‘beautiful butterflies’ like Jewel and Dain Waris, or degenerate, ‘creeping beetles’ like Rajah Allang and Cornelius.<sup>147</sup> However, this is because the landscape and natives acquire the romance

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<sup>145</sup> Chinua Achebe, *The Massachusetts Review* (18), p. 252.

<sup>146</sup> Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 167.

<sup>147</sup> Dryden, pp. 168-9.

of Jim's imagination and become stereotypes.<sup>148</sup> In fact, it is rare for Conrad's natives to be either uncomplicatedly exemplary or execrable. Aïssa is a concoction of dichotomous qualities: 'savage and tender, strong and delicate, fearful and resolute' (*Outcast*, 191). When Willems first catches a glimpse of her, she is 'a gleam of gold like a sun-ray lost in shadow, and a vision of blackness darker than the deepest shade of the forest' (*Outcast*, 53). The same combination of light and dark characterises her soon after, when it is 'as if all those plants claimed her for their own – the animated and brilliant flower of all that exuberant life which, born in gloom, struggles forever towards the sunshine' (*Outcast*, 60). In this respect, she follows Taminah in *Almayer's Folly*, who contains 'all feelings and all passions, all hopes and all fears, the curse of life and the consolation of death ... She lived like the tall palms amongst whom she was passing now, seeking the light, desiring the sunshine, fearing the storm, unconscious of either' (*AF*, 72). The African tribesmen in 'An Outpost' possess similarly incongruous traits, being both 'stately' and wildly agitated ('Outpost', 238). The station men pine for senseless atrocities, as well as family, friends, and 'other ties supposed generally to be human' ('Outpost', 244). Kurtz's African bride is also portrayed through a series of discordant couplets: 'wild and gorgeous', 'savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent ... ominous and stately' ('HD', 99). Glendening considers that her ambiguous status as neither refined nor base 'fits with other instabilities in the representation of the jungle and its inhabitants', which are 'a continuing problem that Marlow is never able to solve'.<sup>149</sup> For me, they are instead part of his attempt to show up the morally bankrupt idealism of modern Europe.

A number of Conrad's white characters do cling to an oppositional conception of the real, pivotal European, and the savage other from the 'outer darkness'. It is a consolation for Willems, who seeks 'refuge within his ideas of propriety from the dismal mangroves, from the darkness of the forests and of the heathen souls of the savages that were his masters' (*Outcast*, 99). Similarly, when Marlow describes his encounter with a chain-gang at the Outer Station, the six men are 'raw matter' and bestial, while their guard is 'one of the reclaimed' ('HD', 33). But neither of these cases endorses the juxtaposition of civilisation and savagery, given the vainglorious character concerned in the first, and the obvious use of irony in the second. The author's genuine sentiment can be better detected in Marlow's declaration that "these men could by no stretch of the imagination be called enemies". As it can in *Almayer's Folly*, where Nina observes 'no change and no difference' in her transition from 'civilised' company in Singapore to 'savage' Sambir:

Whether they traded in brick godowns or on the muddy river bank; whether they reached after much or little; whether they made love under the shadows of the great trees or in the shadow of the cathedral on the Singapore promenade; whether they

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<sup>148</sup> Dryden, p. 172.

<sup>149</sup> Glendening, *'An Entangled Bank'*, p. 171.

plotted for their own ends under the protection of laws and according to the rules of Christian conduct, or whether they sought the gratification of their desires with the savage cunning and the unrestrained fierceness of natures as innocent of culture as their own immense and gloomy forests, Nina saw only the same manifestations of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes. (AF, 27)

True, Conrad repeats the clichéd association between the dark forest and the impulsive, unrestrained natives. Sambir is a 'hopeless quagmire of barbarism, full of strong and uncontrolled passions'; while 'all the seething life and movement of tropical nature [seem] concentrated in the ardent eyes' of Nina and Dain (AF, 44). However, the supposedly rational institutions and inhabitants of 'civilisation' can do nothing to eliminate such material urges. Like his forest, Conrad's native characters often serve to underline the correspondence between European 'culture' and tropical 'savagery'.

Conrad seems also to regurgitate the stock image of natives as primeval and chaotic, suspended in a state of animality or childhood. However, the speaker and context of these allusions are significant. In *An Outcast*, Aïssa is characterised from an early stage as a 'primitive' and a nervous animal (*Outcast*, 59), but arguably this is part of Willems's own fantasy, in which he is a 'clever' and 'civilised European' 'surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of this life, of his race, of his civilisation' (63 & 208). A demeaning vision of African tribesmen is presented in 'An Outpost' too, but largely through the discreditable Carlier, who refers to local warriors as a "herd" of "fine animals" ('Outpost', 238), and Kayerts, who claims to have treated the station hands like "their own children" (246). Although the narrator of 'Karain' repeatedly refers to the native leader as a friend, and pays lip service to the idea of racial equality ('Karain', 14), he also accuses him of possessing 'primitive ideas' and deploying arguments of 'childish shrewdness' (9). The narrator imagines Karain 'racially incapable' of purposeful action (9), and agrees with Hollis that Karain will end by slaughtering his subjects due to 'the form of madness peculiar to his race' (25). In *Lord Jim*, the passengers of the Patna are disparaged as "dese cattle" and "that lot of brutes" by the German skipper and his equally reprehensible chief engineer (LJ, 11 & 75), just as the master of the brigantine carrying Jim to Patusan calls the island "a cage of beasts" (173).

Another, more problematic mouthpiece for developmentalist prejudices is Marlow. The contrast he draws in *Lord Jim* between the 'old mankind' of Patusan and the 'races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom' (192) could be seen as ironic, given the deficiencies lurking beneath Jim's superhuman exterior; however, in 'Heart of Darkness', he appears sincerely to suppose that Africans have no "clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time – had no inherited experience to teach them, as it were" ('HD', 69). A similar claim also appears in the narration of 'An Outpost', along with the statement that 'nothing is easier to certain savages than suicide' (244); but here one senses that Conrad may be parodying the views of men like Léon Rom. Therefore,

rather than an ingenuous expression of the author's own opinions, I am inclined to see Marlow's Lamarckism as an illustration of his unreliability. Indeed, his sense of racial superiority is immediately undercut by the exemplary self-control of the cannibal crew (71).

The most strikingly bestial native in Conrad's fiction is Pedro, the Colombian alligator hunter in *Victory*, a stooped, 'hair-smothered' being with simian features, whose humanity is a matter of equivocation (*Victory*, 79 & 234). We are told that he has "no restraint, no restraint at all" (177), and yet he is an example of savagery redeemed by the white man, for his red 'little bear's eyes' emanate devotion to his master, Jones (216). Pedro could have staggered straight out of the pages of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, with the 'clumsiness of a creature caught in the woods and taught to walk on its hind legs' (93); so too Marlow's fireman, who is like 'a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs' ('HD', 64). Notably, the natives who are compared to animals in 'Heart of Darkness' are those that have come under the 'improving' influence of the Company, such as the slave labourers wearing rags that resemble wagging tails (33), or the helmsman, who behaves like a 'reined-in horse' (76). And like Wells's Beast Folk, they and Pedro cast doubt on the desirability of imposing restraint.

In sharing the tropical forest's impenetrability, mystery, and unreality, Conrad's natives seem quite conventional. Kurtz's 'apparition' of an African bride looks on the receding steamer "like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose" ('HD', 99). But the effect of her gaze is to place the 'civilised' Europeans within a set of nesting dolls, for we have just been told that "the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul". Likewise, Marlow treats Dain Waris as though he is 'half-removed from the "real world"',<sup>150</sup> and claims that he opens to "the Western eye, so often concerned with mere surfaces, the hidden possibilities of races and lands over which hangs the mystery of unrecorded ages" (*LJ*, 190); but he simultaneously extols the understanding between him and Jim, as well as Dain Waris's supposedly 'European' faculties, like 'courage in the open', 'unobscured vision', purpose, and altruism. In Conrad and imperial romance generally, native opacity is frequently reckoned to conceal an enmity for all civilised things. The narrator of 'Karain' can only imagine 'what depth of horrible void' the chieftain is concealing ('Karain', 3): 'Sometimes we caught glimpses of a sombre, glowing fury within him – a brooding and vague sense of wrong, and a concentrated lust of violence which is dangerous in a native' ('Karain', 9). And yet, all attempts through 'reason' to enlighten and mollify him, or Babalatchi (*Outcast*, 42), or the quietly seething 'Henry Price' in 'An Outpost' ('Makola, taciturn and impenetrable, despised the two white men.' (233)), are doomed to failure because the source of resentment is Europeans themselves.

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<sup>150</sup> Dryden, *Joseph Conrad the Imperial Romance*, p. 171.

Conrad's fiction undercuts the Western habit of viewing the tropics as the surreal counterpart to a rational and authentic world. In *Victory*, Schomberg and Ricardo are said to look on native life 'as a mere play of shadows. A play of shadows the dominant race could walk through unaffected and disregarded in the pursuit of its incomprehensible aims and needs' (*Victory*, 128). To Mrs Travers in *The Rescue*, the natives appear 'no more real than fantastic shadows' (*Rescue*, 206), 'a gorgeously got-up play on the brilliantly lighted stage of an exotic opera' (244), or 'a clever sketch in colours' (245). She is torn between two men: her mundane husband, who sees her in native costume and complains that she has 'lost all sense of reality, of probability' (289); and Lingard, who found a Melbourne show to be 'more real than anything in life' (249).<sup>151</sup> The 'Karain' narrator mocks the staginess of the native court, 'seen nowhere else but behind the footlights and in the condensed falseness of some grossly tragic situation' ('Karain', 3), but the conclusion of that story suggests that supposedly rational European customs and the real world of the Strand are no less illusory. In *Lord Jim*, Stein avers that life itself is one long, unattainable dream, resembling treading water, and is punctuated by painful moments of awakening in which one realises this fact (*LJ*, 154). Jim is able to re-immense himself in his romantic imaginings among the people of Patusan, but Marlow finds that place too much "like a picture created by fancy on a canvas" and returns to a more civilised reality. However, his assertion that "I wasn't going to dive into it; I would have enough to do to keep my head above the surface" (*LJ*, 240) reminds us that this state is equally fictive.

Conrad appears to adhere to convention in the way that many of his indigenous characters, especially the female ones,<sup>152</sup> imitate the beguiling powers of the tropical forest in luring men from the narrow path of cultural, racial, or moral integrity to their destruction. Linda Dryden tells us that in nineteenth-century romance generally, the hero's perilous desire to explore tends to encompass both the exotic landscape and the native woman.<sup>153</sup> She quotes Rebecca Stott, who sees in Conrad the same tendency to merge his native female characters with their equally 'incomprehensible' and 'dangerous' environment: 'they are like carnivorous jungle plants – *fleurs du mal* – alluring and deadly. The contours of these women, pictured or framed against a "riot of foliage", in twilight or in checkered green sunlight, dissolve into the

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<sup>151</sup> In *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*, Hampson states that Part IV of *The Rescue* (or rather *The Rescuer*) is 'the contest between two worlds as to which is "real": the listless, 'ordered existence' of Europe and the yacht, or the more vigorous, 'lawless life' of Lingard and the natives (pp. 87 & 93-4).

<sup>152</sup> Other, male native characters have the same mesmerising and unsettling qualities as the landscape they inhabit. They are often storytellers, whose voices drone on through the night, like Arsat in 'The Lagoon', or Belarab in *The Rescue*, who resembles 'the embodiment of some natural force, of a force forever masterful and undying' (*Rescue*, 99). Karain also 'summed up his race, his country, the elemental force of ardent life, of tropical nature. He had its luxuriant strength, its fascination; and, like it, he carried the seed of peril within.' ('Karain', 3) And yet, he too defies convention when it emerges that he is not entirely enchanter nor enchanted, but that his authority and success depend on the soothing assurances whispered in his ear by a deceased servant. That icons of modern European culture so aptly serve as surrogates for these 'primitive' articles of faith would surely have shocked the contemporary reader.

<sup>153</sup> Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 95.

erotic confusion around them.<sup>154</sup> Likewise, Glendening writes that Conrad's Aïssa embodies nature through her combination of deceptive beauty, deadliness, and her will to dominate. By succumbing to the charms of the native girl and the wilderness, he deems that Willems fails in his masculine role of mastering the feminine nature from which he originates and is himself 'unmanned'.<sup>155</sup> For Dryden, Conrad's association of Aïssa with the untamed wilderness in *An Outcast* emphasises her cultural and biological difference, as well as the danger she poses to male self-control:

Having Willems associate the woman with nature and the jungle, Conrad insists upon her "otherness", her strangeness and mystery, and the threat she poses to racial and masculine identity. The appeal of the woman is thus equated with the romantic appeal of the East, dark, alluring, and unfathomable, threatening a loss of the masculine self into the chaos of the jungle and the "irrational" female temperament.<sup>156</sup>

However, she also points out that Aïssa's ensnarement of Willems is just part of his prolonged 'surrender to the demands of his own ego'.<sup>157</sup>

It is easy to understand why Stott and Glendening see Aïssa as a stereotypically alluring enchantress, a replica of Ayesha from Haggard's *She* in more ways than one.<sup>158</sup> To Willems, she seems to attract and swallow up the light like her forest home. When he first passes her, sunlight loses itself 'in the sombre depths of her eyes' (54):

She seemed to him at once enticing and brilliant – sombre and repelling; the very spirit of that land of mysterious forests, standing before him, with the vague beauty of wavering outline; like an apparition behind a transparent veil – a veil woven of sunbeams and shadows. (*Outcast*, 55)

And like the forest, she has "a merciless heart" (*Outcast*, 92). She immediately causes him to move 'like a man in a trance' and with one glance pierces him with something 'like an inspiration'. He soon surrenders control over his actions to 'an invisible force made up of surprise and curiosity and desire' (53-4). The defining trait of his delirium is obliviousness to past and future, and total absorption in the present, which robs him of any motivation to act or progress (59-60). Only when he remembers at intervals his former identity of superiority is his 'sense of peace, of rest, of happiness, and of soothing delight' (109) punctured by impulses of revolt and loathing (57, 98, & 120-1). When Aïssa seeks to manipulate Willems, she approaches the motionless European, presses herself against him and gazes with 'tender, appealing and promising' eyes: 'With that look she drew the man's soul away from him through his immobile

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<sup>154</sup> Rebecca Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death*, quoted in Dryden, pp. 95 & 97.

<sup>155</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', pp. 143-44.

<sup>156</sup> Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 97.

<sup>157</sup> Dryden, p. 100.

<sup>158</sup> Dryden, p. 94.

pupils, and from Willems' features the spark of reason vanished under her gaze and was replaced by ... an ecstasy that drove out regrets, hesitation, and doubt, and proclaimed its terrible work by an appalling aspect of idiotic beatitude.' (108-9) 'The manner of Willems's attraction to Aïssa is exactly that of a hero of romance being placed under a spell of captivity, 'like a man bewitched within the invisible sweep of a magic circle' (121). The crucial concept of possession is twofold. Willems's destiny is now subject to native plots, but he has also irrevocably lost his metaphysical self to the devil-like enchantress: 'She had him. He had heard of such things. He had heard of women who... He would never believe such stories... Yet they were true. But his own captivity seemed more complete, terrible and final – without the hope of any redemption.' (98) It is as though he has been 'despoiled violently of all that was himself', his pride, self-belief, and ambition, leaving him vulnerable to capricious passions (60). By the time the plundering of his humanity is complete, Willems is left utterly hollow, 'upright on its feet, still, rigid, with stony eyes, as if its rotten soul had departed that moment and the carcass hadn't had the time yet to topple over' (199).

For the putative hero of a romance to be spiritually ransacked with so little resistance and rehabilitation is in itself shocking. However, I think what is more unusual about Aïssa's 'seduction' of Willems is that he begins the novel as a 'fallen' man, whose racial pride and self-belief can barely conceal the moral void within. He enters the forest not on a quest for revelation but in the hope of greater obscurity and illusion; and it is he who pursues Aïssa, impatient for intoxication, not vice-versa. In this respect, Aïssa serves the same purpose as Jewel would later do for Jim in a more benign manner. Again, Dryden highlights Jewel's formulaic qualities as a sorceress who desires to imprison Jim: 'Jewel ... is associated with the natural world of the forest which collaborates with the female to protect the male ... and which in turn limits him within its boundaries.'<sup>159</sup> She has 'the simple charm and the delicate vigour of a wild-flower' (*LJ*, 225), and her affection for Jim seems to 'envelop him like a peculiar fragrance' (205). But this aspect of Jewel is 'a deliberate romance stereotype'.<sup>160</sup> Her bewitchment of Jim is unusual in that she is both slave and mistress, and he is a quite willing victim:

The land, the people, the forests were her accomplices, guarding him with vigilant accord, with an air of seclusion, of mystery, of invincible possession. There was no appeal, as it were; he was imprisoned within the very freedom of his power, and she, though ready to make a footstool of her head for his feet, guarded her conquest inflexibly – as though he were hard to keep. (*LJ*, 205)

Marlow himself inserts a note of doubt in his narration cautioning against an orthodox interpretation:

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<sup>159</sup> Dryden, p. 172.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*



'I suppose you think [Jim and Jewel's love] is a story that you can imagine for yourselves. We have heard so many such stories, and the majority of us don't believe them to be stories of love at all. For the most part we look upon them as stories of opportunities: episodes of passion at best, or perhaps only of youth and temptation ... This view mostly is right, and perhaps in this case too... Yet I don't know.' (*LJ*, 199-200)

The tropical forest was commonly interpreted by imperial romance as the natural home of dark-skinned natives, who shared many of the landscape's abiding characteristics via Lamarckian adaptation. Both were seen as enigmatic and otherworldly, capable of being devilishly malevolent or angelically sympathetic, depending on whether they were favoured by the divine oversight of imperial rule. The inhabitants of Kipling's garden-jungle, for example, are far more virtuous and amenable than the followers of decadent cultures, including Western democracy. Without the natural justice of the Empire and lacking any discipline of their own, natives remain outside the progression of linear time, tempting white men to join them in their indolence and irrationality. Conrad exploits this conventional image, but he also applies it to his Europeans, who are frequently unwitting incarnations of degeneracy. His tropical forest and indigenes do not constitute a separate, supernatural realm, but are frequently complex and universal. Where natives are depicted as primitive or inhuman, it is by unreliable characters, or because they have been 'improved' by European imperialism.

## Chapter Five

### Imperialism

#### The degenerative metropolis

Aversion to the excesses of urban society is well-established in the Judeo-Christian tradition and beyond,<sup>1</sup> and a particular anxiety about British domestic dissipation intensified from the late-1860s onwards, peaking around the turn of the century.<sup>2</sup> Hurley writes that, by this point, there was a widespread fear that through modern civilisation ‘the human race might ultimately retrogress into a sordid animalism rather than progress towards a *telos* of intellectual and moral perfection’.<sup>3</sup> As I have already mentioned, Spencer and progressionist anthropology played an important role in this development. Soon after the influential philosopher had incorporated Darwinism into his sociology, the civilised setting came to be seen as not sufficiently challenging to instigate adaptation. Moreover, Tylor’s theory of Survivals raised the possibility that vestigial ‘savages’ had persisted until the present day, corrupting Victorian society from within. In his *L’uomo delinquente* (‘Criminal Man’, 1876), Cesare Lombroso claimed to have discovered among us an entire population of ‘born criminals’, atavistic throwbacks who exhibit ‘the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals’.<sup>4</sup> Bivona asserts that such ideas made it impossible for the well-read Englishman of the 1890s to feel as confidently superior towards non-European peoples as he might have felt in the 1860s;<sup>5</sup> however, I agree with Hurley that Lombroso’s criminology instead shored up such hierarchies:

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<sup>1</sup> According to Malcolm Bradbury, ‘Writers and intellectuals have long abhorred the city: the dream of escape from its vice, its immediacy, its sprawl, its pace, its very model of man has been the basis of a profound cultural dissent, evident in that most enduring of literary modes, pastoral, which can be a critique of the city or a simple transcendence of it. And the forms and stabilities of culture itself have often seemed to belong, finally, outside the urban order.’ (‘The Cities of Modernism’, in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*, p. 97.)

<sup>2</sup> ‘Victorian Pessimism’, *In Our Time*. In that programme, Dinah Birch and Peter Mandler attribute a growing pessimism to mass education and enfranchisement threatening the primacy of élites, the resentment of the impeded masses, and the collapse of the rural economy due to competition with North America and Eastern Europe. As Brantlinger records, so great was this national unease at the time of the Great Durbar of 1903 that Lord Curzon forbade a rendition of ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ because of lyrics referring to the ‘rise and wane’ of kingdoms (*Rule of Darkness*, p. 32).

<sup>3</sup> Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, New York and London, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1911, p. xv.

<sup>5</sup> Bivona, *Desire and contradiction*, p. 83.

atavists were anomalies, who threw into stark contrast ‘fully human’, upper-class, European, adult males.<sup>6</sup>

Lombroso and others postulated a confederacy of association between the lower, criminal castes of European society, an earlier social state, animals, children, women, and colonial peoples, based on their shared enthrallment to brutal egoism.<sup>7</sup> All these groups were primitive and unrestrained according to the model of developmental evolution, and in need of their superiors’ authority. In his *In Darkest England*, having established a parallel between the inhabitants of Africa, urban slums, and the Dark Ages, William Booth laments, ‘What a satire it is upon our Christianity and our civilisation that the existence of these colonies of heathens and savages in the heart of our capital should attract so little attention!’<sup>8</sup> Not only financially disadvantaged Europeans, but also those perceived as mentally and morally inferior were equated with colonials. Charles Darwin himself conceived a point of physical resemblance with ‘the lower types of mankind’ in the brow and prognathous jaw of European sufferers of microcephaly.<sup>9</sup> The attributes of hyle and the observed characteristics of the tropical forest were projected onto all these groups, and vice versa, so that the jungle symbol takes on certain qualities anthropomorphically.

In the final stage of the national journey towards primeval disorder, writers imagined that the city itself would be physically engulfed by vegetation. Edward Thomas imagined such a process in his poem ‘The South Country’ (1909),<sup>10</sup> though more sustained use of it was made by H.G. Wells (*The Time Machine*), and by Richard Jefferies in *After London* (1885). The last describes the aftermath of a natural catastrophe: ‘No fields, indeed, remained, for where the ground was dry, the thorns, briars, brambles, and saplings already mentioned filled the space, and these thickets and the young trees had converted most part of the country into an immense forest.’<sup>11</sup> Darko Suvin and Gillian Beer have both commented on the ‘anti-progressivism’ or ‘anti-Victorian’ strain evident in *After London*,<sup>12</sup> but in doing so neglect the fact that Jefferies

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<sup>6</sup> Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p. 94. Dryden has also written about the emphasis at this time on the racial and moral superiority of the ‘gentleman’; an attitude which lasted until the horrific awakening of the Great War (*Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 22).

<sup>7</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, p. 125.

<sup>8</sup> William Booth, *In Darkest England* (1890), in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 36. It is not as clear as O’Hanlon purports (p. 69) that Darwin also ascribes the ‘mindless energy’ of microcephalous humans to ‘primitive mankind’.

<sup>10</sup> In that poem, Thomas writes, ‘I like to think how easily Nature will absorb London/as she absorbed the mastodon...’ (*The Heart of England*, London, J.M. Dent and Co., 1909, p. 98). Later examples include John Wyndham’s *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and Rose Macaulay’s *The World My Wilderness* (1950), which imagines post-war London ‘deep in dripping greenery that grew high and rank, running over the ruins as the jungle runs over Mayan temples, hiding them from prying eyes’ (quoted by Leo Meller, ‘The Lure of Wilderness’, in Westling (ed.), p. 115).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Jefferies, *After London; or, Wild England*, London, Paris, New York, and Melbourne, Cassell and Co., 1886, pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Page, *The Literary Imagination*, pp. 140 & 141; Darko Suvin in *Victorian Science Fiction in the UK*, and Gillian Beer in *Darwin’s Plots*.

adhered to a spiritual variety of Lamarckian evolutionary theory,<sup>13</sup> the very foundation of Victorian progressivism.

Opinion was divided on the causes of degeneration and the means by which cultural survival could be ensured, with some commentators promoting a return to 'classical' virtues, and those of a more romantic bent advocating the re-barbarisation, not the de-barbarisation of society.<sup>14</sup> The social Lamarckian perspective tended to forewarn of the dangers of certain vices, especially indolence and relativism, and to extol traditional virtues. In E. Ray Lankester's *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (written in 1880, before he came around to hard heredity), the author postulates that a civilised lifestyle lacks the necessary stimuli for evolution, and that the apparent decline of modern mankind is an example of adaptation to 'less varied and less complex conditions of life'.<sup>15</sup> After rejecting humanity's 'good gift of reason', Europeans degenerated into 'a contented life of material enjoyment accompanied by ignorance and superstition'. Extrapolating from this alleged return to the level of the ancient Greeks and Romans, Lankester charts a future for mankind comparable to marine animals like the barnacle or the sea squirt, which, having adopted a sessile life on the seabed, 'throws away its tail and eye and sinks into a quiescent state of inferiority'.<sup>16</sup>

For others, the new technologies and artificiality of cities constituted the wrong sort of evolutionary stimuli, promoting a vicious cycle in its human stock and creating a physically and morally impaired sub-species or 'residuum',<sup>17</sup> feckless, criminal, and anarchic. One source of such ideas was the French psychologist B.A. Morel's *Traité des dégénérescences* (1857), in which he claimed that an individual's adaptation to the pathological environment of the modern city would be passed on through ensuing generations to an ever-greater degree, until sterility intervened.<sup>18</sup> Together, these theories bred panic that the lifestyles of urban dwellers would ruin entire races by imbuing rural immigrants with their habits, and they contributed to an avalanche of literature on the topic between the years 1885 and 1895.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most popular of these was Max Nordau's *Entartung*,<sup>20</sup> published in Germany in 1893 and translated into English as

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<sup>13</sup> Page, p. 140.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, New York, International Publishers, 1893, p. 129.

<sup>15</sup> Lankester, *Degeneration*, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Lankester, p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> 'Residuum' was the word used by Sidney Webb in 'The Difficulties of Individualism' (1896) to describe the 'degenerate horde ... unfit for social life' churned out by modern civilisation (London, Fabian Society, 1905).

<sup>18</sup> Kershner, *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 423; and Hurley, *Gothic Body*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>19</sup> Hurley (p. 69) lists some such works, including James Cantlie, *Degeneration Amongst Londoners* (1885); J. Milner Fothergill, *The Town Dweller* (1889), which claimed that inhabitants of London's East End were devolving towards more primitive 'racial types'; and J.P. Freeman Williams, *The Effect of Town Life on the General Health* (1890).

<sup>20</sup> *Degeneration* ran to seven editions in the space of six months (Greenslade, 'The concept of degeneration', p. 40).

*Degeneration* in 1895. The evolutionary science underlying Nordau's thesis was Lamarckian,<sup>21</sup> and contained a strong moral component. He rejected the primitivism of his age, and imagined he was living in 'a Europe in which the anarchic desires associated with primitive peoples, or what Durkheim would call *anomie*, had become rampant'.<sup>22</sup> Nordau therefore advocated a return to Enlightenment values like reason and self-discipline, rather than instinct.<sup>23</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, Nordau associated the modern city with the chthonic realm's lack of light and form, and his imagery is evocative of the re-assertion of hyle.<sup>24</sup> He describes the advent of his age, the 'Dusk of Nations', thus:

Over the earth the shadows creep with deepening gloom, wrapping all objects in a mysterious dimness, in which all certainty is destroyed and any guess seems plausible. Forms lose their outlines, and are dissolved in floating mist. The day is over, the night draws on.<sup>25</sup>

From a more 'Darwinian' point of view, the modern city was perceived as not selective enough, or selective of those unsuited for survival. Like the garden of Huxley's metaphor going to seed through the liberality of the horticulturalist,<sup>26</sup> it was supposed that the unnaturally generous circumstances of healthcare and poor relief preserved the wrong type of person for reproduction, to the detriment of the nation's biological well-being. This was the opinion of war correspondent George W. Steevens: 'Civilisation is making it too easy to live ... A wiser humanitarian would make it easy for the lower quality of life to die. It sounds brutal, but why not? We have let brutality die out too much.'<sup>27</sup> This assessment led primitivists to advocate the emulation of 'savage' societies.<sup>28</sup> They imagined a productive outcome, like the impact of the Goths upon the flagging Roman empire, as postulated by Friedrich Engels: 'All that was vital and life-bringing that the Germans infused into the Roman world was barbarism. In fact, only barbarians are capable of rejuvenating a world labouring in the throes of a dying civilisation.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Glendening, 'An Entangled Bank', p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 153.

<sup>23</sup> Kershner, *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 434.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, he identifies 'cremnophobia' (a fear of abysses) as one characteristic of the degenerate (Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 241). George Gissing's novel *The Nether World* (1889) is another example.

<sup>25</sup> Nordau, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> John Buchan uses the same extended metaphor in *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), lamenting the replacement of wild nature by 'garden-nature' (p. 294).

<sup>27</sup> Quoted by H. John Field, *Toward a Programme of Imperial Life*, Connecticut, Greenwood, 1982, pp. 138-9; and in Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> Specifically, the circumstances of nature-peoples were seen as preventative of urban syndromes like neurasthenia. Charles E. Rosenberg claims it was common at the time to believe that 'Primitive man was protected from many of the mental diseases of civilised man by his natural state' ('The Place of George M. Beard in Nineteenth Century Psychiatry', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 36 (May – June 1962), as quoted in Greenslade, 'The concept of degeneration', p. 57).

<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, p. 129.

### The regenerative power of conquest

As the paradigm of untamed nature in Europe, the forest has long had a reputation in the pastoral tradition, reinvigorated by Rousseau, for liberating and testing the court-weary adventurer. Now, notwithstanding the supposed link between the tropics and its 'degenerate' inhabitants, the jungle took on a similar role as a physically and biologically challenging environment, a place of ruthless brutality and death, allowing heroes to stand out from the crowd.<sup>30</sup> It represented the imperial periphery, and therefore played a similar, progressive role to the Wild West in F.J. Turner's 'frontier hypothesis' ('The Significance of the Frontier in American History', 1893), which he believed had stimulated Lamarckian improvements in successive generations of European pioneers, until at last they were transformed into innately anti-authoritarian Americans.<sup>31</sup>

The idea of the tropical forest as comprising a degenerative and destructive challenge helps to resolve the apparent paradox of late-nineteenth-century disaffection with modern culture and a simultaneous drive to aggressively expand the Empire. Concerns about the corrupting influence of a decadent Europe on colonial innocence<sup>32</sup> were partly mitigated by the stereotype of the 'well-born' explorer, and the positive effects he would initiate. More than that, noble, re-barbarising imperialism (as opposed to the base, mercantile sort<sup>33</sup>) was not the expression of decadent metropolitan culture but the means of its regeneration: testing and extending the bounds of one's dominion was viewed as a way to break the destructive cycle for the immersed adventurer, the degraded domestic population, and some native peoples too.

I shall explore in greater depth elsewhere the perceived effect of such adventures on individual Europeans, but generally a journey to the edge of Empire was seen as an escape from stultifying domesticity, 'a way back through layers of artifice and taboo to the raw edges of primitive life, the jungle, the originary wilderness'.<sup>34</sup> In popular fiction, Trotter writes, 'the frontier converts the finished ornament – the timid youth defined by his superscriptions – back

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<sup>30</sup> Sir Richard Burton attributed similar attributes to the mortal dangers of the Arabian Desert in 1855: Having escaped the restraints of 'artificial living', 'Your moral improves; you become frank and cordial, hospitable and single-minded; the hypocritical politeness and the slavery of civilisation are left behind you in the city'. (*Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, Vol. I, Leipzig, Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1874, p. 143.)

<sup>31</sup> One champion of this idea was Jan Smuts, who imagined 'the unusual climatic conditions of East Africa ... the human laboratory of Africa' producing a new white race fitted for the tropical environment ('Speech at Rhodes House, Oxford, 1929', quoted in Rich, *Race and Empire*, p. 69).

<sup>32</sup> This is the sentiment expressed in Marcus Clarke's novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874) about convicts transported to Australia. They are 'monsters that civilisation had brought forth and bred', and they pollute the loveliness of their new home (London, Richard Bentley and Son, 1886).

<sup>33</sup> It was not unusual for proponents of empire to distinguish between these two sorts of imperialism, the noble and re-wilding versus the petty and anglicising, as an article in the February 1899 edition of *Blackwood's Magazine* shows: 'The empire, that magnificent fabric founded upon the generous impulse to conquer and to rule, was now regarded as a mere machine for the acquisition of pounds sterling.' ('From the New Gibbon', in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, No. M, February 1899, Vol. CLXV, p. 242.)

<sup>34</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 38.

into the ore out of which it was made: the elemental man'.<sup>35</sup> In terms of domestic social problems, it's possible that imperialism was useful in reducing population pressures through emigration and political tensions by giving the nation a common cause or enemy,<sup>36</sup> but more importantly it was believed that the British race itself could be renewed at the frontier of the Empire. In his Inaugural Lecture on Art, at Oxford in 1870, John Ruskin announced that if Britain was not to perish, 'she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; – seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on'.<sup>37</sup> The connection between colonising 'empty' land and national rebirth surfaced with such urgent regularity in the discourse of the late nineteenth century because of social Darwinism.<sup>38</sup> This ideology not only lent an air of scientific credibility to the dehumanisation of indigenes,<sup>39</sup> but also suggested there was an essential necessity among organisms and societies to engage in a *Kampf um Raum* ('struggle for space'),<sup>40</sup> whereby vitality is substantiated (and fears of degeneration assuaged) through territorial mastery.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> David Trotter, *The English Novel in History, 1895-1920*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> Cecil Rhodes claimed that settlement of new lands would save Britain from 'a bloody civil war' (in a letter of 1895, quoted in Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 34).

<sup>37</sup> John Ruskin, 'Inaugural Lecture', 29, in *Lectures on Art – Delivered Before the University of Oxford in Hilary Term, 1870*, New York, John Wiley & Son, 1870, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Pearson decried the 'false view of human solidarity ... which regrets that a capable and stalwart race of white men should replace a dark-skinned tribe which can neither utilise its land for the full benefit of mankind, nor contribute its quota to the common stock of human knowledge' (*The Grammar of Science*, p. 438).

<sup>39</sup> As Tiffin and Lawson state in their introduction to *De-Scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and textuality* (London, Routledge, 1994, p. 5), 'only empty spaces can be settled, so the space had to be made empty by ignoring or dehumanising the inhabitants'.

<sup>40</sup> The idea devised by the German zoologist Friedrich Ratzel, which was used to vindicate German imperialism, including the Nazi quest for *Lebensraum* (Watson, *Ideas*, p. 916).

<sup>41</sup> Consequently, it must have been reassuring for Joseph Chamberlain's audience at the Royal Colonial Institute in March 1897 to hear that, 'The mother country is still vigorous and fruitful, is still able to send forth troops of stalwart sons to people and occupy the waste spaces of the earth' (Joseph Chamberlain, 'The True Conception of Empire', in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 141).

Of course, the practice of proving one's masterful qualities through the exploration and conquest of untouched nature does depend on the continued existence of such regions; something which many at the time felt was in doubt. Thackeray had bemoaned the bathetic effect of steam-powered tourism as early as 1844 (Michael Angelo Titmarsh (William Thackeray), *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1846, p. 93), but in the 1890s began the real panic that 'the world was growing so sensible and pacific – and so democratic too' (Winston Churchill, *A Roving Commission: My Early Life*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930, p. 44. 'Luckily,' he goes on, 'there were still savages and barbarous peoples. There were Zulus and Afghans, also the Dervishes of the Soudan.'). Both Haggard and Doyle (*LW*, 15) were concerned about romance-writing in a future bereft of secret places 'unknown to the pestilent accuracy of the geographer' (H. Rider Haggard, 'Elephant Smashing and Lion Shooting' (1894), quoted in Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 239. Brantlinger also cites similar concerns of Frederic Harrison that modern technology was opening up 'to the million the wonders of foreign parts' ('Regrets of a Veteran Traveller', 1897, quoted p. 238)). By 1919, one member of that profession declared despondently that the age of exploration was over: 'The known does not fade any longer through the half-known into the unknown' (Sir Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, London, Constable, 1919, pp. 39-40). Victorian-Edwardian anguish that opportunities for heroic triumphs were receding out of existence reflects the age's perception of a symbiotic relationship between savagery and civilisation, and a need to balance the 'classical' drive to order and refine, with a more romantic desire to preserve places of escape, where natural justice can be rediscovered.

The notion of imposing *logos* on disorderly, fallen nature in the manner of God, thereby re-affirming a hierarchical and teleological universe in which mankind is central and uppermost, has long been used at a cultural level to endorse imperialist behaviour. A twentieth-century example of the notional connection can be found in C.S. Lewis's *Miracles* (1947), in which nature is depicted as often constituting a 'fallen world' at war with heavenly reason. Although temporarily rebellious, like an elephant run amok, Lewis claims that nature is nevertheless designed to be subject to reason as the elephant is to the mahout, or a people to its king. Government by reason is the original and the final state of the universe, therefore 'Nature can only raid Reason to kill; but Reason can invade Nature to take prisoners and even to colonise.'<sup>42</sup> However, the idea that colonisation represents the imposition of order on chaos has been present in the discourse of idealists from the very beginning. In Book IX of his *Republic*, in which Socrates shows Glaucon that the wise man regulates his bestial impulses and cultivates the nobler elements of his soul, Plato employs the word meaning 'to found a colony' (*οἰκίζειν*<sup>43</sup>) to represent the realisation of the ideal,<sup>44</sup> and the word for carrying out a political purge (*διαναθαλίσειν*<sup>45</sup>) to describe its upkeep. His use of this metaphor is one origin of the 'City of God' image among Stoics and Christians. Marcus Aurelius, for example, also imagined divine order as an ideal city-state, and it is notable that he attained fame as both a Stoic advocate of self-control and a successful imperialist. In turn, his *Meditations* was a favourite book of Cecil Rhodes,<sup>46</sup> and influenced the educational philosophy of Thomas Arnold, who is widely seen as having helped to establish the foremost 'seminaries' of British imperialism.

<sup>42</sup> C.S. Lewis, 'Nature and Supernature', in *Miracles*, [website] [http://pdbooks.ca/pdbooks/english/L/Lewis-C-S--Miracles/cjyaqv\\_files/text/part0005.html](http://pdbooks.ca/pdbooks/english/L/Lewis-C-S--Miracles/cjyaqv_files/text/part0005.html), (accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2016).

<sup>43</sup> S.C. Woodhouse, *English-Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language*, London, George Routledge and Sons, 1910, p. 341.

<sup>44</sup> Plato, *The Republic* (trans. B. Jowett), Book IX.592, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Oxford, Clarendon, 1888, pp. 305-6:

Socrates:	He will look at the city which is within him, and take heed that no disorder occur in it, such as might arise either from superfluity or from want ... And ... those [honours] ... which are likely to disorder his life, he will avoid ...
Glaucon:	Then, if that is his motive, he will not be a statesman.
Socrates:	By the dog of Egypt, he will! ...
Glaucon:	I understand; you mean that he will be a ruler in the city of which we are the founders [ <i>οἰκίζοντες</i> ], and which exists in idea [ <i>λόγους</i> ] only; for I do not believe that there is such an one anywhere on earth?
Socrates:	In heaven, I replied, there is laid up a pattern of it, methinks, which he who desires may behold, and beholding, may set his own house in order.

<sup>45</sup> Woodhouse, *English-Greek Dictionary*, p. 658.

<sup>46</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, *The Founder: Cecil Rhodes and the Pursuit of Power*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 384-5. In *De Monarchia*, Dante Alighieri showed himself to be another keen proponent of empire; specifically the Holy Roman Empire, which he saw as a remedy for mankind's corruptibility.



A number of historians, like Christine Bolt in *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (1971) and T. Walter Herbert in *Marquesan Encounters* (1980),<sup>47</sup> have written about the important role that religion played in British empire-building during the early and mid-nineteenth century. This liberal, proselytising phase was predicated on two assumptions. First, some native peoples and lands had failed to develop or had deteriorated from a higher condition, but they were also seen as salvageable from their depravity. African 'barbarity', for example, was widely seen as a consequence of the slave trade, with the natives as its unwilling victims. The second assumption was that British culture was superior, the epitome of 'civilisation', and a beneficial influence on all who came in contact with it.<sup>48</sup> Justifications for British intervention established the contraposition of natives and Europeans via contrasting, hierarchical symbols and attributes (the civilising process being the transmutation of the worse quality into the better): reason versus irrationality; compassion versus cruelty; clothing versus nakedness; liberty versus enslavement; industry and productivity versus indolence and infertility, etc. Most common was the image of the chthonic darkness versus ethereal light, used by William Wilberforce to describe the happy exchange of 'dark and bloody superstitions for the genial influence of Christian light and truth'.<sup>49</sup>

These clear-cut oppositions added great purpose to British foreign policy, as Macaulay's 1833 call for the anglicisation of India makes clear: 'To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own.'<sup>50</sup> More than that, it became common to see the British task of rehabilitating native populations through the diffusion of Christianity, free trade, and the English way of life, as divinely sanctioned, at least in a Hegelian sense.<sup>51</sup> Individual explorers were beatified, according to Brantlinger, as 'the obverse of the myth of the Dark Continent ... the Promethean and ... saintly bestower of light'.<sup>52</sup> Britain's political and military power was soon cited as proof of its divine appointment. The 'Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes' heard from Reverend William Whewell that, indubitably, 'this country has been invested ... with the sway of distant lands, and

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<sup>47</sup> Both cited in White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 25. Herbert claims that the imperial ideology grew out of the doctrine that 'God progressively unfolds his plans for the human race by way of a series of encounters in which those who are bearers of his truth come into conflict with the forces of darkness' (*Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilisation*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 57).

<sup>48</sup> 'That white men had something of tremendous value to export was the assumption of imperial policy and of the travel writing and adventure fiction that discussed the subject.' (White, p. 97)

<sup>49</sup> William Wilberforce, 'Speeches on the Clauses in the East-India Bill for Promoting the Religious Instruction and Moral Improvement of the Natives of British Dominions in India', June and July 1813, quoted in Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 77.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Speech on the Government of India' (1833), quoted in Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience*, p. 121.

<sup>51</sup> In his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, Hegel argued that God's will is evident in history, therefore man is a participant in its implementation (Watson, *Ideas*, p. 850).

<sup>52</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 180.

the mastery of the restless waters, for some great and important purpose in the government of the world'.<sup>53</sup> This was also the opinion of Carlyle: 'Sugar Islands, Spice Islands, Indias, Canadas, these, by the real decree of heaven, were ours; and nobody would or could believe it, till it was tried by cannon law [war], and *so* proved.'<sup>54</sup>

Despite the emergent practice in the 1850s of ranking peoples according to biology, Lamarckian theory largely served to entrench the foundational ideas of British imperialism. The cause of native debasement was pinpointed to centuries of exposure to unfavourable environments and acquired characteristics, while hope was still cherished that they could be upraised through prolonged contact with the better elements of a more advanced civilisation.<sup>55</sup> Increasingly, moral standing was seen as determined by instinct or 'race-memory'.<sup>56</sup> Initially, the British racial identity was commonly 'Teutonic', forged by men like Charles Kingsley, J.A. Froude, and E.A. Freeman, and associated with the forests of Northern Germany. But this Teutonism began to fade during the 1880s in proportion to the rise of federalist imperialism, and for the next quarter-century at least was replaced by an 'Anglo-Saxon' narrative which focussed on the characters endowed by sea-faring.<sup>57</sup> It was alleged they had inherited the restless energy of that environment; a racial quality which Darwin and Gladstone both speculated was the basis of the country's pre-eminence,<sup>58</sup> and of which Conrad also makes use. In addition, Anglo-Saxons were plentifully endowed with reason and, according to Nordau, a 'high-minded craving for knowledge' which could lead them into error.<sup>59</sup> Fortunately, they were also blessed with a healthy dose of empirical detachment to ward off superstitious enthusiasms, as well as self-control and respect for the rule of law.<sup>60</sup>

By the later decades of the nineteenth century, the supposed righteousness which the British earlier possessed by virtue of their culture and upbringing had been transfigured into an

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<sup>53</sup> Rev. William Whewell, in 'Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes', London, William Ball and Hatchard & Son, 1837, p. 105.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'The New Downing Street, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1850', in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1850, p. 123.

<sup>55</sup> See W. Winwood Reade's description of Africa as 'a woman with a huge burden on the back', 'whose features, in expression, are sad and noble, but which have been degraded, distorted, and rendered repulsive by disease; whose breath is perfumed by rich spices and by fragrant gums, yet through all steals the stench of the black mud of the mangroves and the miasma of the swamps' (*Savage Africa*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1864).

<sup>56</sup> See again Edgar Rice Burrough's Tarzan, whose lifetime of adaptation to a jungle environment is not enough to overcome the Victorian morals engrained in him by previous generations.

<sup>57</sup> Rich, *Race and Empire*, pp. 14, 16 & 17. However, as early as 1841, Thomas Arnold had claimed in his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford that race explained the rise and fall of civilisations, and that the Anglo-Saxons were the most advanced of Germanic peoples (Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience*, p. 157). In parallel with the decline of the New Imperialism, the Anglo-Saxon identity also began to fade around 1905 (Rich, p. 25).

<sup>58</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 142; Melvyn Bragg, 'The British Empire', *In Our Time*, BBC Radio Four, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2001, [radio programme].

<sup>59</sup> Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 76.

<sup>60</sup> O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, p. 131; and Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 129. This was thought to be especially true of Scots, whose naturally challenging environment promoted self-restraint without the ease of mind that typified southerners (O'Hanlon, p. 55).

inborn vocation to rule over those with no resolve to uplift themselves.<sup>61</sup> In the words of C.C. Eldridge, ‘the imperial idea had assumed all the trappings of a religious faith. Great Britain had a Divine destiny.’<sup>62</sup> Destiny (‘the highest ever set before a nation’) was the word that Ruskin used in 1870 to describe the need for an ‘un-degenerate’ race of ‘best northern blood’ to govern.<sup>63</sup> It was also the tenor of a private speech that Cecil Rhodes gave in 1877 at Oriel College, Oxford:

Since [God] has obviously made the English-speaking race the chosen instrument by which He means to produce a state and society based on justice, freedom and peace, then it is bound to be in keeping with His will if I do everything in my power to provide that race with as much scope and power as possible. I think that, if there is a God, then He would like to see me do one thing, that is, to colour as much of the map of Africa British red as possible.<sup>64</sup>

This fug of zealotry was most intense at the turn of the century, while Joseph Chamberlain was Colonial Secretary. ‘The faculties and qualities which have made of us a great governing race,’ he averred, were evidence enough of a British ‘national mission’ ‘to bring these countries [of the Empire] into some kind of disciplined order’ and ‘redeem’ them ‘from the barbarism and the superstition in which they had been steeped for centuries’.<sup>65</sup> One of Chamberlain’s Liberal Imperialist colleagues, Lord Rosebery described the pure and splendid purpose of the Empire as ‘Human and yet not wholly human, for the most heedless and the most cynical must see the finger of the Divine’.<sup>66</sup> The oppositional imagery ostensibly played the same role as half-a-century earlier: ‘To carry light and civilisation into the dark places of the world’ was the British duty, maintained one author in 1897.<sup>67</sup> As late as 1922, Frederick Lugard envisioned the British ‘bringing to the dark places of the earth – the abode of barbarism and cruelty – the torch of culture and progress’.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> One of the most vociferous advocates of this idea was the headmaster of Harrow School, J.E.C. Welldon, who in 1894 quoted Virgil’s *Aeneid* (Book VI.851-3), ‘Remember, O Roman, it shall be your destiny to have dominion over the nations...’ (Janet Montefiore, ‘Latin, arithmetic, and mastery: a reading of Kipling fictions’, in Booth and Rigby (eds.), p. 115). He returned to this theme in ‘The Early Training of Boys into Citizenship’, where he depicted the Empire as a gift from God so that the British ‘may be the executants of His sovereign purpose in the world’ (*Essays on Duty and Discipline*, London, Cassell and Co., 1910, p. 12). It was this belief in ‘a certain miraculous power that makes [every Englishman] master of the world’ that George Bernard Shaw mocked in his 1896 play *The Man of Destiny* (New York, Brentano’s, 1905, p. 81).

<sup>62</sup> Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience*, p. 104.

<sup>63</sup> John Ruskin, ‘Inaugural Lecture’, 28, in *Lectures on Art*, p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> Cecil Rhodes, ‘Conversation at Oriel College, Oxford, 1877’, quoted in *The Last Will and Testament of C.J. Rhodes*, William J. Stead (ed.), London, Review of Reviews Office, 1902, p. 57.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph Chamberlain, Speech entitled ‘The True Conception of Empire’ (1897), in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), pp. 139-140.

<sup>66</sup> Lord Rosebery, ‘Inaugural Address as Rector of the University of Glasgow’, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1900, quoted in Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience*, p. 105.

<sup>67</sup> H.F. Wyatt, ‘Ethics of Empire’, in *Nineteenth Century* (April 1897), p. 529.

<sup>68</sup> Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1922, p. 618. He goes on, ‘We hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonise, to trade, and to govern’.

Highflown language was often used to conceal a more immutable racial superiority based on hard heredity, which validated segregation or destruction rather than a dogma of reform. Of Imperial literature between 1895 and 1905, it would be especially true to assert, as Hugh Cairns does, that whiteness was equated with ‘cleanliness, the light of day, moral purity and absolution from sins. Black has implied sin, dirt, night and evil ... these metaphors [of contrast] helped to make skin colour an identification mark for differing levels of moral and religious attainment.’<sup>69</sup> An obvious example of such pretence is the rhetoric of King Léopold II of Belgium, who used the language of medieval Christendom when opening the Geographical Conference in Brussels in 1876, by referring to the takeover of Africa as ‘a Crusade worthy of this century of progress’, and as ‘piercing the darkness’.<sup>70</sup> Léopold’s upbeat public talk of ‘regeneration’ was in line with prevailing neo-Lamarckian thinking, but this idealism would eventually be exposed as a front to hide his intent to enslave, exploit, and exterminate.

By the 1890s, when social Darwinism made the gulf between native and the ‘right sort’ of white man virtually unbridgeable, the successful colonial was viewed not so much as a deputy for the universal life force or deity, but as an *Übermensch* and a replacement for God in all but name. Since Livingstone, or perhaps Lubbock’s claim in 1865 that ‘Europeans hold ... almost the same position in [native] estimation as did the ... deities of ancient mythology’,<sup>71</sup> the British had been encouraged to believe that they were revered among ‘primitive savages’ as gods. Now, they became devotees of a self-idolising hero cult; or, as Alan Bullock would have it, ‘a faith, fascinating intellectuals and writers, business men, soldiers, missionaries and politicians alike’.<sup>72</sup> A.N. Wilson blames that generation’s ploy of placing the human on the throne of God in part for the ‘cruelty, depravity, and stupidity’ of the ensuing decades.<sup>73</sup> If this is indeed correct, we may be glad that, for the British, the early twentieth century was characterised by disillusionment with the concept of European divinity;<sup>74</sup> a course which Joseph Conrad surely helped to plot.

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<sup>69</sup> Hugh Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 75.

<sup>70</sup> King Léopold II of Belgium, ‘Opening Address, Brussels Geographic Conference, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1876’, quoted in Childs, *Modernism and the Post-Colonial*, p. 94.

<sup>71</sup> John Lubbock, *Pre-historic Times*, New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1865, p. 460.

<sup>72</sup> Alan Bullock, ‘The Double Image’, in Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), p. 60.

<sup>73</sup> Wilson, *God’s Funeral*, p. 397.

<sup>74</sup> I am thinking of admissions of the kind made by Walter Lawrence in *The India We Served*: ‘I had the illusion, wherever I was, that I was infallible and invulnerable in my dealing with Indians ... They expressed something of the idea when they called us the ‘Heaven Born’, and the idea is really make believe – mutual make believe. They, the millions, made us believe we had a divine mission. We made them believe they were right.’ (London, Cassell and Co., 1928, p. 43.)

### **The tropical forest as *terra nullius* to be cultivated**

What the British sought to achieve by playing the part of God in mastering lawless, decadent nature (in the sense of comprehending, disciplining, and controlling it) was regeneration: of the colonial adventurer; of the incorporated territory and some of its inhabitants; and, of the domestic, urban population. In terms of the British representation of the tropical forest, this involved an often paradoxical fusion of competing traditions. According to ancient convention, it could be deemed unoccupied territory, and a godforsaken, unproductive zone. However, for a number of centuries, the tropics in general had been cast as a place of abundance and ease, frequently corrupting. And, in more recent times, biologists had labelled the tropical forest the evolutionary environment *ne plus ultra*, where the natural law of competition and struggle operated with unparalleled ferocity.

Part of previous empires' attempts to pose as a source of progress and to justify expansion was the depiction of hitherto unconquered territory as unproductive *terra nullius*, crying out for direction and cultivation. Such places are often referred to as 'virgin land', which must be ploughed to make it a 'motherland'. The Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament details how, on the 'Day of Yahweh', God 'will make [Zion's] wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord' (Isaiah, 51:3); the land will be literally married, or *Beulah* (62:4). In *The Aeneid*, as part of the establishment of a colony (a word that derives from *colere*, to 'till') on the future site of Rome, Aeneas weds the parthenic embodiment of Italy, King Latinus' daughter Lavinia.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Sharae Deckard points out that, in Enlightenment literature, the irrational and uncultivated wasteland 'in need of domination' is anathema to ideas of paradise, which was generally a 'pastoral vision of bountiful nature ordered and working for Europeans'.<sup>76</sup>

The Victorians were no less apt to think of themselves as gardeners of the wilderness, and of the first stage of progress as the clearance of woodland. In his journal for 4<sup>th</sup> August 1838, James Brooke records a walk amid the trees of Borneo and looks forward to a time 'when the axe shall level the forest, and the plough turn the ground'.<sup>77</sup> Thomas Carlyle imagined a future in which Britain shared 'the fruit' of its conquest of 'some half or more of this Terraqueous Planet for the use of man'.<sup>78</sup> This horticultural ideal even found its way into the list of natural British characteristics. One writer in an 1868 edition of the *Edinburgh Review* claimed that in America, 'the Anglo-Saxon is everywhere the more successful pioneer and backwoodsman [than the Irishman, who is] ... certainly not to be found among the hunters and

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<sup>75</sup> Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, p. 134.

<sup>76</sup> Sharae Grace Deckard, 'Exploited Edens: Paradise Discourse in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature', PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2007, p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> James Brooke, 'Journal Extracts', quoted in Henry Keppel, *The Expedition to Borneo of H.M.S. Dido, 1843-46*, Vol. I, London, Chapman and Hall, 1847, p. 19.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Chartism', in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, Vol. IV, London, Chapman and Hall, 1899, p. 175.

squatters who prepare the forest for the husbandmen of more settled civilised habits'.<sup>79</sup> And a 1902 biography of Kipling referred to the British race as unsurpassable 'makers of gardens from deserts'.<sup>80</sup> According to Lamarckian theory, refinement of the landscape would in turn have positive repercussions for the settlers themselves, as one Australian frontierswoman postulated in a letter of 1850: 'I have been employing myself in making a flower-garden, for ... I think their contemplation, and ... cultivation has a humanising, or ... civilising effect on the mind, such as I can assure you we require in the Bush.'<sup>81</sup>

Huxley's rhetoric in *Evolution and Ethics* is further evidence of the persistent tendency to represent empire as husbandry or gardening. The period germane to this investigation was full of such allusions, from Lord Curzon's reminder that 'the Almighty has placed your hand on the greatest of His ploughs, in whose furrow the nations of the future are germinating and taking shape',<sup>82</sup> to John Buchan quoting Isaiah 51:3 in relation to British Africa in *A Lodge in the Wilderness*.<sup>83</sup> Correspondingly, those territories without British *imperium* were represented as a tangled wasteland to be either walled off or uprooted; hence the trend towards an exaggerated picture of the tropics as almost exclusively 'jungle', a word with connotations of emptiness and neglect.<sup>84</sup> The idea of jungle can be seen as a variation on an age-old theme that calls into question the right of a population to possess land they are supposedly unable to fructify.<sup>85</sup> Brian Street claims that imperial literature reconciled the notion of the tropics as a potentially abundant paradise and barren wilderness by claiming that the lowly inhabitants had 'failed to take full advantage of their environment; so they require the benevolent trusteeship of their superior white brothers to put them on the right path'.<sup>86</sup> McLaughlan tells us that the fashioning of the African interior as a landscape of absence and darkness accelerated around the time of the 1884-5 Berlin Conference, and was used to justify British intrusion.<sup>87</sup> This logic was most overtly and ruthlessly pursued, however, by the Congo Free State. There, native property rights were not recognised beyond the bounds of villages and adjoining fields, and did not pertain to the forest, with its wealth of rubber, resins, oils, and dyes. E.D. Morel records that, for the Free

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<sup>79</sup> 'The Irish Abroad', *Edinburgh Review*, 127, 260 (1868), pp. 509 & 523.

<sup>80</sup> G.F. Monkshood, *Rudyard Kipling: The Man and his Work*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., London, Greening and Co., 1902, p. 276.

<sup>81</sup> 'Two Letters from Australia', in *Household Words*, 1 (10<sup>th</sup> August 1850), p. 480.

<sup>82</sup> Lord Curzon, 'Speech of 16<sup>th</sup> November 1905', quoted in Sir Thomas Raleigh, *Lord Curzon in India*, London, MacMillan, 1906, pp. 589-90.

<sup>83</sup> Buchan, *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, p. 35.

<sup>84</sup> Writing of the literature of the Raj, Robin Jared Lewis argues that clichés, such as luxuriant jungles, were a means of asserting knowledge and control over an otherwise foreign environment. They 'encouraged English readers to believe that India's "mystery" and exoticism could be tamed, that Indians could be managed and made to bow to the rule of a "superior" race' ('The literature of the Raj', in Winks and Rush (eds.), p. 55).

<sup>85</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 25.

<sup>86</sup> Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 127.

<sup>87</sup> McLaughlan, *Re-imagining the Dark Continent*, p. 106.

State, 'The land was "vacant", i.e. without owners. Consequently, the "State" was the owner.'<sup>88</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle decried the 1887 act appropriating 'undeveloped' land in 'The Crime of the Congo' (1909):

Consider for a moment what this meant! No land in such a country is actually occupied by natives save the actual site of their villages, and the scanty fields of grain or manioc which surround them. Everywhere beyond these tiny patches extend the plains and forests which have been the ancestral wandering-places of the natives, and which contain the rubber, the camwood, the copal, the ivory, and the skins which are the sole objects of their commerce. At a single stroke of a pen in Brussels everything was taken from them, not only the country, but the produce of the country.<sup>89</sup>

Having been prevented from gathering these products for themselves, and from trading with anybody but the Free State, the natives were then coerced under pain of mutilation and death to harvest latex for their persecutors.

Details began to emerge during the 1890s of the ruthless methods employed by Léopold II and his Congo Free State, which led directly and indirectly to the deaths of an estimated eight million natives between 1885 and 1908.<sup>90</sup> In 1891, a few months after Conrad had steamed along the Congo, a trader related in a letter that 'The country is ruined ... [for about two hundred miles of river], there is not an inhabited village left – that is to say four days' steaming through a country formerly so rich, today entirely ruined'.<sup>91</sup> Doyle also describes a populous and bountiful forest transformed into a wilderness by the regime's vile injustices:

One cannot let these extracts pass without noting that Bolobo, the first place named by Stanley, has sunk in population from 40,000 to 7,000; that Irebu, called by Stanley the populous Venice of the Congo, had in 1903 a population of fifty; that the natives who used to follow Stanley, beseeching him to trade, now, according to Consul Casement, fly into the bush at the approach of a steamer...<sup>92</sup>

It wasn't until 1897 that the first newspaper articles recording the Free State's outrages started to appear, such as the one in *The Times* of 14<sup>th</sup> May, which drew on the testimony of a Danish missionary to expose an explicit policy of punitive amputations. Reverend K.V. Sjöblom described a collection of severed hands, smoked 'in order to preserve them for the commissaire – trophies of civilisation'.<sup>93</sup> Roger Casement was of the opinion that such practices were not

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<sup>88</sup> E.D. Morel, 'The Story of the Congo Free State', in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 167.

<sup>89</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Crime of the Congo*, New York, Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1909, p. 11.

<sup>90</sup> *The Fin de Siècle*, Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 135. One of the first accounts was written by the African-American George Washington Williams in July 1890. Brantlinger puts the figure at six million lives lost between 1888 and 1908 (*Rule of Darkness*, p.257).

<sup>91</sup> 'Letter by "O.S.", February 1891', translated in Edmund D. Morel, *King Leopold's Rule in Africa*, London, William Heinemann, 1904, p. 39.

<sup>92</sup> Doyle, *The Crime of the Congo*, p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> 'Affairs on the Upper Congo', *The Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1897, quoted in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 154.

indigenous but imported around 1890 with Léopold's system;<sup>94</sup> a far cry from the commonly held view of European influence in Africa as restorative. Although it was not British soldiers committing the Congo atrocities, such revelations contributed to the wholesale re-evaluation of imperialism that would take place in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>95</sup> Suddenly, the Empire was seen by some not as the means by which wild jungles were benevolently converted into tame idylls, but as a self-interested engine of ruination.

### **The advent of cultural relativism at the beginning of the twentieth century**

There arose in the early 1900s a serious challenge to the idea of a linear hierarchy of races and cultures, upon which the fervour of the New Imperialism had been founded. It was akin to the principle that some ancient Greek materialists had accepted two-and-a-half thousand years earlier, which the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur describes as the discovery that there is more than one 'culture': 'Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just others, that we ourselves are an "other" among others.'<sup>96</sup> It was perhaps most plainly expressed by the character Shelton in John Galsworthy's novel *The Island Pharisees* (1904): 'We always think our standards of right and wrong best for the whole world ... though, when you come to think of it, one man's meat is usually another man's poison. Look at nature.'<sup>97</sup> Arguably, the dawning of this concept of 'cultural relativism' had been imminent for some time. One can detect its irreverence for Western customs in an 1884 speech by the Liberal MP Henry Labouchere on the requirement for newly elected members of the House of Commons to swear an oath on the Bible, words that to him were 'just the same superstitious incantation as the trash of any Mumbo-Jumbo among African savages'.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, the anthropologist James Clifford pinpoints to around 1900 the moment when 'the ethnographic (relativist and plural) began to attain its modern currency', and the word 'culture' 'began to be used in the plural, suggesting a world of separate, distinctive, and equally meaningful ways of life'.<sup>99</sup> The sociologists Max Weber and Emile Durkheim reinforced the notion of discrete and unique cultures incompatible

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<sup>94</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 259.

<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, the atrocities in the Congo would continue for another forty-five years until the end of Belgian occupation (Booth, *The Doctor, the Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 274).

<sup>96</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales' (1965), quoted in Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*, p. 128.

<sup>97</sup> John Galsworthy, *The Island Pharisees*, London, William Heinemann, 1904, p. 144.

<sup>98</sup> 'Debate on the Parliamentary Oath', in *Hansard HC, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1884*, Vol. 284, c.c. 455, [website] <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1884/feb/11/parliamentary-oath-mr-bradlaugh>, (accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>99</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, London, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 92-3.



with a single scale of civilisation.<sup>100</sup> Any lingering convictions of the innate rationality of Anglo-Saxons were quashed amid the carnage of the Great War.<sup>101</sup>

At the forefront of developing cultural relativism in Britain was Conrad's friend and Liberal MP R.B. Cunningham Graham, whose 1897 essay 'Bloody Niggers' parodies Victorian assumptions regarding the centrality, originality, and purity of European mankind, and its God-given task to conquer the territories inhabited by 'niggers':<sup>102</sup>

In the consideration of the 'nigger' races which God sent into the world for whites (and chiefly Englishmen) to rule, 'niggers' of Africa occupy first place. I take it Africa was brought about in sheer ill-humour. No one can think it possible that an all-wise God (had he been in his sober senses) would create a land and fill it full of people destined to be replaced by other races from across the seas. Better, by far, to have made the 'niggers' white and let them by degrees all become Englishmen, than put us to the trouble of exterminating whole tribes of them, to carry out his plan ... Their land is ours, their cattle, fields, their houses, their poor utensils, arms, all that they have...<sup>103</sup>

Irony, and the inversion or combination of the previously stable opposites 'barbarism' and 'civilisation', was employed by those who campaigned against the exploitative rubber trade in the Congo, such as E.D. Morel, in his polemic *Red Rubber* (1906),<sup>104</sup> or Roger Casement, who complained that "The Civilisers" are now ... burning with hatred against me because I think their work is organised murder, far worse than anything the savages did before them'.<sup>105</sup> A further person of importance in this respect was the African explorer and travel writer Mary Kingsley, who objected in her *West African Studies* (1899) to 'the idea that those Africans are ... steeped in sin, or ... a lower or degraded race', 'either by environment, or microbes, or both'.<sup>106</sup> She believed that Africans had 'a culture of their own', with a unique path of development.<sup>107</sup>

In her book, Kingsley quotes at length Hugh Clifford's *East Coast Etchings* (1896) on the uncompromising character of British imperialism in Malaya:

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<sup>100</sup> Bowler, *Evolution*, p. 288.

<sup>101</sup> However, a consensus of complete racial and cultural equality, such as that attempted at the July 1911 Universal Race Congress in London, was scotched post-war by the emergence of the Commonwealth ideal (Rich, *Race and Empire*, pp. 61-3).

<sup>102</sup> R.B. Cunningham Graham defines this word ironically as signifying 'those of almost any race whose skins are darker than our own, and whose ideas of faith, of matrimony, banking, and therapeutics differ from those held by the dwellers of the meridian of Primrose Hill ... A plague on pigments, blackness is in the heart, not in the face, and poverty, no matter how it washes, still is black' ('Bloody Niggers', in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 158).

<sup>103</sup> Cunningham Graham, 'Bloody Niggers', in Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), p. 159.

<sup>104</sup> See E.D. Morel, *Red Rubber*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., Manchester and London, *The National Labour Press*, 1919, pp. 76 & 192.

<sup>105</sup> Roger Casement, quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trial of Sir Roger Casement*, London, 1960, p. cxxx.

<sup>106</sup> Mary H. Kingsley, *West African Studies*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1899, pp. 383 & 385.

<sup>107</sup> Mary H. Kingsley, 'Introductory Note to the Second Edition of *West African Studies*', p. xviii, quoted in Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 207.

In these days the boot of the ubiquitous white man leaves its mark on all the fair places of the earth, and scores thereon an even more gigantic track than that which affrighted Robinson Crusoe in his solitude. It crushes down the forests, beats out roads, strides across the rivers, kicks down native institutions, and generally tramples on the growths of natives and the works of primitive man, reducing all things to that dead level of conventionality which we call civilisation.<sup>108</sup>

Clifford foreruns an attitude that would become increasingly widespread during the first decade of the twentieth century, that imperialism was a violent and regressive force, rather than positive and productive. As E.M. Forster wrote in *Howards End* (1910), ‘the Imperialist is not what he thinks or seems. He is a destroyer.’<sup>109</sup> This was partly due to the emerging accounts of European atrocities in various parts of the globe. Of the Congo, Roger Casement allegedly wrote to his friend Morel, ‘what a hell on earth our own white race has made...’<sup>110</sup> But it was also a result of the growing influence of left-wing thinkers like J.A. Hobson, who represented British expansionism in *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) as the corruption of democratic civilisation, not its expression.

### **Domestic decadence and regenerative imperialism in fiction**

Regarding British domestic society, the judgement of Victorian-Edwardian imperial romance is almost entirely negative. David Miller informs us that W.H. Hudson ‘detested cities’,<sup>111</sup> and Rima’s fate in *Green Mansions* represents the threat to an earthly paradise posed by ‘man’s alienation from the natural order via mechanistic doctrines and “civilisation”’.<sup>112</sup> Abel is scornful of the ‘artificial social state’ that pertains in Caracas, ‘with its old-world vices, its idle political passions, its empty round of gaieties’, and of the unnamed woman he left behind, who ‘could never experience such feelings as these and return to nature as I was doing’ (*GM*, 57 & 134-5). Where indigenes and colonisers collide, natives intoxicated by ‘the white man’s more potent poisons’ manifest the corruption of ‘civilised’ ways. There is even a suggestion that the uncomplicated brutality of the Indian is preferable to Europeans’ petty schemes: “‘The Indian kills his enemy, but the white man takes his gold, and that is worse than death.’” (*GM*, 262)

Arthur Conan Doyle’s portrayal of London and its population in *The Lost World* is enough to suggest he shared the pessimism of Hudson regarding metropolitan culture. The source of the problem according to Lord John Roxton is a lack of risk and ‘manly games’ in modern life: “‘We’re all gettin’ a deal too soft and dull and comfy’” (*LW*, 59 & 61). Challenger implies the lack of decent education is to blame (31 & 37), and grumbles about the “‘flesh-pots

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<sup>108</sup> Hugh Clifford, *East Coast Etchings*, quoted in Kingsley, *West African Studies*, p. 379.

<sup>109</sup> E.M. Forster, *Howards End*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1991, p. 339.

<sup>110</sup> Roger Casement, ‘The 1903 Diary’, quoted in Peter Singleton-Gates and Maurice Girodias, *The Black Diaries of Roger Casement*, New York, 1959, p. 188.

<sup>111</sup> Miller, *W.H. Hudson and the Elusive Paradise*, p. 8.

<sup>112</sup> Miller, p. 175.

of civilisation” (134). The result is a generation of young men who attend the ‘Savage Club’ (17) and live in ‘rookeries’ (55); not to mention public meetings which resemble ‘the uproar of the carnivora cage when the step of the bucket-bearing keeper is heard in the distance’ (47), and are ‘likely to become more lively than harmonious’ (193). The inhabitants of Maple White Land are in many ways more estimable, be they the alert and powerful ape-men (151) or the ‘wiry, active, and well-built’ Indians, whose poisoned arrows surpass European bullets in efficacy (163 & 178).

Some critics interpret this dissatisfaction, in combination with admiration for a degree of ‘savagery’, as underpinning in their writing a kind of *avant-garde* cultural relativism and veiled subversion of British imperialism. Bivona claims that, unlike Edmund Burke at the end of the eighteenth century, late-nineteenth-century authors were no longer able to define civilisation in straight opposition to savagery. He cites Haggard, Conrad, and Hardy as three writers who look beyond a simple hierarchy of the civilised and primitive.<sup>113</sup> According to Andrea White, the celebration of the ‘savage’ by Haggard and Stevenson, and their antagonism towards modern civilisation sounds an unprecedentedly ‘contentious note’, jarring with the assumed outcome of both imperial policy and adventure fiction that the hero would successfully export ‘the English way of life, returning intact to a better life than possible in the wilderness’.<sup>114</sup> She claims these writers are the first to depict natives as the victims rather than the perpetrators of injustice.<sup>115</sup> For Deborah Denenholz Morse, it is the stories of Kipling, Doyle, and W.W. Jacobs that unusually showcase the European imperialist himself, not the colonial ‘Other’, as ‘the unruly beast’.<sup>116</sup>

I do not dispute that some of these writers foreshadow the more relativistic outlook of ensuing decades, but it is important to note that disdain for a corrupt society has long been a motivating factor in quest romances, and continued to be in late-nineteenth-century British literature. In Haggard’s eyes, the average European was unnaturally decadent, but his fiction celebrates the existence of a masterful few, able to regulate savagery and redeem civilisation. As he declared in a 1912 letter to Theodore Roosevelt, the result of Western society’s excess of sympathy was that ‘the civilised world wallows in a slough worse perhaps than the primeval mud of the savage’, however ‘it is possible if not probable that it may be dragged from the slough, cleansed, and clothed in white garments’.<sup>117</sup> With a few exceptions, the vast majority of the period’s jungle novels end, not with the hero’s continued estrangement, but his return to civilisation.

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<sup>113</sup> Bivona, *Desire and contradiction*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>114</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, pp. 82-83, 94, & 97.

<sup>115</sup> White, pp. 92-93.

<sup>116</sup> Deborah Denenholz Morse, “‘The Mark of the Beast’: Animals as Sites of Imperial Encounter from *Wuthering Heights* to *Green Mansions*”, in *Victorian Animal Dreams*, p. 181.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Letter to Theodore Roosevelt, June 1912’, quoted in Stiebel, *Imagining Africa*, p. 36.

In the introduction to Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* (1887), the eponymous hero confesses to longing for primitive and wild Africa, rather than the cultured surroundings and mankind of England:

I longed once more to throw myself into the arms of Nature. Not the Nature which you know, the Nature that waves in well-kept woods and smiles out in corn-fields, but Nature as she was in the age when creation was complete, undefiled as yet by any human sinks of sweltering humanity. I would go again where the wild game was, back to the land, whereof none know the history, back to the savages, whom I love.<sup>118</sup>

In doing so, Quatermain was in line with the author's own sympathies. Haggard wrote in an 1877 letter to his mother that he had come to enjoy his life on the hoof in the Transvaal: 'It is a savage kind of existence but it certainly has attractions, shooting your own dinner and cooking it – I can hardly sleep in a house now, it seems to stifle one.'<sup>119</sup> This notion of civilisation as constrictive and lacking rigour is a consistent theme of Haggard's writing. Again in *Allan Quatermain*, the narrator complains that hospitals exist because 'we breed the sickly people who fill them. In a savage land they do not exist'.<sup>120</sup> What Haggard approved of in native societies, namely toughness, abstinence, hierarchy, and militarism, he found wanting at home.<sup>121</sup>

In terms of imperial policy, like Mary Kingsley, Haggard disliked centrally directed anglicisation, preferring colonial trusteeship and the shielding of native culture from the customs of the British populace. He also objects to the conceptual opposition of European civilisation and African savagery, which he sees as a mechanism to justify conquest.<sup>122</sup> 'Civilisation is only savagery silver-gilt,' Allan Quatermain avers.<sup>123</sup> And in the preface to *Nada the Lily* (1892), Haggard points out the hypocrisy of European revulsion at Zulu atrocities 'in this polite age of melanite and torpedoes' (NL, 6). However, Ridley claims that, while Haggard may express a genuine sympathy for the Zulus and a genuine disdain for democracy, the superiority of his heroes demonstrates that a 'contempt for Africa lurks behind even this

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<sup>118</sup> Haggard, *Allan Quatermain*, p. 7.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Lilius Rider Haggard, *The Cloak That I Left*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1951, p. 73.

<sup>120</sup> Haggard, *Allan Quatermain*, p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, pp. 87-88. Haggard was inclined to wax lyrical about the benefits to colonists of a natural existence. In *Allan's Wife* (1889), Quatermain speculates about the increase in his affection for his wife while living in Natal: 'Was it the long years of communing with Nature that had endowed her with such peculiar grace, the grace we find in opening flowers and budding trees?' (H. Rider Haggard, *Allan's Wife*, New York, M.J. Ivers and Co., 1889, p. 116.) However, Street claims that this does not constitute a total rejection of civilisation: '[Haggard's] literary heritage and romantic bent inclined him to extol the virtues of the natural setting, but his cultural heritage and rational belief in progress inclined him to extol the "civilised" setting.' (Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 120.)

<sup>122</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *Child of the Storm*, London, New York, Toronto, and Melbourne, Cassell and Co., 1913, p. 90: 'Now, let him who is highly cultured take up a stone to throw at the poor, untaught Zulu, which I notice the most dissolute and drunken wretch of a white man is often ready to do, generally because he covets his land, his labour, or whatever else may be his.'

<sup>123</sup> Haggard, *Allan Quatermain*, p. 4.

superficially anti-Western attitude'.<sup>124</sup> Brian Street likewise points to the incorruptibility of Haggard's savage nobles, and their ultimate mastery of the native realm, as evidence that the author subscribed to the doctrine of imperial progress.<sup>125</sup> To echo Benita Parry's criticism of Conrad, Haggard's dissent from the notion of inherent native inferiority strikes me as limited, blunting any intended censure of imperialism. In *Child of the Storm* (1913), Allan Quatermain ponders, 'by what exact right do we call people like the Zulus savages? Setting aside the habit of polygamy ... they have a social system not unlike our own ... Where they differ from us mainly is that they do not get drunk until the white man teaches them to do so'; nonetheless, he goes on to compare the Zulus with Europeans of 'a few generations ago'. He claims to be making the point that 'a clever man or woman among the people whom we call savages is in all essentials very much the same as a clever man or woman anywhere else ... Ability is the gift of Nature, and that universal mother sheds her favours impartially over all who breathe.' However, he continues: 'No, not quite impartially, perhaps, for the old Greeks and others were examples to the contrary. Still, the general rule obtains.'<sup>126</sup> Ultimately, Haggard declines to discount altogether British superiority. There may be no 'great gulf fixed' between 'savages' and the 'children of light', but there is still a gulf, and Quatermain finds its narrowness 'depressing'.<sup>127</sup>

It is certainly correct to say that Haggard regretted the effect of modern culture on the peoples and landscape of southern Africa that he witnessed between 1875 and 1881, and saw it as the end of a heroic age much like that in ancient Greek mythology.<sup>128</sup> In a 1914 letter to the Colonial Secretary Lewis Harcourt, he called the Zulus 'a bewildered people that we have broken and never tried to mend'.<sup>129</sup> And in his preface to *Child of the Storm*, he imagines an old warrior surveying 'men and women of the Zulu blood passing homeward from the cities and the mines, bemused, some of them, with the white man's smuggled liquor, grotesque with the white man's cast-off garments, hiding, perhaps, in their blankets examples of the white man's doubtful photographs'.<sup>130</sup> In his eyes, Africa should be like a preserve of savagery, a place where 'the non-modern should be allowed to survive, providing a healthy antidote to European modernity'.<sup>131</sup> However, I would stop short of endorsing Andrea White's claim that Haggard turned the adventure genre against the imperialism it had previously promoted, lighting the way

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<sup>124</sup> Ridley, *Images of Imperial Rule*, p. 20.

<sup>125</sup> Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 20.

<sup>126</sup> Haggard, *Child of the Storm*, pp. 89-91. Rich (*Race and Empire*, p. 45) notes that it was possible for an early cultural relativist like Harry Johnston to attack the notion of permanent black inferiority while upholding the existence of a supreme white race.

<sup>127</sup> Haggard, *Allan Quatermain*, p. 4.

<sup>128</sup> Panesar, 'Worlds Elsewhere', p. 30. According to White, he especially mourned the loss of 'native hierarchies and systems of obedience' (*Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 91).

<sup>129</sup> 'Letter to the Rt. Hon. Lewis Harcourt, June 1914', quoted in Stiebel, *Imagining Africa*, p. 31.

<sup>130</sup> Haggard, *Child of the Storm*, p. vi.

<sup>131</sup> Daly, 'Colonialism and Popular Literature', in *Modernism and Colonialism*, p. 35.

for modernists like Lawrence and Yeats, and that the popularity of his fiction is a sign this subversion was either unnoticed or supported by his readership.<sup>132</sup>

I think it is necessary to distinguish between Haggard's notion of British culture, which he associated with bourgeois, mercantile values, and his vision of imperialism, which sought regeneration by reasserting the natural state of things. In his mind, primitivism did not prohibit genuine progress but instigated it, and he perceived in the Zulus 'a spirit which can be led to higher things'.<sup>133</sup> He also believed that various ruined settlements, such as Great Zimbabwe, were evidence that the prehistoric inhabitants of Africa had been an advanced, even a white race.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, the guardianship of the British nobility represented merely the return of the former *status-quo*, and with it the rejuvenation of the degraded land: 'Those wastes, now so dismal and desolate, are at no distant date destined to support and enrich a large population ... This vast land will one day be the garden of Africa, the land of gems and gold, of oil and corn, of steam-ploughs and railways.'<sup>135</sup> Street notes that when Haggard's heroes depart a native 'otherworld' at the end of a novel, they generally leave it under the stewardship of a trustworthy European;<sup>136</sup> such as Sir Henry Curtis in *Allan Quatermain*, who sees it as his 'sacred duty' to preserve in Zu-Vendis 'the blessings of comparative barbarism' from 'speculators, tourists, politicians and teachers', and from the 'general demoralisation which chiefly mark[s] the progress of civilisation amongst unsophisticated peoples'.<sup>137</sup> Haggard may not have been as enthusiastic an imperialist as his friend Kipling, but he did believe in 'a divine right of a great civilising people ... in their divine mission'.<sup>138</sup>

Disapprobation of domestic civilisation was a consistent theme in Kipling's writing also. His first novel, *The Light That Failed* (1890), contains a group of war correspondents between imperial missions, leading a dreary, dissolute existence in feminised London. The scenario is similar to that of a short story published around the same time, 'A Conference of the Powers', which records an encounter in London between three veterans of jungle warfare in Burma and a well-known author called Cleever, who has 'never in the body moved ten miles from his fellows' ('CP', 23). The experiences of a soldier nicknamed 'The Infant' show up home-grown Englishmen as unworldly, fainthearted, and squeamish:

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<sup>132</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>133</sup> 'Letter to the Rt. Hon. Lewis Harcourt, June 1914', quoted in Stiebel, *Imagining Africa*, p. 31.

<sup>134</sup> Stiebel, *Imagining Africa*, p. 29. Haggard's novel *She* contains numerous suggestions of ancient white civilisations in Africa.

<sup>135</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *A Farmer's Year*, London, New York, and Bombay, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899, p. 399.

<sup>136</sup> Street, *The savage in literature*, p. 123.

<sup>137</sup> Haggard, *Allan Quatermain*, pp. 276-77.

<sup>138</sup> 'Speech to the Anglo-African Writers' Club, May 1898', quoted in White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 89.

Then said Cleever, 'I can't understand. Why should you have seen and done all these things before you have cut your wisdom-teeth?'  
 'Don't know,' said The Infant apologetically. 'I haven't seen much – only Burmese jungle.'  
 'And dead men, and war, and power, and responsibility,' said Cleever, under his breath. ('CP', 31)

A dissipating urban environment is to blame for the reverses of the Boer War in Kipling's 1902 poem 'The Islanders', which cites 'Sons of the sheltered city – unmade, unhandled, unmeet'.<sup>139</sup> In *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), a Roman Empire beset by external barbarism and internal decadence stands in for its modern British equivalent. And a 1909 letter to Cecil Rhodes, written from Cape Town, complains that 'England is a stuffy little place, mentally, morally, and physically'.<sup>140</sup> Kipling was equally, if not more displeased by American culture, writing in 1893: 'Au fond it's barbarism – barbarism plus telephone, electric light, rail and suffrage but all the more terrible for that very reason.'<sup>141</sup> In particular, he had been horrified by his visit to Chicago in 1889, and all the references he heard there to modern technology as 'progress':<sup>142</sup> 'Having seen it, I urgently desire never to see it again. It is inhabited by savages.'<sup>143</sup>

Peter Morey points to the tendency to mingle notions of civilisation and savagery, not to mention humanity and animality, as evidence that Kipling's stories often 'challenge ... those easy binarisms which are the basis of racial-imperial hierarchies'.<sup>144</sup> However, I would argue that Kipling maintains a quite robust division between redeemed and corrupt nature.<sup>145</sup> The former is a state of lawful struggle overseen by superior mankind, as it purportedly was in the British Raj. In *The Jungle Books*, the real reason why the animals are forbidden to eat Man is that 'man-killing means, sooner or later, the arrival of white men on elephants, with guns, and hundreds of brown men with gongs and rockets and torches. Then everybody in the jungle suffers.' (JB1, 13) When Mowgli first hears of 'the English', Messua explains, "They be white, and it is said that they govern all the land, and do not suffer people to burn or beat each other without witnesses." (JB2, 199) This is the role fulfilled by Gisborne in 'In the Rukh' ('IR', 184), Hicksey in 'A Conference of the Powers' ('CP', 30), and John Chinn in 'The Tomb of His Ancestors' ('a

<sup>139</sup> Rudyard Kipling, 'The Islanders', *The Kipling Society*, [website] [http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems\\_islanders.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_islanders.htm), (accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2017).

<sup>140</sup> 'Letter to Cecil Rhodes, 1909', quoted in Green, *Dreams of Adventure*, p. 286.

<sup>141</sup> 'Letter to W.E. Henley, January 1893', in *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, Vol. II, Thomas Pinney (ed.), Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 86.

<sup>142</sup> Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 177.

<sup>143</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea: Letters of Travel*, Vol. II, New York, Doubleday and McClure Company, 1899, p. 139.

<sup>144</sup> Peter Morey, *Fictions of India: Narrative and Power*, quoted in *Victorian Animal Dreams*, Morse and Danahay (eds.), p. 193.

<sup>145</sup> In this, I am in agreement with W.H. Auden, who thought Kipling's notion of 'civilisation (and consciousness) is a little citadel of light surrounded by a great darkness full of malignant forces and only maintained through the centuries by everlasting vigilance, will-power and self-sacrifice' ('The Poet of the Encirclement', *Literary Opinion in America*, Morton Zabel (ed.), New York, Harper, 1962, I.260).

word spoken in haste before mess became the dread unappealable law of villages beyond the smoky hills' ('THA', 113)).

Examples of corrupt nature include London, the Indian village, and the jungle bereft of proper, human authority, hence the implicit consonance between tigers and methodical 'clerks in an office' ('THA', 106); or, between the villagers and the wolf pack in Mowgli's absence (*JB1*, 69). Mowgli's interchange of jungle and village establishes an affinity between beasts and humans, but it also stresses the importance of mastering the words and laws of both realms ("Now I am as silly and dumb [in the village] as a man would be with us in the jungle" (*JB1*, 58)). Kipling appears quite comfortable with the idea of natives and Europeans abiding by different philosophies,<sup>146</sup> as long as the British are the ultimate arbiters of justice. In this way, it is possible to reconcile Kipling's reputation as 'Rhodes's wordsmith'<sup>147</sup> with his dislike of British domestic culture and of the Western-educated Hindu, whom he regarded as a 'hybrid university-trained mule'.<sup>148</sup> Contrary to Morey's contention, Kipling's inversion of culture and barbarism does not amount to an attack on imperialist ideology, because his own colonial creed entails not the anglicisation of nature and natural mankind, but the reformation of both poles. The civilised ideal is that which John Chinn the First brought to the ferocious, jungle-dwelling Bhil when he 'went into his country, lived with him, learned his language, shot the deer that stole his poor crops, and won his confidence, so that some Bhils learned to plough and sow, while others were coaxed into the Company's service to police their friends' ('THA', 99). As Kipling suggested in an 1897 letter to Haggard: 'the fact that [the British] do not [use their fleet to "trample the guts out of the rest of the world"] seems to show that even if we aren't very civilised, we're about the one power with a glimmering of civilisation in us. As you say, we've always had it somewhere in our composition.'<sup>149</sup> Being endowed with this innate quality, it falls to the pioneering members of the British race to return 'lesser breeds without the Law'<sup>150</sup> to the fold of natural justice.<sup>151</sup>

The prominence that Kipling gives to the jungle within his representation of India encourages the reader to see the two as synonymous.<sup>152</sup> 'In the *Rukh*' opens by asserting that, 'Of the wheels of public service that turn under the Indian Government, there is none more

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<sup>146</sup> For example, from the perspective of the Bhils in 'The Tombs of His Ancestors', European logic is shown to be merely 'the foolish white world which has no eyes' ('THA', 113).

<sup>147</sup> Green, *Dreams of Adventure*, p. 285.

<sup>148</sup> Rudyard Kipling, 'Tods' Amendment', in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, p. 156.

<sup>149</sup> 'Letter to H. Rider Haggard, July 1897', quoted in Higgins, *Rider Haggard*, p. 167.

<sup>150</sup> Rudyard Kipling, 'Recessional', *Poetry Foundation*, [website] [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org), (accessed 4<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>151</sup> Although, in doing so, the redeemers may sometimes fall foul of human justice: 'The men who run ahead of the cars of Decency and Propriety, and make the jungle ways straight, cannot be judged in the same manner as the stay-at-home folk of the ranks of the regular *Tchin*' (Rudyard Kipling, 'Georgie Porgie', in *Life's Handicap*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1899, p. 327).

<sup>152</sup> Note that, just as in the Hindu tradition, the killing of cattle is profane for Mowgli in the jungle (*JB1*, 20). Also, in the jungle's creation myth, the rule of Tha is followed by that of the First of Tigers (*JB2*, 162), which evokes the first of the Mughal emperors, Babur 'the Tiger'.



important than the Department of Woods and Forests' (157). According to the analogy, the members of the Imperial Civil Service are foresters overseeing the regeneration of the country. A keen horticulturalist himself, especially at Bateman's in later life, Kipling saw gardening as essential to the British identity. For example, in his poem 'The Glory of the Garden' (1910), he depicts England as a garden, and its people as 'the gardeners, the men and "prentice boys"', just as Adam had been in the beginning.<sup>153</sup> In this manner, Kipling transfers to the administrators of India intimations of the divine. In *The Jungle Books*, the Gond whom the villagers consult is aware that 'when the jungle moves only white men can hope to turn it aside' (JB2, 211). Gisborne is merely compared to a wise monarch acquainting himself with 'the polity of the jungle' and dispensing justice to 'the subjects of his kingdom' ('IR', 157-9), his sense of ownership moderated by feelings of service; but, in Muller, British authority approaches godhood ("Yes, I work miracles, and, by Gott, dey come off too." ('IR', 175 & 185)), and attains it as John Chinn in 'The Tomb of His Ancestors'. The Bhils see John as the prophesied reincarnation of his celestial, tiger-riding ancestor 'Jan Chinn', who pacified and humanised them; he is 'a demi-god twice born – tutelary deity of their land and people' ('THA', 114), and John does nothing to discourage their devotion.

It is not quite true to say of Kipling, as Angus Wilson does in *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, that he senses India as a Garden of Eden before the Fall.<sup>154</sup> Kipling's image of the jungle and its menagerie of diverse creatures is edenic, but it represents a Raj the British had allegedly returned to docility after a previous 'Lapse'. According to Heather Schell, 'Tigers had long symbolised both India and her ruling class, in the eyes of the Moghuls as well as the British'; therefore, the killing of a man by the First of the Tigers in 'How Fear Came' can be seen as emblematic of the 1806 or 1857 mutinies<sup>155</sup> and their vengeful aftermaths ("Thou hast taught Man to kill!" (JB2, 166)). Ridley draws attention to this allegorical component of 'In the *Rukh*':

The Department [of Woods and Forests] carries out on the Indian landscape precisely the same work which the colonial administrators and soldiers perform in the chaotic human environment of warring and rebellious groups. The vital cycle of the forest is dependent on the colonising work of the Department, just as the colourful pageant of Indian life depends on the peace-giving presence of the British. The Department has transformed 'denuded hillsides, dry gullies, aching ravines' into a true order, in which primitive nature and man work together. Gisborne, the Forest Officer, smiles on his forest like God in the first garden: he has made it and he knows it to be good ... The

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<sup>153</sup> Rudyard Kipling, 'The Glory of the Garden', *The Kipling Society Archive*, [website] [http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems\\_garden.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_garden.htm), (accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>154</sup> Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, London, Pimlico, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>155</sup> Schell, 'Tiger Tales', in *Victorian Animal Dreams*, p. 240. According to Brantlinger (*Rule of Darkness*, p. 217), the traditional villains of these revolts, Tipu Sultan and Nana Sahib, have often been equated with tigers.

aesthetic vision of the primitive, both Mowgli and the forest, is inseparable from Kipling's pride in the achievements of British rule.<sup>156</sup>

He perhaps acquired this habit of understanding the country from his father, Lockwood Kipling, who wrote in *Man and Beast of India* (1891) that "The shadow of evil days of anarchy, disorder, and rapine has been lately cleared away and given place to an era of security, when, as the country proverb says, "the tiger and the goat drink from one ghat".<sup>157</sup> As with the trees and beasts of the forest, the British have purportedly created a regimented and compliant populace resembling Mowgli, delivered from the original sin of decadent Hindu culture and returned to noble savagery under the auspices of the Department. The ending of 'In the *Rukh*' suggests to Jane Hotchkiss that 'Mowgli's half-wild, brown descendants will flourish like the trees the British are planting to repair the carelessness of past centuries', leading to the 'reboisement of all India'.<sup>158</sup>

Of all the writers of tropical nature who were Conrad's contemporaries, perhaps Robert Louis Stevenson and H.G. Wells best fit the criteria of cultural relativists. These writers display a quite conventional aversion to domestic civilisation and the romanticisation of nature, but they tend not to offset this criticism with a redemptive imperialism. Stevenson claimed to despise city-living. In his *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* (1879), he rejoices at having 'escaped out of the Bastille of civilisation'.<sup>159</sup> For him, modernity was not only a 'poison bad world for the romancer',<sup>160</sup> but 'a hollow fraud' in general: 'all the fun of life is lost by it, all it gains is that a larger number of persons can continue to be contemporaneously unhappy on the surface of the globe'.<sup>161</sup> There is also the suggestion in his writing of a correlation between the teeming metropolis and the tropics. Nicholas Daly claims that writers like Stevenson talked about their readership, newly expanded by the 1870 Education Act, as 'a veritable virgin continent of readers, an enormous untapped resource' because it was both to be exploited and feared as a hostile and overwhelming force.<sup>162</sup> Such menace is certainly evident in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), where the upright Jekyll is transformed into the loutish and

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<sup>156</sup> Ridley, *Images of Imperial Rule*, p. 64. Don Randall makes the similar claim that Mowgli's *Bildungsroman* is 'an empire-affirming allegorisation of the history of British India' (*Kipling's Imperial Boy: Adolescence and Cultural Hybridity*, Hampshire, Palgrave, 2000, p. 67).

<sup>157</sup> John Lockwood Kipling, *Man and Beast in India: A Popular Sketch of Indian Animals in Their Relations with the People*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1904, p. 14.

<sup>158</sup> Hotchkiss, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 442.

<sup>159</sup> R.L. Stevenson, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*, Boston, Herbert B. Turner and Co., 1903, p. 131.

<sup>160</sup> 'Letter to Sidney Colvin, January 1892', in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Sidney Colvin (ed.), Vol. IV, p. 12.

<sup>161</sup> 'Letter to Mrs Charles Fairchild, September 1890', in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Sidney Colvin (ed.), Vol. III, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911, p. 215. In 'Falesá', Wiltshire describes England as, in reality, 'a nasty, cold, muddy hole, with not enough light to see to read by' ('Falesá', 17).

<sup>162</sup> Daly, in *Modernism and Colonialism*, Begam and Valdez (eds.), pp. 23-24. And vice versa, James Bryce declared in his 1902 Romanes lecture that globalisation had consigned 'hitherto backward nations' to the role of a worldwide working class ("The Relations of the Advanced and the Backward Races of Mankind" (1902), quoted in Rich, *Race and Empire*, p. 21).

‘apelike’ Hyde, who then clubs a Member of Parliament to death with a cane carved from a ‘rare and very tough and heavy wood’.<sup>163</sup> Although some critics detect in Stevenson’s portrayal of this crime little more than class fear and the ‘recoil’ of colonial savagery on the heart of civilisation,<sup>164</sup> the status of Jekyll and his ‘bringing the jungle to a West End London street’<sup>165</sup> lends the novel a subversive air.

Stevenson’s early correspondence from the Pacific does betray an idealisation of Polynesia as a haven from modernity and of the islanders as ‘God’s sweetest works’.<sup>166</sup> However, he was not satisfied by the dialectic of civilisation and savagery, writing in the plural of ‘barbarisms and civilisations’,<sup>167</sup> which he distributes evenly among his European and Polynesian characters. Jolly claims that Stevenson became ‘increasingly interested in investigating Pacific societies on their own terms’,<sup>168</sup> and aware of individual natives’ foibles as ‘ordinary men’.<sup>169</sup> He defied the judgement of his peers in the domestic literary sphere that the Pacific could not be the setting for important literature, nor its natives the protagonists, because they were too outlandish.

Stevenson was a keen gardener, but his letters record the struggle he faced in eradicating the thorny Sensitive plant (*mimosa pudica*) from his estate at Vailima, and an awareness that any triumph of his over nature would be short-lived:

The unconcealed vitality of these vegetables, their exuberant number and strength, the attempts – I can use no other word – of lianas to enwrap and capture the intruder, the awful silence; the knowledge that all my efforts are only like the performance of an actor, the thing of a moment, and the wood will silently and swiftly heal them up with fresh effervescence ... the whole silent battle, murder and slow death of the contending forest – weighs upon the imagination.<sup>170</sup>

He was also a sceptic of imperialism, and particularly disapproved of the European and American influence on Samoa, which he describes as ‘this dance of folly and injustice and unconscious rapacity’.<sup>171</sup> Like Conrad, he uses the conventions of imperial romance to query the expansionism the genre traditionally advocated, for the British in his *South Sea Tales* are far from flawless heroes. According to Brantlinger, those stories are ‘as sceptical about the influences of white civilisation on primitive societies as anything Conrad wrote’; and ‘The Beach of Falesá’ in

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<sup>163</sup> R.L. Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, London and Glasgow, Collins Clear-type Press, c. 1920s, p. 89.

<sup>164</sup> Daly, in *Modernism and Colonialism*, p. 30; and Kershner, *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 439.

<sup>165</sup> Morse, in *Victorian Animal Dreams*, p. 187.

<sup>166</sup> ‘Letter to Charles Baxter, May 1889’, in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Vol. III, p. 141.

<sup>167</sup> ‘Letter to Sidney Colvin, June 1889’, in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Vol. III, p. 154.

<sup>168</sup> Jolly, ‘Stevenson and the Pacific’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 119.

<sup>169</sup> ‘Letter to Sidney Colvin, September 1891’, in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Vol. III, p. 337. Roslyn Jolly, ‘Introduction to the 1996 Oxford World’s Classics Edition of *South Sea Tales*’, p. xiii.

<sup>170</sup> R.L. Stevenson, ‘Letter to Sidney Colvin, November 1890’, in *Vailima Letters*, p. 16.

<sup>171</sup> ‘Letter to Sidney Colvin, September 1891’, in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Vol. III, p. 334.

particular links the drive for profits to degeneracy and parasitism.<sup>172</sup> Unconditional ideals and heroes are difficult to come by on the island of Falesá. The villainous character of Case certainly has a ruinous effect on other Europeans, like Randall, and on the island's society generally by exacerbating native superstitions for his own gain. It is notable that, like Kurtz, 'Case would have passed muster in a city': 'He could speak, when he chose, fit for a drawing-room; and when he chose he could blaspheme worse than a Yankee boatswain, and talk smart to sicken a Kanaka' ('Falesá', 5). Even the narrator and central character, Wiltshire, is morally ambivalent. He claims, "'I've come here to do [the natives] good, and bring them civilisation'" (23), but he also believes he has a right as a white man to do what he pleases (24). Ultimately, he fulfils the conventional criteria of an imperial hero by liberating Falesá from the tyranny of Case, but there is no guarantee that he will subvert his personal interest in the same way again: 'though I did well in Falesá, I was half glad when the firm moved me on to another station, where I was under no kind of a pledge and could look my balances in the face' (70).

H.G. Wells was yet another author who thought of contemporary European civilisation not as the apogee of reason but a symptom, if not the cause, of social decline. In *The Time Machine*, both the narrator and the Time Traveller view Londoners of their own age as 'decadent humanity', and their civilisation 'only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end' (*TM*, 91). The scientist's experiments using the time machine corroborate his reservations about the fragility of modern society and the human species, for they reveal a future in which "'all the activity, all the traditions, the complex organisations, the nations, languages, literatures, aspirations, even the mere memory of Man as I knew him, had been swept out of existence'" (61). Wells expanded on this theme in *Tono-Bungay*, a novel which is in essence a critique of the institutions of British civilisation, portraying them as ruinous distortions of mankind's savage nature. Early on, George Ponderevo sets out the thesis of his biography: 'I want ... to say things I have come to feel intensely of the laws, traditions, usages and ideas we call society, and how we poor individuals get driven and lured and stranded among these windy, perplexing shoals and channels' (*TB*, 12).<sup>173</sup>

The first institution that comes under attack in *Tono-Bungay* is the class system. George is in a good position to appraise it because he has been 'a native in many social countries' (9), from the oozing 'gutter waste' to the godlike capitalist class (231). He particularly reviles plebeian obeisance towards a corrupt aristocracy. Nannie has suppressed her own reproductive

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<sup>172</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, pp. 39-40. The imperial scepticism of 'Falesá' has perhaps been underestimated due to the fact that it wasn't published exactly as Stevenson intended until relatively recently.

<sup>173</sup> Without doubt the character is reflecting the author's own views of human morality, which Wells believed was not a deep-seated instinct but makeshift 'padding', designed 'to keep the round Palaeolithic savage in the square hole of the civilised state' ('Human Evolution: An Artificial Process', in *H.G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*, Philmus and Hughes (eds.), Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975, p. 217).

instincts to raise the nobility's children (32-3), like Archie and Beatrice, who personify both the nobility's obsession with rules, hierarchy, and honour, as well as the amorality and weakness concealed by these ideals (40-1). George believes law and order in general to be a pyramid scheme ripe for collapse, 'a swelling, thinning bubble of assurances' given by bankers and policemen: "They couldn't for a moment "make good" if the quarter of what they guarantee was demanded of them. The whole of this modern mercantile investing civilisation is indeed such stuff as dreams are made of.' (221-2) Ponderevo also inveighs against the sterilisation of sexual passion by Edwardian decorum, which forces his artist friend Ewart to publicly stifle his natural desires, while gratifying them covertly with prostitutes (110). A similar, misguided sense of propriety suffocates George's own marriage to Marion, whose fastidiousness develops into 'an absolute perversion of instinct' (164). 'Love, like everything else in this immense process of social disorganisation in which we live, is a thing adrift, a fruitless thing broken away from its connections,' he later reflects (372). All these bewildering restrictions on the free expression of man's true nature do not have an improving effect on the Ponderevos, but a degenerating one. George is reduced to a feral state by London's inhibitions (190), making him appear 'a busy blackbeetle in a crack in the floor' (138). For Wells, it is obvious what constitutes the quap at the heart of modern society, the root of all this bewildering deception and degradation. When Ewart is commissioned by George to create an advertisement, he produces a picture of two beavers with a likeness to the Ponderevos, and calls it 'Modern Commerce' (161). Far from being the great romance that Ted claims, business is "'just on all fours with the rest of things, only more so'" (157).

### **Stirring from the dream of European civilisation in Conrad's forest**

What Conrad appears to have reviled about modern European civilisation is its requirement that the populace not be challenged, that they should subvert their individuality and exist as passive, mindless cogs within the greater mechanism of society. They are the "less tried successors" of seventeenth-century adventurers, who explored and traded due to "an impulse beating in the blood" (*LJ*, 164), without being compelled by a rapacious social system.<sup>174</sup> Carlier and Kayerts are two such 'perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organisation of civilised crowds' ('Outpost', 235):

Society, not from any tenderness, but because of its strange needs, had taken care of those two men, forbidding them all independent thought, all initiative, all departure from routine; and forbidding it under pain of death. They could only live on condition of being machines. (237)

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<sup>174</sup> In this passage, one senses the admiration of Marlow and Conrad for these adventurous ancestors, but it is not without qualification. They are both 'heroic' and 'pathetic' in their desire for pepper at any cost. In *The Rescue*, the adventurers of two centuries ago are 'very ignorant and incomparably audacious' (85).

Modern life doesn't produce independent-minded sceptics, but a 'crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions' (235), zealots with an unjustified sense of importance and security.<sup>175</sup> Savagery is something alien and inconceivable among people such as themselves, and when encountered, is a source of doubt and disturbance. For example, while still the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. in Macassar, Willems had 'despised on hearsay from his safe position of a civilised man' the possibility of deferring to a native and his own illogical impulses (*Outcast*, 63). Marlow, on his return to Europe in 'Heart of Darkness', feels keenly that the people around him believe too much in themselves and society:

"They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend." ('HD', 114)

He even fumes at the same naivety in the members of his audience, "each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal – you hear – normal from year's end to year's end" (80).<sup>176</sup> With braces such as these and "the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums" (82), he doubts whether any among them can imagine the temptation of the irrational, let alone withstand it. What such men do not suspect is that, utterly alone amid the mute wilderness of the future, they will find their civility to be a charade, leaving just their own untested 'capacity for faithfulness'.

The idea that civilisation is a kind of reverie or soporific state, in which Europeans seek refuge from the chaotic reality of nature, differentiates Conrad from most of his contemporaries. As I have already shown, many of his fellow authors held modern cities and technology in contempt, and believed that civilisation was merely a fragile carapace on top of a much deeper and more meaningful European savagery;<sup>177</sup> however, they do tend to uphold the integrity of these categories and the importance of the small, 'civilised' element in containing the larger 'savage' portion. As Bivona writes, the boundary between the civilised and the primitive in Conrad's fiction is fluid: his Africa cannot be sealed off from Britain, as Haggard's can.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Such a man is Heyst, who fell prey to the enchanting and illusory idea of a 'stride forward' or the 'march of civilisation' (*Victory*, 9 & 258).

<sup>176</sup> The policeman as representative of a complacent but illusory security also appears at the end of 'Karain', 'helmeted and dark, stretching out a rigid arm at the crossing of the streets' ('Karain', 31).

<sup>177</sup> I refer especially to Haggard and to Kipling, who ridiculed the idea of educating the native population, describing India as a place 'where nothing changes in spite of the shiny, top-scum stuff that people call "civilisation"' ('The Bisara of Pooree', in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, p. 197).

<sup>178</sup> Bivona, *Desire and contradiction*, p. 79.

Nor do I believe that Conrad thought genuine mastery possible, either of the self or of the domestic and colonial masses. There could be only a temporary pretence of control.<sup>179</sup>

That Conrad melds the otherworlds of civilisation and savagery is not an original observation. In his notes to the 1919 edition of *An Outcast* and the 1921 edition of *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad himself rejects the notion of a divide between tropical and European humanity, and takes exception to his being called an 'exotic writer' (*Outcast*, 282). Hampson has written of the way in which 'the savage/civilised binary is problematised' in Conrad's Malay fiction.<sup>180</sup> Griffith suggests that Conrad achieves the same effect through his ironic use of imperial rhetoric,<sup>181</sup> so that 'all of these distinctions [between civil and uncivil, civilisation and primitivism], which seem so clear in other Victorian works, erode'.<sup>182</sup> Shaffer focuses on Spencer's distinction between primitive, militant societies and advanced, industrial ones, and the way in which Conrad simultaneously exploits and expunges the difference. He claims that in Conrad 'the two proclivities are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive', and therefore the author 'creates the notion of a "military-industrial complex", whereby war and trade go hand-in-hand'.<sup>183</sup>

I would point to the persistent correlation in Conrad's writing between the tropical forest and the European city, including its more affluent quarters. In *Almayer's Folly*, a woman's look means the same to a native like Dain as to 'the man threading the paths of the more dangerous wilderness of houses and streets' (*AF*, 110). Babalatchi is shown in *An Outcast* to be as capable of profound feelings as any inhabitant of 'the impure wilderness of chimneys and roofs' (*Outcast*, 166). In *Lord Jim*, Marlow implies the same irrational animus assails 'wanderers lost in a desert, men battling against the unthinking might of nature, or the stupid brutality of crowds' (*LJ*, 64). And in *Victory*, Britain features as a dark, 'strange', and deadly country, containing its own 'horrors' (*Victory*, 20 & 53), with London resembling a 'cemetery of hopes'

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<sup>179</sup> In *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma* (p. 192), Griffith argues that Conrad's position in advocating restraint, discipline, and sympathy closely resembled that of Nordau. I am not convinced that Conrad agreed with Nordau's diagnosis that social ills result from an absence of virtues like restraint. He was far from enamoured with *Die Entartung*, which attacked a number of French writers whom Conrad most admired, like Maupassant (*Degeneration*, p. 474). When the author of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* discovered that the novel had been praised by Nordau, he wrote sardonically, 'Praise is sweet, no matter whence it comes' ('Letter to the Hon. Mrs Bontine, November 1898', *Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters*, Vol. I, G. Jean-Aubry (ed.), New York, Doubleday, Page and Co., 1927, p. 255). And in *Chance* (1912), John Fyne is familiar with 'some idiotic book everybody was reading a few years ago' which propounds a link between poetical genius and madness: a likely reference to Nordau's tome (*Chance: A Tale in Two Parts*, New York, Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1914, p. 194).

<sup>180</sup> Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*, p. 114.

<sup>181</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, pp. 88 & 92.

<sup>182</sup> Griffith, p. 93.

<sup>183</sup> Shaffer, *PMLA*, Vol. 108, pp. 46 & 52. Conrad enhances the confusion by undermining and inverting the attendant imagery of each category, as Eloise Knapp Hay points out (*The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 137), so that the torch of Liberty becomes unintentionally destructive ('HD', 46; see Hampson's notes in the 1995 Penguin Classics edition of 'Heart of Darkness', p. 135), and Jim's 'immaculate' whiteness blinds people to his real character (*LJ*, 166 & 277).

(134). 'Heart of Darkness' contains the most sustained comparison between the European metropolis and the jungle, whereby Conrad insinuates that there is not much to separate modern Britain from primitivism, or to stop it from becoming again a forsaken land of woods and swamp, one of the 'dark places of the earth'.<sup>184</sup> The sepulchral city is already sparsely inhabited, engulfed by 'a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones' ('HD', 24), and when Marlow visits the Intended, 'the gloom of the forests' and 'the souging of the trees swayed by the wind' seem to fill her house (117 & 121).

Conrad also implies a correspondence between natural and European mankind through the injustice of the latter's values and the ferocity of its inventions, such as the shrieking steamboat in 'An Outpost' (256) or Zangiacomo's Ladies' Orchestra in *Victory* (55). The powerful flout the law with impunity in Europe as they do in Sambir (*Outcast*, 238), and a rapacious trader or administrator is a common thief, whatever his custom or skin colour (*LJ*, 31 & *Rescue*, 71). In *The Rescue*, the best defence of civilisation that d'Alcacer can muster is that it offers to one 'a certain refinement of form, a comeliness of proceedings and definite safeguards against deadly surprises' (*Rescue*, 334). In contrast to his contemporaries' fiction, which is consistently told from a British perspective, Conrad's inclusion of less favourable non-European opinions within the narrative voice also undermines the pretensions of European culture to righteousness. I have already mentioned the parallels drawn by Nina in *Almayer's Folly* between the sincere people of the forest and the hypocrites of the city (*AF*, 27), but Arsat in 'The Lagoon'<sup>185</sup> or Babalatchi in *An Outcast* are no less provocative: "'You are strange, you white men. You think it is only your wisdom and your virtue and your happiness that are true'" (*Outcast*, 175). The enlightenment of Western civilisation is also challenged by the enmity of less perceptive characters, like Aïssa, who thinks of Britain as a land of 'lies', 'evil', and 'violence' (*Outcast*, 112 & 118). The slave-labourers in 'Heart of Darkness' similarly see the source of their misfortune as Europe, whose 'outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from over the sea' ('HD', 33).

In particular, Conrad implies that European society was no less 'primitive' than native cultures because both sets superstitiously worship spirits and cherish protective talismans. The scepticism of many white men is a fraud, for idols are very much part of their reality; indeed, they may be necessary to fill the godless void with meaning. Some substitutes for religion are more adequate than others. The most delusional is the acquisitive variety of imperialism practised by the employees of the Trading Society in 'Heart of Darkness' or the Great Trading

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<sup>184</sup> In his notes on 'Heart of Darkness' (pp. xxvi & xxxiv), Hampson points to the presence of ivory in the novella's European scenes as part of 'a net of complicity' enveloping the civilised world. He writes that, with the return to the Thames, 'it is clear that "darkness" is not something safely in the past ... nor is it something "other"'. Instead of affirming the opposition of darkness and light, civilised and savage, Marlow's narrative works to destabilise it: darkness is located at the heart of the "civilising" mission.'

<sup>185</sup> Arsat remarks, "'We are of a people who take what they want – like you whites'" ('Lagoon', 224).



Company in 'An Outpost', who pray to the 'spirit of civilisation': material wealth and goods, like ivory ('Outpost', 238 & 'HD', 44). The charms of this 'strange witchcraft', like the immaculate apparel and ledgers of the chief accountant ('HD', 36), conceal the fact that they are already ensnared by brutal, irrational, and egoistic desires (61). Even supposedly redeeming ideas inevitably give way in the end to (human) sacrifice (20) and 'unspeakable rites'. Discovering a comforting alternative to uncertain reality has been the objective of a desperate quest by Almayer, who could find 'no successful magic in the blank pages of his ledgers' and therefore allows his office to become 'neglected then like a temple of an exploded superstition' (*Outcast*, 231-32). Subsequently, he makes his daughter Nina the subject of his devotions, until she too deserts him.<sup>186</sup>

Conrad suggests through Kurtz's final moment of insight that awareness of the illusion is all-important, and that it can lead to a measure of redemption. I think the same notion of awakening to an enchantment is at the heart of 'Karain'. Karain's compelling "Odyssey of revenge" disturbingly melds the two halves of the narrator's binary worldview, of savage superstition and European realism.<sup>187</sup> This is because the native chief's absorption in a supernatural reality, and his idea of Western rationality as simply another kind of hex ('Karain', 24), stimulates the British companions to view their own mission as indeed founded on something very near animism, with objects like a Jubilee sixpence acting as the 'amulets of white men' (27). Part of this disillusionment is that the national spirit commanded by Victoria, which Jackson senses panting, running, rolling along the Strand, is not an unconditional good but "a masterful, conscientious, unscrupulous, unconquerable devil" (28).<sup>188</sup> The ending, in which the narrator scoffs at Jackson for reasserting the truth of the native chieftain's story, suggests that it is the former who has stayed too long at home and should remember his erstwhile sympathy for Karain's position.

While Griffith sees Conrad's narrowing of the Victorian gap between European civilisation and native primitivism as the measure of his modernity,<sup>189</sup> Brantlinger decries it as racist. In *Rule of Darkness*, he claims that the comparison of European avarice with native religious practices in 'Heart of Darkness' retains aspersions of moral bankruptcy in African culture, and thus does nothing to combat the rationale of British colonialism:

[Conrad's] version of evil – the form taken by Kurtz's Satanic behaviour – is going native. Evil, in short, is African in Conrad's story; if it is also European, that is because some white men in the heart of darkness behave like Africans. Conrad's stress on cannibalism, his identification of African customs with violence, lust, and madness, his

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<sup>186</sup> Hampson, *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*, p. 59.

<sup>187</sup> Without wanting to misrepresent his analysis, here I am drawing on Hampson (*Cross-Cultural Encounters*, p. 125).

<sup>188</sup> It is after all the British companions who are called from the 'Infernal Regions' to judge Karain, not vice-versa ('Karain', 25).

<sup>189</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, pp. 93 & 202.

metaphors of bestiality, death, and darkness, his suggestion that travelling in Africa is like travelling backward in time to primeval, infantile, but also hellish stages of existence – these features of the story are drawn from the repertoire of Victorian imperialism and racism that painted an entire continent dark.<sup>190</sup>

I would dispute Brantlinger's statement that evil is African in 'Heart of Darkness', partly because there is nothing as uncomplicated in Conrad's fiction as good and evil. His Africa is undoubtedly chaotic, made more so by European intervention, but that is because Conrad sees all nature and humanity thus when stripped bare. There is about the savagery of the natives a levelheadedness, which prevents the cannibal crew, for example, from sinking to the levels of depravity plumbed by Kurtz. To my mind, 'Heart of Darkness' is not the hackneyed tale of a white man 'going native', but of one unfettered by society, pursuing his entirely human hunger for wealth and power under the delusion of embodying a higher purpose.

Conrad's ironic emulation of imperial romance conventions, and his use of complex narrative structures,<sup>191</sup> have long confounded attempts by readers and critics to categorise him as either pro- or anti-imperialist. Many contemporary reviewers assumed 'Heart of Darkness' was a flawed attempt to produce something Kiplingesque, in the mould of a popular rescue narrative or tale of tropical degeneration.<sup>192</sup> Others failed to detect any negative implications for British imperialism.<sup>193</sup> In more recent times, Martin Green has suggested that Conrad was mistakenly championed by Eloise Knapp Hay and others as an anti-imperialist because 'his actual ambiguity could be read as a subtly profound strategy'.<sup>194</sup> Hewitt agrees that Conrad is inconsistent about colonialism due to his paradoxical character, his groping style of writing, and a desire not to alienate his readership.<sup>195</sup> Griffith also presents a perplexing picture of Conrad as simultaneously 'seduced by [James] Brooke's vision of a more beneficent colonialism that aimed to reverse the "deterioration" of indigenous peoples',<sup>196</sup> and a follower of J.A. Hobson, who saw imperialism as a symptom of a degenerate and parasitic civilisation.<sup>197</sup> By contrast, Moses argues that Conrad's impressionism is part of 'a sustained and unflinching exposé of European colonialism'.<sup>198</sup> And White views Conrad's critique of empire as more powerful than that of Stevenson precisely because it is so complex: the natives aren't romanticised, the tropical setting isn't a fallen paradise, and the imperialists aren't straightforwardly diabolical. Instead, 'the

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<sup>190</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 262.

<sup>191</sup> For example, the contrast between the quite conventionally pro-imperial frame narrator of 'Heart of Darkness' and Marlow's more lugubrious response.

<sup>192</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, pp. 172 & 190.

<sup>193</sup> Meyers, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 191.

<sup>194</sup> Green, *Dreams of Adventure*, p. 298.

<sup>195</sup> Hewitt, *English Fiction of the Early Modern Period*, p. 35.

<sup>196</sup> Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 81.

<sup>197</sup> Griffith, pp. 147 & 208.

<sup>198</sup> Moses, in *Modernism and Colonialism*, p. 46.

intruder is associated with a cause of purported benevolence and is often a failed idealist himself, a kind of victim of his own desires that have been shaped in complicated ways'.<sup>199</sup>

It is probably correct that Conrad was not opposed to imperialist idealism *per se*, and its application in previous ages, rather to the specious variety of his dissipated epoch, which he felt used fine words to conceal self-interest and barbarity.<sup>200</sup> This can be inferred from a passage in the novel *The Inheritors* (1901) describing an exposé on a corrupt colonial enterprise: 'more revolting to see without a mask [than details of cruelty and greed] was that falsehood which had been hiding under the words that for ages had spurred men to noble deeds, to self-sacrifice, to heroism ... all the traditional ideals of honour, glory, conscience, had been committed to the upholding of a gigantic and atrocious fraud'.<sup>201</sup> Such ideals had once motivated the expansion of European civilisation, but in 'Autocracy and War' (1905), Conrad agrees with the sentiment that "*Il n'y a plus d'Europe*" – there is only an armed and trading continent, the home of slowly maturing economical contests for life and death'.<sup>202</sup>

These words convey the similarity which Conrad discerned between the cosmic process and the theoretically horticultural process of contemporary imperialism. Conrad's attitude to gardening itself can be detected in a passage from *Victory* that describes Wang cultivating a patch of Samburan.<sup>203</sup> In doing so, the coolie is 'giving way to a Chinaman's ruling passion', surrendering to 'an irresistible impulse', and satisfying 'his instinct' (*Victory*, 139). Far from the mastery of nature by spirit or willpower, Wang's purposeful gardening is trancelike, making 'his existence appear almost automatic'. In the same way, Conrad saw the gardening of human societies as a pretence of reason, masking much cruder and tumultuous motivations. As White puts it, he demonstrates that 'imperialism is enabled by an idealism [which] must remain ignorant of what imperialism means in practice'.<sup>204</sup> Willems personifies this hypocrisy on an individual level in *An Outcast*. He is the preacher of a 'doctrine' or 'text' to the young men of Macassar, but his 'principles' exhort nothing more than the amorality of untrammelled nature: 'The wise, the strong, the respected, have no scruples. Where there are scruples there can be no power.' (*Outcast*, 10) For Babalatchi, it is the way of all white men to make a parade of their humanity while practising the 'might is right' ethics of animals. When Lingard casts himself in the role of elder brother to the people of Sambir, he shoots back,

"That is how you all talk while you load your guns and sharpen your swords; and when you are ready, then to those who are weak you say: "Obey me and be happy, or die!" ...

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<sup>199</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 197.

<sup>200</sup> As Brantlinger argues in *Rule of Darkness*, pp. 258-61; and White in *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p.188.

<sup>201</sup> Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, *The Inheritors: An Extravagant Story*, New York, Doubleday, Page and Co., 1920, p. 282.

<sup>202</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Autocracy and War', in *The North American Review*, Vol. 181, July 1905, p. 54.

<sup>203</sup> Meyers (*Joseph Conrad*, p. 130) states that Conrad had 'no interest in gardening, farming, or country life'.

<sup>204</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 178.

You are stronger than the wild beasts, but not so wise. A black tiger knows when he is not hungry – you do not.’ (*Outcast*, 174)

Conrad expands on the duplicity of modern imperialism in ‘Heart of Darkness’. The Eldorado Exploring Expedition is a ‘devoted band’, but truthfully there is in them ‘no more moral purpose ... than there is in burglars breaking into a safe’ (‘HD’, 54), or in the Roman conquerors described by Marlow at the outset (20). Kurtz, who departs Europe as “‘something like a lower sort of apostle’” (28), quickly reveals himself to be the most ferociously and unreasonably acquisitive of the lot (92 & 97). His success, like that of the manager, the Romans, even the British, is entirely accidental, and no indication of being God’s elect.

The concept of colonisers as divine law-givers features frequently in Conrad’s fiction as both absurd and dangerous. In ‘An Outpost’, the mediocre pair of Carlier and Kayerts makes Gobila’s faith in a brotherhood of immortal white men ridiculous (‘Outpost’, 240). The figure of Captain Whalley in *The End of the Tether*, who is like a ‘presumptuous Titan’ cast out of heaven (*Tether*, 146), suggests that British intelligence and power can no longer claim to be ‘in accordance with [God’s] declared will’ (134). In *An Outcast*, Lingard also represents the end of omnipotent British authority and its dream of forging a new Arcadia. He is a ‘shepherd’ and ‘doer of justice’, whose ‘word is law’ to the people of Sambir (*Outcast*, 126, 173 & 36):

His deep-seated and immovable conviction that only he – he, Lingard – knew what was good for them was characteristic of him, and, after all, not so very far wrong. His trade brought prosperity to the young state, and the fear of his heavy hand secured its internal peace for many years. (154)

However, his ‘obedient flock’ is becoming sceptical and fractious (‘Was he a government? Who made him ruler?’ (89)), and there are omens of colonial rebellion (245). When Willems claims that “‘our white law ... comes from God’”, Aïssa snaps, “‘Your law! Your God!’” (271). White asserts that Lingard’s oppressive and possessive patronage leads not to another Eden, but to the wilderness.<sup>205</sup> Conrad’s message is that ‘the white man is the intruder, not the heroic, benevolent bringer of light. He brings gunpowder and opium, not religion.’<sup>206</sup> Not merely fraudulent, Conrad depicts the European imperialist as an active purveyor of darkness, disorder, savagery, and jungle; more devil than god.

Adams writes that Kurtz, Jim, and Charles Gould likewise ‘all pose as gods, reoccupying the position of the West’s absconded deity’,<sup>207</sup> but their influence on native societies is never constructive. The brickmaker paints Kurtz as a godlike ‘special being’ with

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<sup>205</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, pp. 142-3.

<sup>206</sup> White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 132.

<sup>207</sup> Adams, *Colonial Odysseys*, p. 89. For him, the natives in ‘Heart of Darkness’ are ‘grieving over the imminent loss of their god, Kurtz, and thus they are much like Kurtz, who has attempted to fill the void left by the retreat of *his* God’ (p. 149).

'higher intelligence', at the same time throwing in an unsettling reference to the devil ('HD', 47). Kurtz himself replicates in his report Lubbock's claim that natives endow white men ""with the might as of a deity"", and it is possible therefore to ""exert a power for good practically unbounded"": a thesis which briefly enthralls the previously dubious Marlow (83).<sup>208</sup> Of course, Kurtz not only succeeds in getting the natives to adore him (92), but participates in a kind of hideous self-worship (83). The result is that the country is pillaged. Instead of transforming wilderness into garden, European imperialism leads to darkness where once there had been light (16 & 22), the surrender of native villages (24), and ""a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut"" (39). It also conjures something worse than jungle: the 'grove of death'.<sup>209</sup>

To the natives of Patusan, Jim appears ""like a creature not only of another kind but of another essence. Had they not seen him come up in a canoe they might have thought he had descended upon them from the clouds."" (*LJ*, 166) His apotheosis to ""the visible, tangible incarnation of unfailing truth and of unfailing victory"" has much to do with his otherness and 'racial prestige' (263). Marlow finds that stories are told of how the tide turned early to aid Jim's arrival (176), and of how he carried cannons on his back in the assault on Sherif Ali's camp (193): ""He dominated the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like a figure set up on a pedestal..." (192) However, like all icons, Jim's reputed godhood is a comforting illusion, a pall for the decomposing corpse of Patusan. He is trapped, as he recognises, because his departure would mean 'Hell loose' (242). With Gentleman Brown's coming, this prophecy is fulfilled:

"The social fabric of orderly, peaceful life, when every man was sure of tomorrow, the edifice raised by Jim's hands, seemed on that evening ready to collapse into a ruin reeking with blood. The poorer folk were already taking to the bush or flying up the river." (*LJ*, 271)

After Doramin fires the shot that kills the 'Lord', the tumultuous rush forward of the watching crowd hints at what is to come.

For Conrad, the ideals of modern European imperialism are more fantastic by far than the chaotic and ambivalent natural world, traditionally depicted as a dreamlike realm in need of

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<sup>208</sup> In 'Frazer, Conrad and the "truth of primitive passion"', Hampson identifies a connection between Conrad's image of Kurtz as a god among the natives and Sir James Frazer's 'weather kings' in *The Golden Bough*, all having 'the power of causing rain or fine weather' (*The Golden Bough*, Vol. I, London, Macmillan, 1890, p. 47). One is also reminded of Sambir under the dominion of Lingard, where clouds linger 'undecided – as if brooding over its own power for good or evil' (*Outcast*, 165).

<sup>209</sup> In *W.H. Hudson and the Elusive Paradise*, Miller defines a grove as straight lines of trees enclosing an open space, devoid of undergrowth (p. 50). Glendening notes that the word has connotations of pastoral order and tranquillity, but in 'Heart of Darkness' it is 'a microcosmic patch of jungle where nature and culture intersect', encompassing 'both the character of a wilderness where life is cheap and of the destruction civilisation had wrought' (*An Entangled Bank*, p. 165).

waking.<sup>210</sup> As he suggests in ‘An Outpost’, the words which ‘civilised’ people use to transmit these supposed absolutes (‘oppression, cruelty, crime, devotion, self-sacrifice, virtue’) endow ‘the untried’ with the comforting semblance of significance, but are devoid of any genuine meaning (‘Outpost’, 248). When Carlier and Kayerts find a newspaper from home, which speaks much of ‘the sacredness of the civilising work’, they are seduced, and begin to ‘think better of themselves’ (240). In ‘Heart of Darkness’, Kurtz enters the jungle equipped with such moral ideas, seemingly intent on ‘humanising, improving, instructing’, but in his written report, Marlow witnesses the greed and violence beyond the ‘magic current of phrases’ (‘HD’, 83).<sup>211</sup> The celestial form and the diabolical substance of Kurtz’s language epitomises the beguiling power of imperial rhetoric, ‘the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness’ (79). What protects Marlow against this snare is awareness of his own unimportance; however, when he allows the brickmaker to imagine he has influence within the Company, he is ‘captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams’ (50). This is the same enthralling quality which Karain detected upon arriving in the Dutch territory of Java, where “‘stone campongs, full of white faces, are surrounded by fertile fields, but every man you meet is a slave’” (‘Karain’, 17).

The enchantment emanates from the European metropolis and not from the forest, which places human life in better perspective than the ‘more artificial atmosphere of the town’ (*Rescue*, 226). In *The Rescue*, a memory of Mrs Travers in London strikes d’Alcacer as no more than the tropical landscape reconstituted into a fantasy of gentility (121). In ‘Heart of Darkness’, the sepulchral city seems to Marlow as he journeys upriver “‘an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence’” (‘HD’, 59-60).<sup>212</sup> When he returns there following a journey in which he himself resisted enchantment, he finds a population identical to the ‘faithless pilgrims’ of the Central Station, whose philanthropy, conversation, government, and industry appeared ‘unreal’ beside the ‘great and invincible’ truth of the wilderness (44 & 46). Likewise, the citizens are intruders with the affectation of purpose, absorbed by dreams of material things without realising how ‘insignificant and silly’ they are (114).

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<sup>210</sup> Conrad alludes to this trope in *The Rescue*: ‘When at the conclusion of some long talk with Hassim, who for the twentieth time perhaps had related the story of his wrongs and his struggle, [Lingard] lifted his big arm and shaking his fist above his head, shouted: “We will stir them up. We will wake up the country!” he was, without knowing it in the least, making a complete confession of the idealism hidden under the simplicity of his strength.’ (*Rescue*, 95)

<sup>211</sup> Ricardo fulminates against precisely this insincerity in *Victory*: “‘It’s the very way they tame ones – the common ’ypocrits of the world – get on. When it comes to plunder drifting under one’s very nose, there’s not one of them that would keep his hands off. And I don’t blame them. It’s the way they do it that sets my back up.’” (*Victory*, 200)

<sup>212</sup> In his notes to the 1995 Penguin Classics edition of ‘Heart of Darkness’, Hampson points out that ‘sepulchral city’ recalls Matthew 23:27-8, and connotes the hypocrisy and corruption of the European civilising mission (p. 130).

Several prominent *fin-de-siècle* writers used the jungle image to suggest the stagnation or degeneration of European urban slums and their inhabitants, just as they did with indigenous populations in the tropics. But their forest settings also offer an opportunity for a select band to remedy domestic deficiency through toil and conquest, and restore a utopia of rigour and rank. By contrast, Conrad's jungle-writing exemplified an emergent sense that the imperial 'horticultural' ideal was the cause of cultural ruin, not redemption. His traders and colonists traverse a haphazard world, erroneously secure in the conviction of moral superiority and rationality, until the unfeeling tropical verdure elicits an awakening to the voracity and futility behind their sense of purpose.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have shown that Victorian adventure fiction was not merely engaged in conjuring appealing fantasies for a boyish readership or propagandising for empire, but addressed some fundamental questions about nature at a time when established truths had become unsustainable. Likewise, the recurrent jungle setting for such stories was no fad, occasioned by the environment's novelty or economic relevance to Europeans; it constituted the resurrection of a symbol first used by Aristotle, and perpetuated by medieval romance, to account for a seemingly arbitrary and unruly world. I have also demonstrated that, unlike most of his peers, Joseph Conrad had little interest in justifying a hopeful vision of existence, and subverted many of the conventions surrounding the literary forest to depict humanity as a transitory trespasser in an entropic universe.

There is a great deal more to be written about the tropical forest in British fiction than I have achieved here. I would have liked to examine trends in late-nineteenth-century thought regarding the metaphysics and psychology of the individual, specifically how spiritualism and theories of the unconscious sought to preserve the idealist model of humans as divisible into sinful body and rational soul, and the ways in which authors used the jungle image to convey such ideas. It would also be illuminating to delve into the non-fictional texts and experiences that helped to shape the landscape's fictional manifestations. Of Asia, early accounts recall cynegetic exploits in India and Ceylon (e.g. Walter Campbell's *The Old Forest Ranger* (1842)), and later, colonial life in Malaya more generally (e.g. Isabella Bird's *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (1883)). South America is depicted by a steady stream of naturalists, from Alexander von Humboldt to the seed-smuggling Henry Wickham. Africa is brought to us first by explorers, like Livingstone, Burton, Speke, Stanley, and Mary Kingsley; and latterly by campaigners against the abuses of the Congo Free State, such as E.D. Morel.

In some respects, the main objective of my research still lies ahead, unachieved by this introductory investigation. My intention is to detail the recurrent otherworldly qualities of the *fin-de-siècle* jungle, its timelessness, obscurity, unreality, and variability (between hell, a false paradise, and heaven). And I would like to correlate the stock development of the imperial protagonist in this landscape, from enchantment and degeneration, to mastery, realisation, and home-coming, with the katabatic quest for knowledge that one finds in ancient and medieval literature. By proving the existence of such mythic conventions in the writing of his contemporaries, I hope to clarify the true extent of Conrad's heterodoxy and his influence on a successive generation of authors. If he did indeed transmit his pessimism, ironic style, preoccupation with disintegration, disenchantment with imperialism, and vision of humanity as



risibly pathetic in the face of nature, it may be argued that British modernism originated in Conrad's jungle.

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