

DARWIN AND THE ISLAND

*The Impact of Evolutionary Thought on Certain Island
Texts of Wells, Conrad and Golding*

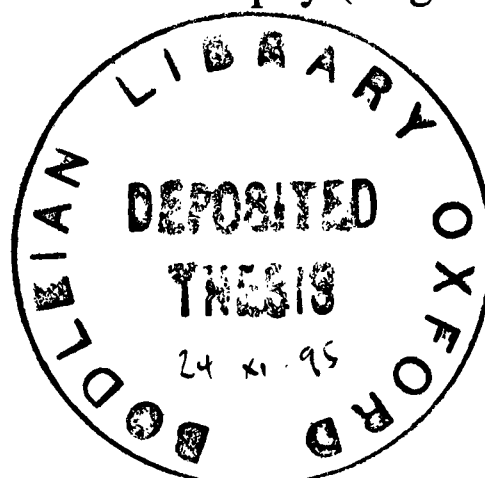
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DARWIN AND THE ISLAND: THE IMPACT OF EVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT ON CERTAIN ISLAND TEXTS OF WELLS, CONRAD AND GOLDING

This thesis examines the fictional island and assesses the impact of Darwinism on the genre. I show how islands have been a recurring feature in European literature, fictional spaces where authors create a microcosm in which they satirise, criticise or hold up a mirror to their own society. I argue that traditional utopian islands are static realms and that through the introduction of evolution (Darwin and Wallace made their most important discoveries regarding the mechanism of evolution on islands) fictional islands of the last century and a half have been radically transformed. The elements of chance, change, random mutation, natural and sexual selection, survival of the fittest as well as the knowledge of an animal heritage have changed the castaway experience, making it a far more anti-utopian one. The publication of *The Origin of Species* forced a reappraisal of all areas of knowledge and I show how, in the laboratory of the fictional island, authors examine the implications of Darwin's theory. Closely related issues are also taken into account, such as degeneration, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, developments in evolutionary anthropology, psychoanalysis and the coming of modern scientific method.

I conduct a close reading of H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in which I consider the phenomenon of the mad scientist (in this case a modern, distinctly Darwinian scientist). Using some of Wells' scientific articles as a starting point, I show how the doctor tries to replicate a speeded up version of evolution in his island laboratory. Wells was a student of T. H. Huxley and the chapter examines the situation on the island in relation to Huxley's famous essay, "Evolution and Ethics", in which he argues that the "cosmic process" must be fought with an "ethical process". Wells called the novel a "theological grotesque" and I show how the novelist parodies orthodox Christianity and creates a protagonist who is a perverted evolutionary "god". Much of the remainder of the chapter is a detailed examination of degeneration in which I describe how the beast begins to resurface in Moreau's half-human creations as well as in the human protagonists (graphically evidenced in a "return" to cannibalism).

A chapter on Joseph Conrad considers the pessimistic intellectual, philosophical and metaphysical forces that affect the novelist and his protagonist. First I show how the *fin de siècle* mood, in conjunction with the popular contemporary philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (perceived in the light of Darwinian science) colour the cerebral landscape of *Victory*. The main thrust of this chapter concerns the issues of degeneration and devolution and in this respect I examine contemporary fears concerning cannibalism, thermodynamics, atavism and the anarchy resulting from a corrosion within society. I show further how the issue of sexuality (with relation to such issues as miscegenation, heredity and perversion) bears directly upon the idea of degeneracy. Finally the chapter considers the case of the imperial subject, the other "races" represented on Samburan. Here I am particularly interested in the anthropological application of Darwinism: far from being degenerate or inferior, Conrad depicts the racial other as having the "biological" advantage.

By the time William Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies*, evolutionary elements were coming to novelists diluted in many different areas of enquiry. I discuss how Golding's knowledge of (evolutionary) anthropology and archaeology create a blueprint for the regression of English schoolboys to the level of "savages" and metaphorically to the level of early hominids and even animals. I show how the evil they try to externalise arises from within and is a part of their "animal" heritage. The chapter traces the path of their regression looking at aspects of their microcosmic society and religion. I also consider the situation of Golding's boys with relation to Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and his theories of child sexuality. Finally Golding's attempt to chart an existential and spiritual course through the waters of evolutionary determinism is discussed.

In my concluding chapter I account for the "demise" of the Darwinian island showing how new issues are dominating the genre and in a close reading of Marianne Wiggins' *John Dollar* and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* I examine how and why the postmodern and poststructuralist island fails to live up to the exigencies of the genre.

To my mother and father

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Thanks must go to Akane and Maike in particular, who have endured years of island talk and island dreams and who have provided a second home for me. Tamara's love and support, as well as her willingness to read and offer advise (even travelling from Budapest to do so), helped get me through. Lastly my gratitude must go to my mother and father for being who they are, for being the steadfast constant in my life and for making it all possible.

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Arise and fly
The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die.

Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, cxvii.

It is a magic circle, a small area of perfection shutting out all the rest of infinite space. What wonder that an island has come to be a symbol of birth and of rebirth, or that from the fabled Atlantis and that earthly island, the Garden of Eden, to the latest Utopia, an island, literal or metaphorical, is more often than any other the spot the human imagination chooses for a fresh experiment in life!

Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, p. 287.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I am embarking on a voyage of exploration, setting sail from a university spire in the heart of an island. My mission will be to chart the fictional islands of the post-Darwinian era, establish whether communication exists between the atolls of this temporal archipelago and ascertain what similarities there are between them. Like Charles Darwin on the *Beagle*, I will be alert to the geological, botanical and zoological peculiarities and will make ethnographic observations concerning the native inhabitants and settlers I encounter. My chief objective will be to consider the impact of the theory of evolution on the fictional island and to assess whether one can make a strong case for distinctly post-Darwinian islands in the sea of English literature.¹ But first it is necessary to present a brief résumé of pre-Darwinian island literature showing how islands traditionally provide a testing ground for contemporary ideologies and systems of thought.

The island has been a recurring feature of European literature, from *Ulysses* to the present. It offers itself to the writer as a *tabula rasa* on which to play out his fantasies and visions. An island is a sequestered laboratory where authors can set up a microcosm and remove all extraneous material: it is the most perfectly isolated - and mysterious - realm on earth and until well into the twentieth century it was still possible to forge a plausible and realistic "other world" on an island (without having to tip over into science fiction and move into outer space to create it). The fictional island, perhaps best thought of as a sub-genre of utopian literature, is usually a reflection of the author's own environment and society, the most common approach being to try to create an ideal version of

¹In this voyage of critical exploration I am restricting myself to islands in English literature, particularly those produced on this island. There is, of course, not enough space to deal with continental or international fictional islands, but more importantly I am interested in the impact of Darwin "at home" as it were, where the theory of evolution had its most immediate and dramatic effect. Also the fact that England is an island influences the way authors here write and think about islands: they live with the "islanded" condition and it recurs frequently in their serious literature. As Gillian Beer notes:

The identification of England with the island is already, and from the start, a fiction. It is a fiction, but an unwavering one among English writers and other English people, that England occupies the land up to the margins of every shore. The island has seemed the perfect form in English cultural imagining, as the city was to the Greeks. Defensive, secure, compacted, even paradisaical - a safe place; a safe place too from which to set out on predations and from which to launch the building of an empire. Even now, remote islands - the Falkland Islands or Fiji - are claimed as peculiarly part of empire history. ("The island and the aeroplane: the case of Virginia Woolf" in Homi K. Bhabha [ed.] *Nation and Narration* [London, 1990], p. 269)

contemporary reality: an earthly paradise, a utopia, Arcadia, Land of Cockaigne or to discover a lost colony of the Golden Age.² In this introduction I will show how fictional islands in different periods mirror aspects of contemporary society (thereby satirising, criticising or hoping to improve it) and present prevailing systems of thought.

In *Timaeus and Critias* Plato imagines the island of Atlantis in utopian terms as one modelled on strictly classical lines, a foil to his ideal Athens. Critias puts Socrates' utopian city into practice and describes how it would work from political and social perspectives. A hierarchical society radiates out from a central, artificially-created island citadel; the authority of the king is absolute and the population controlled by a dynastic elite. Critias describes how the island was strictly organised from a legal and military perspective and how greed and decadence led to the degeneration and eventual destruction of this civilisation (Plato's stern warning to Greece). Thus Plato creates the first technologically advanced island state in fiction, an idea that was to be taken up in one form or another by countless subsequent writers.

In *Utopia* (1516) Sir Thomas More builds on the Platonic ideal where Critias left off. Both societies have comprehensive educational systems and are communist by design, but where Plato's is dynastic, More's (as a product of Christian thought) is more egalitarian. The idea of creating a perfect society on earth (instead of Heaven) was ultimately blasphemy. Thus we can see that More's island reflects a secularising, reforming impulse in early sixteenth-century Europe as well as excitement and uncertainty generated by discoveries in the New World. More's island society aims at universal justice, prosperity and brotherhood. The abolition of private property, resistance to embarking on wars, community of labour and religious toleration are some of the hallmarks of Utopia. The author makes it his project to gently satirise sixteenth-century England, contrasting it with his fictional society. He comments on, for example, housing, marriage, industry and by dressing his Utopians in uniform (monastic) grey he shows his disapproval of the opulence and decadence symbolised by the ostentatious garb of the European nobility. Utopia is a communist, pagan society based on reason and

²For a detailed discussion of the distinction between these concepts as they pertain to island fiction, see the introduction to my master's thesis (*Island* [M. Phil. Thesis, Oxford, 1993]).

intellect alone and as such it is a better organised state than any in Christendom. More aims at enlightening England and Europe by presenting an island where natural piety, toleration and virtue exceed that of "advanced" Christian nations.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* also explores contemporary thought systems and aspects of society in the microcosm of an island environment. The play is, on a political level, a meditation on power, authority and resistance: Prospero (like James I) harrows characters with fear and wonder and then reveals that their anxiety is his to create and allay.³ Much has been made of the influence on Shakespeare of William Strachey's famous diary of the shipwreck of the *Sea Venture* on Bermuda in 1610 and the description of the resultant crisis of authority between future colonists, seamen and governors - between the workers and the rulers (in the play aristocrats and plebeians are separated and put into a situation of conflict). Both islands create a test-case for Elizabethan and Jacobean notions of authority, legitimacy and usurpation (ranging from Antonio's successful palace coup to Caliban's failed rebellion). There is similarly a colonial crisis of authority centring around the convergent claims to legitimate ownership by Caliban and Prospero derived from inheritance of the island or from God (similarly James I's legitimacy was dubiously derived from Mary Queen of Scots and his authority consisted primarily in the fact of his being *named* heir by Elizabeth I). Caliban's position as rightful sovereign of the island is analogous to the natives of the New World, particularly the colonies on the North American seaboard, where English expansion was dispossessing the Indians of their territory (Stephano's claim to be descended from the moon is an example of unscrupulous colonisers taking advantage of the natives' credulity and playing at being God). Prospero's admission: "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (V. i. 275-6)⁴ seems to be a recognition of affinity and even a veiled acknowledgement of guilt at his act of appropriation. Shakespeare shows the contradictory nature of the colonial enterprise

³Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley, 1988), p. 142.

⁴William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (1611; London, 1972 [the date preceding the semi-colon denotes the date of first publication, while the place and date of publication that follow it denote the edition I have used]).

demonstrating the absolute mastery of the colonist, Prospero, but also revealing the violence and the contradictions required to maintain order on his island.

Prospero and Caliban also stand for the popular contemporary opposition of Art and Nature, of cultivated man and unnurtured, natural man. It has been shown by many critics that Shakespeare, in his depiction of natural man, is borrowing, and at times satirising, the ideas of Montaigne as they occur in his essay "Of Cannibals" (for instance in Gonzalo's notion of a paradisaal commonwealth). Montaigne holds the primitivist view that a "natural" society, free of the civilised accretions of law, custom and other artificial constraints, would be a happier and more virtuous one.⁵ In Montaigne we find a pastoral and "naturalist" conception of Arcadia that is entirely different to the sophisticated, urban and classical utopia of Plato, one that was to gain in importance during the modern era. Such comparisons between corrupt Europe and the virtues of "savages" and cannibals became increasingly popular and continued to influence island writers for the next three centuries (Jean-Jacques Rousseau having a particularly strong impact in the eighteenth century).

In the most famous castaway adventure, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), we see how Daniel Defoe engages with contemporary debates and systems of thought on a South Atlantic island. A shipwrecked Crusoe recognises that he has been thrust into a "state of nature", but interprets it in a very different way to Montaigne. Following Thomas Hobbes he initially finds his condition potentially "solitary, poore, nasty [and] brutish"⁶ and sees no possibility of attaining virtue by following nature (as John Locke had suggested). He interprets Montaigne's noble cannibals (who come ashore to feast) as representative of the terrifying Hobbesian condition he might himself descend to if he does not guard against the forces of "nature". (However, following the contemporary version of Montaigne's primitivism - espoused by Shaftesbury and, to a certain extent, Locke - Defoe on the other hand shows that being forced to return to an earlier stage of society, one might at least have the compensation of escaping civilised vices such as drinking.⁷) With the

⁵Frank Kermode in his introduction to *The Tempest*, p. xxxiv.

⁶Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; Oxford, 1909), p. 97.

⁷Maximillian E. Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (London, 1963), p. 40.

arrival and education/socialisation of Friday there is a necessary movement away from a "state of nature" to the development of a crude society informed by the popular contemporary political philosophies of Hobbes and Locke. A "social contract" is drawn up and basic laws are formulated between Crusoe, the "owner" of the land, and those who come ashore on his island. Crusoe's initial contract is one that accords with Hobbes' notion of an absolute authority/sovereign, but the society he leaves behind him on the island is a loose democracy (Lockean), thereby indicating that Defoe was interested in the political evolution of society.

Crusoe also reflects the rising tide of Protestant liberalism in early seventeenth-century England. Early liberalism favoured the rising middle class and was against any form of fanaticism; it valued industry and commerce and rated the rights of property very highly. It strove for an end to political and religious strife in order to liberate energies for the enterprises of commerce and science.⁸ Individualism in the realm of religion, economics and politics was seen as paving the way for a better future for all. Where Plato and More are interested in the mechanisms of island communities and show a preference for the universal and the ideal, Defoe explores the range of possibilities for an "individualistic" hero and John Locke provides the philosophical blueprint.

The ideology of the individual was generated by the conditions created by industrial capitalism and Puritanism. Capitalism brought an increase in economic specialisation and this, combined with a less rigid social structure and a more democratic political system, enormously increased the individual's freedom of choice.⁹ The foundations of this new order were laid at the end of the Glorious Revolution and in the beginning of the eighteenth century and in Crusoe, Defoe tells the tale of this new, heroic *Homo economicus*, thereby expressing some of the most important tendencies of the life of his era. The story deals with the history of capitalism: the colonial venture aimed at opening up markets in the New World and concomitant trade expansion and is thus an appropriate allegory of empire.

⁸Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (1946; London, 1957), p. 621.

⁹Ian P. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley, 1957), p. 61.

Defoe gives expression to the notion of the dignity of labour espoused by Puritans who showed that "untiring stewardship of the material gifts of God was a paramount religious and ethical obligation."¹⁰ They preached the corresponding virtues of prudence and piety. Once spiritual values had been attached to daily labour, the individual could begin to regard his achievements as a quasi-divine mastering of the environment. Puritan individualism controls the way Crusoe views his island condition: the internalisation of conscience (keeping a diary or journal became widely popular) meant that it was no longer the Church that mediated between God and the believer. However the marriage between the spiritual and the material realm was not without its difficulties: Defoe's novel shows the struggle between Puritanism and the secularising impulse provided by economic individualism.

What the island does for Crusoe then, is to offer him the fullest opportunity to realise the major tendencies of modern civilisation: absolute economic, social and intellectual freedom.¹¹ Implicit is the call to colonial expansion, to move into non-European territory and re-enact the Crusoe myth.

In *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) Jonathan Swift has his protagonist visit a number of islands which satirise aspects of English society (and *Robinson Crusoe*). Again we see how an author fashions a sealed microcosm in which to conduct his social, political and philosophical experiments. Swift strips man of his pretensions and exposes how far short of his ideals man falls: in proto-Darwinian fashion he shows man to be a rational animal who succumbs all too frequently to his passions. In comparing and contrasting imaginary societies, Swift encourages readers to review their basic assumptions about British society, law, customs and education. For instance, in Lilliput the wrangling of the two contending political parties are reminiscent of Tories and Whigs under the Walpole administration; patriotism, war-mongering and imperialism are ridiculed; debates between Catholics and Protestants are reduced to an argument over whether one should break one's egg on the bigger or smaller end; the pretensions of scientists and mathematicians are poked fun at on the island of Laputa; while the Yahoos and

¹⁰Ibid., p. 73.

¹¹Ibid., p. 86.

Houyhnhnms provide an opportunity for an examination of the nature of "rational" man. The "Augustan" Houyhnhnms are not the ideal: they may show up the shortcomings of the "animal" in man and may have used reason to solve all the problems that beset society, but they have done so at the expense of Christian love and compassion. Balance must be achieved between the Houyhnhnm and Yahoo in all of us.

As with Defoe, Swift uses current systems of thought to inform the philosophical landscape of the islands. Finding the confident and optimistic creed of early eighteenth-century individualist philosophy unpalatable, he sets out to paint a very different picture of humanity. Fashionable opinion held that man was created good, that reason and moral sense prevailed and it is these conceptions that Swift was anxious to call into question. Locke's benevolent and rational state of nature is juxtaposed with Hobbes' on the Houyhnhnms' island - and we find, not surprisingly, that Swift's sympathies lie more with Hobbes, although he keeps the two conceptions delicately balanced. In *Gulliver's Travels* Swift also shows affinity with Montaigne's attacks on Stoic pride, his lowering of man to the level of beasts, and as in Montaigne, primitivism is repeatedly contrasted with pompous civilisation.

As I have tried to show, island texts reflect the *Zeitgeist* and *Weltanschauung* of their age and in the nineteenth century, when island fiction was at its most prolific, we see the ideas already mentioned being reinterpreted by contemporary thinkers in accord with recent social and political developments (notably rapid imperial expansion). For instance Rousseau, in an updated version of Locke, held that man is naturally and "instinctively" good - this is evidenced by the innocents: children and to a certain extent "savages" - and it is only by institutions that he is made bad. We shall see how in *The Coral Island* (1858) R. M. Ballantyne maroons a group of boys on an island and puts Rousseau's notion into practice, while in our own century William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) takes an opposing view.

Such islands as those of Plato, More and Swift are static, two-dimensional and often dream-like environments: a true utopia does not evolve. Their societies are stable, unchanging, and life is pleasantly uneventful, if a little dull. Prospero and Crusoe also

struggle towards effecting this kind of utopian mastery over their islands (although both ultimately fail). William Golding makes it quite clear that utopias are representations of an ideal that cannot be translated into the real world:

Did it move off the printed page into living reality there is one thing certain we can say about it. The instant it moved it would change. I do not say it would evolve, since the implications of that word in its technical sense are too restricting, but it would change, warp, harden, fragment. These things and good things along with them would operate like viruses in the blood.¹²

Where Golding is reluctant to use the term evolution, fearing that it might be interpreted in a narrowly biological sense, I, however, believe that the advent of evolution (in its biological as well as its various epistemological senses bearing upon science, religion, politics et cetera) is absolutely crucial in transforming the fictional isle. With evolution the "exotics" of chance, change, random variation, natural and sexual selection, survival of the fittest and the knowledge of an animal inheritance wash up on the utopian shore. No utopia can withstand this onslaught and anti-utopian islands, often with a distinctly evolutionary caste, supplant the paradise isle as the most popular form of the genre in the post-Darwinian era. Although this kind of nightmarish island appears to be a distinctly late nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon, the roots of anti-utopia go back much further. The anti-utopian element is always there as a threat in paradise island fiction: "As nightmare is to dream, like a malevolent and grimacing doppelganger, anti-utopia has stalked utopia from the very beginning."¹³ Anti-utopia lives parasitically on utopia; it is a cracked mirror image of paradise where the dark side of human nature is allowed to dominate.

In the laboratory of an isle a castaway's ideologies, beliefs and philosophies are often pushed to an extreme, laying bare their weaknesses and contradictions. We have seen how for each period in the modern, post-Renaissance, era of island fiction there have been certain models of behaviour (informed by contemporary social and political factors) made available to castaways by the thinkers of the time. Authors, narrators and characters

¹²William Golding, "Utopias and Antiutopias" in *A Moving Target* (London, 1982), p. 178. Indeed H. G. Wells misunderstands the nature of Utopia when he insists that "the Modern Utopia must be not static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages" (*A Modern Utopia* (1905) in *Tono-Bungay and A Modern Utopia* [London, Odhams Edition], p. 315).

¹³Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (1987; Oxford, 1991), p. 99.

interpret prevailing ideologies and theologies, using the "neutral" island space to implement a particular world view. One's *Weltanschauung* and understanding of humanity is also determined by one's theory about genesis, the origin of life. When starting afresh on a desert island this issue becomes important in considering what form of belief is adopted and on exactly what foundation of faith the societal superstructure will be erected. Castaways must redefine their relationship with the god-head/s and with nature. For most of the protagonists in Western island fiction the choice has been almost unanimously Christian: the islanders' and their creators' ubiquitous interpretation of the island as an Eden is testament to this. The question to be examined in this thesis is: what happens to these fictional realms after the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859)? Ideologies, beliefs and philosophies were radically transformed and it is not surprising (given that islands were the locations of the most obvious examples of evolution) that the fictional isle was so dramatically changed. Darwinism became the single most influential thought system to "colonise" the island genre. Old antitheses were re-evaluated (nature and nurture, utopia and anti-utopia, "noble savage" and cannibal, natural law and law of nature) and new ones were introduced (ethics and evolution, ape and angel, being and becoming). The mechanisms of evolution replaced the deity, philosophies and world views were reinterpreted according to the new system and the question of origin became a case of a slow process of selection, governed by the laws of chance. Until at least well into the twentieth century, Darwin and branches of Darwinian and evolutionary thought loomed large as the most important and inspiring force in the genre.

Before Darwin, Europeans arriving on an island were able to impose their will and their *Weltanschauung* on the new environment. Since Darwin, this has seldom been the case. Obviously there have been other contributing factors: the crumbling of empire, philosophical and psychological doubt, the Freudian and Marxist "disruptions" and two world wars. But what we do find is that the Darwinian paradigm remains a constant and exerts a particular influence on island fiction: when authors maroon characters on a desert isle they cannot help but dramatise or allude to evolutionary issues. In effect it became almost impossible to write a pre-Darwinian island text (I am referring here to

sophisticated literature and not to popular novels that use islands as, for instance, erotic or romantic locations). My project is to show how the anti-utopian perspective, with a particular evolutionary caste, became dominant after 1859. The thesis will also demonstrate why *islands* became such an important location for fiction dealing with evolutionary issues. I will show further how ideas spawned by the new theory were quickly incorporated into English island fiction: issues such as degeneration, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, developments in evolutionary anthropology, the rise of the "animal" in man and the coming of age of modern scientific method. Perhaps the greatest upset was to the idea of hierarchies: society had always tried to create a cosmology (such as the Great Chain of Being) which ordered the world in a particular and manageable way. Darwin's "ladder" of evolution, no matter how hard one tried to adapt it, refused to accord man a "natural" position at the top, and certainly not any one particular class, race or gender. Might not bees or rats be "better evolved" and more easily adaptable than us, and was there even a "top"?

Let me now begin to chart the course of evolution through the islands of post-Darwinian fiction from the Victorian era to the present and finally assess to what extent this still has a bearing on contemporary fiction as well as account for the state of the genre today.

1 AN INTRODUCTION TO DARWIN

We live in a post-Darwinian age and it is almost impossible, in our culture, to remain unaware of the tenets of evolution, even if we have never read a word of Darwin: as we shall see in this chapter, Darwinian assumptions are diffused in the way we act and think. The theory of evolution created an effective break with previous ways of perceiving ourselves and the world and even if we reject Darwin's model of descent outright, we cannot remain indifferent to or untainted by it. Gillian Beer offers a concise summary of the impact of the "monkey theory":

During the past hundred years or so evolutionary theory has functioned in our culture like a myth in a period of belief, moving effortlessly to and fro between metaphor and paradigm, feeding an extraordinary range of disciplines beyond its own original biological field. In the later nineteenth century it gave ordering assumptions to the developing subjects of anthropology, sociology and psychology and elements in its ideas have been appropriated to serve as confirming metaphors for beliefs politically at odds with those of Darwin himself, such as social Darwinism, and even - through a displaced eugenic argument - a nightmare acting out of "artificial selection" in Nazism.¹

BACKGROUND

On 27 December 1831 HMS *Beagle* left England on what was to become one of the greatest voyages of scientific discovery. On board was Charles Darwin, a young geologist/biologist who would make use of the following years at sea to investigate and develop ideas about the origin and mutation of species. At the time, theories of evolution and "transmutation" were not new: philosophers from Aristotle to Kant had contemplated the mechanical laws of nature; scientists like Erasmus Darwin, Buffon, Lamarck and Cuvier had come palpably close to deciphering the code of evolution.² Charles Lyell's

¹Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* [London, 1983], p. 17.

²Indeed it was the Greeks who more or less "invented" the idea of evolution (in speculative philosophical form at least) and it has been debated ever since:

From Heraclitus and Anaximander came the suggestion that animal species are mutable; from Aristotle the idea of a graded series of organisms, the idea of continuity in nature or the shading of one class into another, and a model of evolutionary process in the development of the germ into the plant. From both the Stoics and the Epicureans, and particularly from Lucretius, came the doctrine that man is a part of nature and that his organs are animal and savage rather than godlike and idyllic. (William Irvine, *Apes, Angels and Victorians: A Joint Biography of Darwin and Huxley* [London, 1956], p. 65)

In the middle ages evolutionary ideas were contemplated by alchemists in both the scientific and

Principles of Geology (1830-33) taught Darwin how to think about changes in the earth's history and how to construct and test hypotheses. Darwin saw the topography of the lands and islands he visited as constantly changing (slowly over geological time) and began applying the principle of change to the creatures and species he encountered. On the *Beagle* he read Georges Cuvier, a scientist who admitted that there was a certain "succession" of plants and animals, although Cuvier felt that whole species were entirely wiped out and a new genesis created an altered type (this was basically a fallacious, but understandable, reading of an incomplete fossil record, a record with too many "missing links"). Darwin was also influenced by the theories of his own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, regarding "generation" in which he contends that all warm-blooded animals may have descended from a single ancestral filament imbued with powers of growth and development by the "First-Cause". Darwin was also familiar with the theories of Jean Baptiste Lamarck, a discredited and ridiculed scientist, but a man who, in a few inspired pieces of half-poetic, half-prophetic writing came closest to unravelling the theory of evolution. Lamarck believed in organic continuity and postulated that the efforts of organisms to adapt themselves to changes in the conditions of life resulted in the production of an organ with a new function; these changes were then passed on to the offspring. He posited an almost transcendental, upward striving in the animal (a will or volition) towards a higher state - an idea that came in and out of fashion during the nineteenth- and into the twentieth century. Samuel Butler, for instance, championed Lamarck, being convinced that the principle of evolution implied effort, will and intention: there was design beneath the seemingly random process.

As the voyage progressed, the weight of facts the young man was collecting began to form themselves into a pattern. Fossils of extinct and still living species were found together, a fact that seemed to discredit Cuvier's "creationist" theory. Darwin noted how slightly modified species inhabited adjacent islands. He was fascinated by the similarity

transcendental spheres of alchemy. The assumption of the transmutability of metals and experiments to create a "homunculus" (an artificial life form) disregard the essential distinctions of species and elements in favour of a belief in development and transformation. "Thus divested of its absurd jargon and superstitions, the basic [alchemical] creed is quite in accord with various modern metaphysical doctrines" (Lionel Stevenson, *Darwin Among the Poets* [1932; New York, 1963], p. 22).

between existing species and those of the previous geological epochs. His visit to the Galapagos Islands was crucial in his quest; it seemed to him like a journey back into the biological past (a journey Wells and Conrad were to make on their fictional "evolutionary" isles). Here evolution stared him in the face: related species of tortoises or of finches differed according to the natural barriers which separated them. Thus it seemed to him that castaways, cut off from their mainland stock, could start to change according to their new surroundings. Later he noted that "on a small island the race for life would be less severe, and there will have been less modification and less extermination."³ He found that on a tiny island like Madeira, ancient fresh water fish, basically living fossils, still survive, due to their isolation and lack of competition.

Nearly all of the great revelations Darwin was to unleash upon the world in the next half century are to be found in germ form in his journal notes of this period. After the voyage he published his *The Voyage of the "Beagle"* (1839), a geological history of the South American continent and his revolutionary theory of the growth of coral reefs and islands. Until 1858 Darwin continued to develop his theories about the common origin of life forms, and became fluent in the details of animal breeding: he felt that if man could develop breeds of dogs, pigeons and race-horses, nature could be "naturally selecting" on a much grander scale. And connecting Thomas Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) - a polemical account of man over-breeding, outstripping his food supply, and the weak succumbing in the struggle for available resources - with his findings in the animal kingdom, suddenly it all fell into place: nature bred vast populations of each species and then neutralised the failures by eliminating them, thus giving the successful adaptations and mutations the chance to breed the next generation. Natural and sexual selection, mutation and adaptation to environment were the answers to the evolution riddle. However, he felt that the world was not yet ready to hear his tentative and heretical ideas about the origin of species. It was not until two decades later that he was forced to show his hand. On 18 June 1858 he received a letter from a hut on the Mollucas in the Malay Archipelago where Alfred Russell Wallace's experiences on

³Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, edited with an introduction by J. W. Barrow (1859; London, 1985), p. 151.

the islands had led him to the same conclusions. The letter contained an abstract of a theory explaining the adaptation of species to environment and their evolution. Darwin had to publish.

THE *ORIGIN*

When *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* appeared in 1859 (for a brief summary, see Appendix A) it exploded like a bombshell in the stable mid-century world.⁴ The first edition sold out in a single day. It was immediately apparent that it was going to be very difficult for Victorians to adapt to the idea that their "ancestor was an animal which breathed water, had a swim bladder, a great swimming tail, an imperfect skull, and undoubtedly was an hermaphrodite!"⁵ The Darwinian revolution had begun and it was to bring about a profound change in man's conception of himself: no wonder there was strong opposition to the book, particularly from the clergy. The implications of the *Origin* challenged the ethical, political, sociological, philosophical and religious ideas of the day. It undermined the accepted morals, conventions and ideals.

Although the idea of evolution was not new, the meticulous manner with which Darwin, a man of high scientific integrity, had gone about assembling his mountain of data posed a case that his contemporaries found very hard to refute. What *was* new was that evolution could now be considered a tried and tested fact of biology. Darwin's genius lay in his ability to marshal all the available data and weld it into a coherent theoretical framework. He was able to show how the natural order is in a kind of intricate war for survival, that the slightest mutation might grant an individual an advantage over another, allow it to survive, reproduce and so transmit the hereditary "advantage" or small "mutation". Species diverge and specialise in accordance with their different surroundings, adapting to new conditions and eventually becoming new species. The

⁴Beer explains how Darwin's almost fictional style in the *Origin* made it even more incendiary. Passages that are deliberately obscure in relation to how man fits into the picture, metaphors whose peripheries remain undescribed, the presence of latent meaning and the use of ambiguous terms such as "the struggle for existence", offered space for thinkers to move in and interpret his theory in diverse and contradictory ways. His use of language and the expansive method of his explication led inexorably to a rapid expansion of applications and interpretations (*Darwin's Plots*, pp. 99-103).

⁵Darwin quoted in Irvine, *Apes, Angels and Victorians*, p. 108.

process of sexual selection (that is the male struggle with other males over females, and the choice of mate) results in the stronger, more virile or more "beautiful" reproducing themselves more abundantly and strengthening the line. There is inevitable "waste" - populations are kept to relatively constant sizes through nature's selective "elimination" process, whole species are slaughtered or become extinct - but Darwin was more impressed with the "upward" climb, the development, specialisation and advance towards "intelligence" that species exhibit over time. However he could not fully explain the variation in animals. It was not until the twentieth-century rediscovery of Mendel's genetic theories about the mechanism of heredity that chance variations could be fully understood: without genetics Darwin at times resorted to Lamarckian explanations, in particular the inheritance of acquired characteristics. (Although Lamarck was more or less discredited by 1914, his theories, like those of Freud - and Freud was a confirmed Lamarckian - proved fruitful for the metaphorical uses of creative artists such as Wells and Conrad.⁶)

T. H. Huxley

In June 1860 the British Association for the Advancement of Science met in Oxford in what was to be a clash between Thomas Henry Huxley, Darwin's spokesman and knight in armour, and Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, defender against the heretical "monkey theory". The minutes of the debate were not taken, but it was recorded that Huxley's brilliant reply to the Bishop's flippant question as to whether Huxley was descended from an ape through his grandmother or his grandfather was so compelling that he turned the audience in his favour. From then on opponents of the evolutionary theory beat a (prolonged and tenacious) rear-guard action against the Darwinian scientists.⁷ Huxley, a young professor of palaeontology, became renowned as the vocal

⁶Belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics has found fertile ground at different times during this century. Hitler believed in the extermination of undesirables so that they did not pass on their "degeneracy" while the Soviet application of this theory to plant breeding led to an agricultural disaster in Russia. In H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, the obsessive scientist is similarly mistaken in his biological experiments.

⁷It was not until the twentieth century that the vast majority of scientists accepted almost *all* of Darwin's hypotheses: in the last decades of the nineteenth century "pure" Darwinism had to do battle with many contending evolutionary theories (creationist, teleological/autogenetic [that is the law of necessary

champion of the new theory; he saw it as his mission to wrench science from ecclesiastical control. He quickly realised the impact of evolutionary ideas on the realm of ethics, and developed an explanation of morality based on science which he defended at every opportunity. It was he who coined the term "agnostic", to describe those of like incredulous mind as himself. He looked at theology from an anthropological perspective, trying to explain many of the Bible stories as similar to the demonology and animism found in contemporary "primitive" tribes. He stressed that to pursue what was ethically the best, man had to choose a course very different to the one that led to success in the cosmic struggle for existence: the animal in man had to be fought at every turn. The ethical process, he argued, was part of the cosmic process, but was nevertheless in opposition to it.

Huxley was the first to explicitly use embryology, palaeontology and comparative anatomy to establish the anthropoid origin of man and published it in *Man's Place in Nature* (1863). He showed conclusively that there is no biological gap between the higher apes and *Homo sapiens* and, using the evidence of recently discovered Neanderthal skulls, proved that our ancestors were half-human, half-ape. Taking this line of thinking a step further, from the fact that all life forms derived from the same essential ingredients it could be asserted that humans were "related" not only to the monkey, but also to the amoeba, and even to the molecule and atom.

THE IMPACT OF THE "MONKEY THEORY"

Ideas

The *Origin* was a watershed in the history of ideas. Evolutionary theory was threatening and revolutionary not because the concepts were new, but because it offered scientific answers to old problems concerning issues such as the afterlife, descent and hierarchies. During the course of this thesis we will see how Darwin's emphasis on

development and an inbuilt drive to progress] and saltational [the sudden emergence of drastically new life forms]). However for my purposes I am concerned with popular conceptions of evolution which, after 1859, were broadly Darwinian.

chance, flux, change and "animal" inheritance affected (and relativised) man's conception of philosophy, ethics and history.

From a philosophical perspective I will consider how Darwinian thought influenced the interpretation of Schopenhauer in the late nineteenth century. As the century drew to a close, Schopenhauer's pessimistic notions of an ascetic renunciation of the world became very popular in England as well as on the continent. His ideas played a role in helping to reinforce and articulate late-century pessimism brought about largely as a result of the implications of Darwinian theory. Thinkers from Nietzsche to Huxley responded to Schopenhauer's view of life, particularly his proto-Darwinian ideas concerning over-refinement and his attempts to escape the world of blind and instinctive Will. The philosopher urged a withdrawal from life, from the realm of action, into an ascetic realm of "art", in effect a quest for a kind of nirvana. I will also assess the impact of the philosophy of Nietzsche, with its Darwinian cast, on contemporary thought. A popular conflation of Nietzsche and Darwin resulted in the idea that the evolution of the highest human type, the superman, had been thwarted by a democratic "slave morality" that favoured the weak and the masses. In the absence of a Christian system of ethics, Nietzsche called for a morality that stood "beyond good and evil" and would bring about a race of *Übermensch*, the "fittest" in his cosmology.

Darwin had thus opened up a void in the field of ethics; certainly no biological doctrine could serve as a basis for a moral code. The increasing moral scepticism of the Victorians was reinforced by anthropological investigations which revealed the relative nature of customs and ethics in different societies. The notion of moral/ethical "progress" proved to be difficult to define. Evolutionary principles alone could not explain human advancement: ethical choices implied a willed evolution of mind, in effect a renunciation of the main tenets of biological evolution.

Darwin's theory also profoundly influenced the way people thought about the past, present and future: it transformed man's notion of time. A static state (be it utopian or anti-utopian) was no longer plausible; fixed orders and hierarchies looked tenuous in a broader, evolutionary time-scale; the idea of cyclical and mechanistic forces in nature and

society (Paley, like Newton before him, had conceived of the world as part of a cosmic *machine*) were largely superseded by linear, organic and non-repeatable growth taking the model of evolutionary time: a world of "becoming" rather than "being".

Politics

The *Origin's* impact on society echoed in every area of contemporary political thought and was employed in the cavalcade of the most diverse bandwagons and ideas. Herbert Spencer used evolutionary theory to explain his individualistic, *laissez-faire* philosophy, advocating "survival of the fittest" (his own term) as the universal rule of law. Social Darwinism was an "ideology" that appealed to many capitalists, imperialists and politicians and served as a "theoretical" justification for their unfair and often inhumane treatment of others. (Of course *laissez-faire* politics had been around long before Darwin - indeed, his theory was really an application of economics and free competition to the natural world; it was however the tremendously adaptable and seductive pseudo-scientific underpinning that was new.) Thus, for example, Darwin could be used to justify imperialism by promoting the British as the pinnacle of evolution and thus the fittest to rule the "less evolved" civilisations or "races". Classical liberalism found a doctrine that could challenge socialist ideals which preached government intervention for the weak. From the mid-1890's it was believed that war was imminent and this was not seen as necessarily a bad thing. From a crude social Darwinian perspective, war was a grand manifestation of competition, of survival of the fittest, and was necessary to maintain a position of eminence on the world stage.

Consequently, evolutionary theory had a significant influence on the way people thought about societal hierarchies and the class structure in particular. Many diverse conclusions were drawn from Darwin. His theory proved to be wonderfully elastic: it could be used to provide "scientific" arguments from both ends of the political spectrum. On the one hand, Darwinism functioned as a reaction against the random and "democratic" nature of chance variation and natural selection - and fear of the "mob". There was the growing conviction amongst some that a new evolutionary aristocracy

needed to be forged. Some believed that societies based on egalitarian principles were soft and decadent and that a new authoritarian hierarchy would restore "order" (assumptions of this kind and utopian eugenic solutions run through the works of H. G. Wells). Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin, was a eugenicist who advocated that society should set out to breed a gifted, superior "race", people who were "hereditarily endowed with noble qualities", an idea that found an echo in Nietzsche's idea of the "superman".⁸ On the other hand, evolutionary theories justified universal brotherhood and egalitarian social systems: a shared simian ancestry made a mockery of class privilege. Classification in the plant and animal kingdoms was shown to be an arrested moment in a sea of endless transformation, not an end in itself; so how could advocates of a human "class" structure claim any permanence or credibility for it?⁹ The whole race was seen as striving upward towards higher ideals: social progress (the greatest happiness for the greatest number) was associated with evolutionary "progress". Social Darwinism gave Karl Marx a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history. Samuel Hynes discusses the effect of the changing conceptions of classes as creating

a mood of estrangement and anxious uncertainty. A new, irresponsible rich, living in a new vulgarity, and a strange new poor, living in new ugliness, were replacing the old class division of gentry and peasantry.¹⁰

Evolutionary theory and evolutionary anthropology also influenced European nations' attitude and policies with respect to their colonies. An answer to the over-breeding described by Malthus and Darwin was to export the surplus population of Britain to the "unpeopled regions" of the earth. The emigrants would, it was hoped, be transformed into rich customers and the "race" invigorated. Others did not see this as the best solution, fearing that the "boatloads of rejects" would "[wreak] havoc abroad" with the result that all the "aboriginal nations" would be wiped out within a century.¹¹ All over the globe the "fitter civilised races" were eliminating the "lower races". Darwin was appalled at the way pseudo-science was used to justify domination: if you could prove that a "race" was

⁸Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London, 1883), p. 24.

⁹A play such as J. M. Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* (1902) draws attention to the tenuous and artificial nature of the class structure by isolating an aristocratic family and their resourceful servants on a desert island where a reversal of roles results in a "natural" (Darwinian) hierarchy.

¹⁰Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (1968; Princeton, 1975), p. 63.

¹¹Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin* (London, 1991), p. 266.

a separate and inferior species there was then little moral obligation to treat its members humanely. Instead he sought to show that different "races" had diversified due to environmental differences and sexual selection, but were by no means separate species.

Sexuality

Not only did the theory of evolution force a reappraisal of "primitives" or living "biological ancestors", but it also compelled a reassessment of the position of that other "class" of *Homo sapiens*: womankind. Women's "preordained" inferior position with regard to men had to be questioned. One school of thought held that natural and sexual selection had turned the female of the species into a different, less intelligent, more altruistic creature, but with the advent of proto-genetics or pangenesis (individuals inheriting "genes" from both parents) arguments of this sort became more tenuous. Anthropological research showed that women in other societies performed tasks that would have been unheard of for European women. Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) brought mankind openly into the evolutionary debate and focused on sexual, rather than natural, selection. Darwin's explication of the mechanism of sexual selection demonstrated how women had to accommodate themselves to men's tastes and values in order to be "chosen". He showed that man keeps the female of the species in a far more abject state of bondage than does the male of any other animal, and has gained the dominant power of selection: the mating game could be viewed as an instrument of oppression. Inspired by the *Descent*, Henry Maudsley outlined an evolutionist theory of madness, concentrating his study on young women and analysing their madness from biological, educational and social perspectives. He showed the effect of a selection process determined by cultural determinants by explaining how the influence of the reproductive organs and menstruation, the limited range of activities available to young women, and society's one-sided morality in sexual matters may affect the minds of women.¹² Investigations such as

¹²Henry Maudsley in his *Pathology of Mind* (1879) in Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, pp. 212-3. Darwin even backed his cousin Galton's eugenic proposal to have the law changed to permit divorce on the grounds of "hereditary defects" such as insanity, criminality or vice (Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin*, p. 602). However Darwin was conservative and equivocal in his conception of the advancement of women:

these brought the issue and status of woman under the *scientific* microscope. Beer notes further that this had a profound impact on the representation of women in literature: "So topics traditional to the novel - courtship, sensibility, the making of matches, women's beauty, men's dominance, *inheritance* in all its forms - became charged with new difficulty in the wake of the publication of *The Descent of Man*."¹³

By the end of the nineteenth century a new, scientific understanding of sexuality began to develop, partly engineered by Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis.¹⁴ Carpenter was an anti-establishment mystic with a scientific background who championed the causes of suffragettes, free-lovers, socialists, vegetarians and others. He wrote about sexual liberation and speculated on the relation between sexual behaviour and social organisation. Ellis was trained as a doctor, but was concerned with demystifying the perceived value of science - as a socialist he wanted to see science used as an instrument for social reform. He defended all forms of social improvement, particularly the women's movement, and wrote his highly influential *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1911), to document a new, modern attitude towards sex and sexual behaviour, from a biological, anthropological, psychological and historical perspective. Carpenter and Ellis tried to convince Englishmen that sex was instinctive - determined by our biological inheritance - and not immoral, that sexual deviants were not necessarily "criminals" and that sexual behaviour should be based on natural and humane considerations instead of social conventions. During the Edwardian era the suffragette movement began to have a great impact on public attitudes towards women: many men were alienated and none could ignore the sweeping changes in the social, political, psychological and economic landscape brought about by the altering status of women.

The practice of modern contraception and the Marriage Question (women could now choose whether to have a husband or children and divorce became a ready option) meant that women gained a degree of independence, mobility and choice, which resulted in an inevitable change in their status (in Conrad's *Victory* we will meet a female heroine who

for instance, he did feel that the standard of women's education should be raised, but he refused to support the defendants of contraception and birth control.

¹³Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 213.

¹⁴Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, pp. 149-164.

is clearly a product of this relatively "liberated" Edwardian era). Naturally a liberated womankind contributed to conservative fears of decadence, degeneration and a decline in morals. The militant suffragette movement only added fuel to the fire.

Theology

From a religious perspective Darwin's theory stormed the battlements of Christian orthodoxy: humans were now products of blind chance and blind fate, an intelligent mutation in a kingdom where only the fittest survived. Introduce evolution into the supernaturally sanctioned status quo and, it was believed, civilisation would surely collapse. Pious citizens reacted in one of two ways: they either rejected Darwinism outright or, realising the compelling argument of the new theory, tried to incorporate it into their system of belief, evolutionary ideas (particularly Lamarckian) being used as evidence in favour of Christianity.¹⁵ Of course the rationalisation of Christianity had been happening gradually throughout the modern, post-Renaissance era; Darwin however gave a cogency and an urgency to the ongoing debate and was able to strike at the heart of faith, particularly the idea of genesis, with a plausible and scientific alternative.

Darwinian theory offered no answers, no indications as to how to conduct oneself in the world. Scepticism, relativism and empiricism had destroyed the metaphysical-religious foundations of ethics. How could a benevolent Deity have created an imperfect world of chance, waste, suffering and death? And how could the descendant of a prehistoric fish possess an immortal soul? Huxley treated theology to an anthropological scrutiny and found that the Bible was a series of literatures recording the intellectual life of Israel over many centuries and that the myths and miracles closely resembled stories in the histories of other religions. In his *Primitive Culture* (1871) the anthropologist Edward

¹⁵The "Age of Evolution" (as Tom Gibbons characterises the period 1880-1920 in *Rooms in the Darwin Hotel: Studies in English Literary Criticism and Ideas 1880-1920* [Nedlands, 1973]) saw a vehement reaction to the materialism, atheism and pessimism that went hand in hand with the Darwinian revolution. Some evolutionists with a metaphysical bent postulated that there was a single, all-controlling evolutionary force or Will. This notion gave new impetus to religious philosophies that held that God was an immanent force. Evolutionism contributed to the revival of mystical, "alchemical", occult and theosophical movements, the popularity of Schopenhauer's idealist aesthetic and Buddhist philosophy. In an age when man had been displaced from his privileged position in the universe, these "creeds" reinvested him with mystical qualities, made his life seem meaningful.

Burnett Tylor set out to show that man's spiritual life was governed by the same natural laws of progress as his material existence. Christianity was being reduced to mythology and it began to appear as though *man* had created *God* in his own image. Sin could now be viewed, not in terms of the Fall, but as the survival of "primitive" and animal characteristics in man.

The recognition of the animal in us all had an effect on the way we view ourselves in the world. Darwin helped to collapse crucial distinctions between man and animal, arguing that man exhibits moral, cultural and intellectual differences in degree only, not in kind. The very idea of "species" as a normative category became untenable and weird creatures became biological possibilities. Man was toppled from producer to a mere product of nature:

The resulting crisis is one of Authorship. As model and analogue of human reason, God is abolished along with the fiction of the subject as the origin of the text, a representation of divine thought, to a self-referential and self-reflexive text, disclosing only its own origin in unconscious, involuntary, mathematical processes ("accumulation" and selection) that are as dispersed ("innumerable"), trivial ("slight"), arbitrary ("variations"), and autotelic ("good for the individual possessor") as the play of differences that constitute language itself.¹⁶

Literature

Darwin had removed man from the centre of life on this planet just as the Earth had been removed from the centre of the universe by Copernican heliocentrism. The evolutionary paradigm invaded the sphere of the creative unconscious just as surely as it infiltrated the scientific, philosophical and metaphysical concepts of the day.¹⁷ In the realm of island literature this meant a break with previous conceptions of the hermetically sealed, timeless island space. Never again could authors escape so completely the everyday, *changing* realm of the "mainland", the "real" world. The Arcadian or Utopian isle forged in the minds of Prospero, Crusoe, Mr Robinson and their authors was no

¹⁶Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence* (Baltimore, 1985), p. 26.

¹⁷Beer notes how Darwin's theory influenced the nineteenth-century novel:

Evolutionary ideas proved crucial to the novel during that century not only at the level of theme but at the level of organisation. At first evolutionism tended to offer a new authority to orderings of narrative which emphasised cause and effect, then, descent and kin. Later again, its eschewing of fore-ordained design (its dysteleology) allowed chance to figure as the only sure determinant (*Darwin's Plots*, p. 8).

longer secure. The modern temper, a symptom of the evolutionary *Weltanschauung*, invaded the modern fictional island paradise as inevitably as microscopic organisms are washed ashore by the current or birds swept off course to a new island home. Island faunas and floras had taught Wallace and Darwin their greatest lessons in evolution: islands were their laboratories. Islands were also nature's laboratories: hot-houses where whole new species could be developed, and in a similar way writers began to use islands to experiment with human behaviour and development. In an Age of Evolution fictional islands reflected scientific advances either literally or metaphorically.

The *Origin* sparked a great many literary works that engaged with the idea of evolution, often going to the extreme of science fiction - the so-called scientific and anthropological romances - in order to convey their imaginative interpretations of the implications in this change in cosmology. The rule of natural law prevails in Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1863); in Samuel Butler's anti-clerical *Erewhon* (1872) machines take over from humans; Jules Verne takes his readers into a prehistoric past full of living fossils far below the Earth's surface in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864); W. H. Mallock pokes fun at the idea of a "missing link" in *The New Paul and Virginia* (1878), in which an atheist professor and the wife of an Anglican bishop are shipwrecked on a desert island; H. G. Wells explores Darwinian theory in *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and many later novels while George Bernard Shaw's play, *Back to Methuselah* (1921), owes a debt to Lamarckian thinking. Furthermore Darwin's emphasis on *luck* or *chance* manifested itself in literature by undermining the prevailing belief in a rational and ordered universe and making way for the realist device of apparently inexplicable twists of fate (so apparent in Thomas Hardy) that punctuate the plots of contemporary realist novels.

MAN'S DESCENT AND THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCHOOL

Darwin's *The Descent of Man* had almost as great an impact as the *Origin* (for a brief summary, see Appendix B). In it he concentrated on sexual selection and introduced the ideas of will and culture which had been deliberately excluded from the *Origin*. He

applied the theory of evolution (developed for plant and animal life) to humans, taking account of the anthropological thinking of the time. Darwin posited that the brain power of hominids in their earliest stages was essentially that of animals and that the difference between the mind of humans and animals was one of degree, not of kind. He wanted to prove that mental faculties had developed in the same way as physical attributes: through natural selection, adaptation to changes in environment and the like. Mind was just another weapon in the struggle for survival. He pointed out that man's ascent was due to the combination of a number of factors, such as his upright posture, the development of tools and the fashioning of language. Racial difference was explained using his theory of sexual selection: men fought over women they considered to be the most beautiful - and this varied from region to region. He showed how each "race" moved up the "ladder" of civilisation with selfish instinct giving way to reason and morality. Sexual selection made women more passive, caring and unselfish; it made men more courageous, intelligent and stronger. He held that the moral nature of man had developed through the advancement of reasoning powers, through social instincts (gained by natural selection), public opinion and later by the "creation" of an all-seeing deity.

Victorian Anthropology

The growth of anthropology, the study of "primitive" people and their "evolution", was closely connected to the spread of Darwinian theory.¹⁸ Irvine points out that in the Age of Evolution

the advantage passed from the biologist and the comparative anatomist to the anthropologist and the historical scholar. The two former, having located man among his fellow creatures, could do little more than speculate, sometimes naturalistically and sometimes transcendently, on remote and grandiloquent dawns and origins; whereas the latter two, facing lesser and more soluble

¹⁸Irving Goldman sketches the relationship:

Anthropology has from its beginnings been closely identified with the concept of evolution. It was in response to the idea of evolution that anthropology developed its subject matter, the study of primitive and of prehistoric peoples, and acquired the orientation of an historical discipline concerned with origins and developments. Moreover, the Darwinian contribution raised the scientific standing of evolutionary theory and thereby invigorated a discipline already evolutionist in orientation. After 1859 professional field work was begun and anthropology passed into its maturity. ("Evolution and Anthropology", *Victorian Studies* 3, 1 (September, 1959], p. 55).

problems, moved triumphantly from doctrine to doctrine, building up intricate structures of fact and inference.¹⁹

In the second half of the nineteenth century organisations such as the Anthropological Society of London were formed whose concern was to study the way of life of "primitive" peoples. Darwin's theory, archaeological discoveries of the day (such as those of Neanderthal skulls) as well as the acquisition of more "spheres of influence" and formal colonies lent impetus to the desire to know more about the natives of different lands and islands. "Armchair anthropology" was useful in the imperial enterprise: it had shown "savages" to be inferior, further down the evolutionary "ladder", to Europeans. Because Europeans had supposedly passed up the same "ladder" of evolution, "primitives", it was thought, could be studied as contemporary embodiments of "prehistoric" European development. The adults of "inferior" groups (and women would have been included in this paradigm) were considered more or less the equivalent of the children of "superior" groups: the European child represented the "primitive" adult ancestor.

Pseudo-scientific theories about "race" served the purposes of the empire builders; stereotypical assumptions and simplified formulas were applied indiscriminately to natives from different countries and continents.²⁰ "Primitives" were "considered to be slaves of custom and thus to be unable to break the despotism of their own 'collective conscience'."²¹ They worshipped animals or ancestors, were superstitious, lived under the yoke of despotic tribal chiefs: in short, "primitives" were thought to exist in a primal condition of naked survival of the fittest. The eminent Victorian anthropologist, John Lubbock, endorsing Hobbes in a frontal attack on Rousseau's conception of noble "savages", described them as follows:

¹⁹Irvine, *Apes, Angels and Victorians*, p. 141.

²⁰On Darwin and racism, J. W. Burrow writes in his introduction to *The Origin of Species*:

Racial doctrines entered European thought before Darwin, as an offshoot of developments in anatomy and philology, and Darwin himself did not endorse the application of his theory in social contexts - Huxley, indeed, explicitly repudiated it - but inevitably it provided a kind of crucible into which the fears and hatreds of the age could be dipped and come out coated with an aura of scientific authority. (p. 45)

²¹Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of "Primitive" Society in English Fiction 1858-1920* (London, 1975), p. 6.

The true savage is neither free nor noble; he is a slave to his own wants, his own passions; imperfectly protected from the weather, he suffers from the cold by night and the heat by day; ignorant of agriculture, living by the chase, and improvident in success, hunger always stares him in the face, and often drives him to the dreadful alternative of cannibalism or death.²²

The equally influential anthropologist, Edward Tylor, was to remark: "The black, brown, yellow, and white men whom we have supposed ourselves examining on the quays, are living records of the remote past, every Chinese and Negro bearing in his face evidence of the antiquity of man."²³ Natives were ascribed a position on the hierarchical "ladder" according to their "race" and "customs". As "racial characteristics" were thought to be hereditary, whole "races" were classified and certain qualities attributed to them. Racism and racial theory had been around for centuries, but social Darwinian anthropology strengthened these, giving them a "scientific" base, and placed Anglo Saxon man at the top and the "primitive" at the bottom of the cultural and biological scale.

The period in which this image of "primitives" developed - from the publication of *Origin of Species* until 1914 - coincides to some extent with the rise and decline of Empire, with the huge output of popular fiction about exotic lands, and with the scientific debates stimulated by Darwin and anthropologists.²⁴ Popular literature reflected and reinforced the anthropological assumptions. Leo Henkin explores many of the recurring anthropological themes of the period that are derived from Darwin and occur in contemporary (island) fiction. Robert Ellis Dudgeon's *Colymbia* (1873), for example, concerns a subterranean race that has branched from the human, and lives on volcanic islands in the South Seas. This race of Colymbians is able to live under water and claims its descent from aquatic mammals rather than apes. In William Westall's *A Queer Race* (1887), the hero arrives at an island where miscegenation between copper-coloured aborigines and blacks has produced piebald progeny with monkey-like agility.²⁵ From these fictions it becomes apparent that with the advent of the theory of evolution came a change in the nature of the weird and wonderful discoveries in isolated territories and

²²John Lubbock quoted in George W. Stocking, Jr. *Victorian Anthropology* (New York, 1987), p. 153.

²³Edward B. Tylor, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilisation* (1881; Michigan, 1960), p. 5.

²⁴Street, *The Savage in Literature*, p. 10.

²⁵Leo Henkin, *Darwinism in the English Novel 1860-1910: The Impact of Evolution on Victorian Fiction* (New York, 1968).

undiscovered islands. Whereas in the past the heroes of romances and adventure stories had met strange creatures on their travels, the theory of evolution gave a scientific argument for mutated forms and degenerate or "unevolved" inhabitants. In *The Oracle of Baal* (1896) by J. Provand Webster, a journey into darkest Africa results in the discovery of human-like Affri "savages". The Affri are a "missing link" tribe who have part animal and part human features. Some resemble baboons, others tigers, dogs or cattle; they are without language and, according to the Englishmen, without soul. They are thus classified as animal. The Affri are slaves to an evolutionarily more advanced tribe, but in an uprising they vanquish their masters, throw off the clothing they were forced to wear and degenerate into pure animality. Well's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* can be viewed as a more sophisticated version of this kind of anthropological romance.

As the century drew to a close there was an increasing awareness amongst more sensitive writers of an alternative picture. As the science of anthropology developed and became more sophisticated, the representation of the native began to change and by the time a novel such as *Heart of Darkness* was published in 1899, the very concept of the "primitive" was being challenged. Gradually anthropologists began to interpret and understand rituals and customs that had formerly been dismissed as irrational. Fieldwork research, as opposed to the "armchair" variety, was pioneered by the father of modern anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, who spent a considerable period living with the Trobriand Islanders in the early years of the twentieth century. His choice of locale was important: in the realm of anthropology, as in biology, scientists found that the isolated laboratory of an island crystallised, made more transparent, mechanisms and processes that were less easily discernible on the mainland. Malinowski's approach to other societies was a more relativistic one, less Eurocentric and more empathetic, and the emphasis lay on understanding the function of institutions and behaviour patterns within the society rather than placing a society or culture on the "ladder" of civilisation. In 1913 a different strand was added to evolutionary anthropology with the publication of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. It provided a link between the old and the new in evolutionary thought: the old, "armchair" understanding of "primitives" and a new, more complex

view of human nature and culture. Freud encouraged the consideration of symbolic and non-rational elements in human nature, an area that had been hitherto neglected.²⁶

As the new anthropological science matured, anthropologists came to realise that human development was not a simple linear progression, that societies did not necessarily pass through definable steps (from idol worship to monotheism, from communal marriage to exogamy, for example). Indeed it was shown that the evolution of man did not proceed unidirectionally, but was rather a process of sprawling, *ad hoc* adaptation. The very idea of an "evolutionary" school of anthropology began to look tenuous: theories of social and cultural evolution did not fit into the patterns that had been sketched for them. Clearly these developments had an effect on literature about natives, producing a more subtle and cautious approach by even the most jingoistic of writers.

DEGENERATION AND THE END OF A CENTURY

Darwin had stated that evolution was a process of amelioration: "And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection."²⁷ However this optimistic contention soon began to look increasingly debatable. Without the benefit of modern genetics and endocrinology Darwin himself had to resort to theories of atavism and reversion to explain mutation. The concept of degeneration²⁸ is integrally linked to the *fin de siècle* mood of decline, but evolutionary degeneration is an idea as old as that of evolution. Evolution could be regressive just as easily as it could be progressive: there was no guarantee of amelioration.²⁹

²⁶Goldman, "Evolution and Anthropology", p. 62.

²⁷Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 459.

²⁸In *Body and Will*, Henry Maudsley defines degeneration, an inheritable "disease", as follows:

It means literally an *unkinding*, the undoing of a *kind*, and in this sense was first used to express the change of kind without regard to whether the change was to perfect or to degrade; but it is now used exclusively to denote a change from a higher to a lower kind, that is to say, from a more complex organisation: it is a process of *dissolution*, the opposite of that process of *involution* which is pre-essential to evolution. (*Body and Will, Being an Essay Concerning Will in its Metaphysical, Physiological and Pathological Aspects* [London, 1883], p. 240)

²⁹In *The Water-Babies*, an early Darwinian tale of degeneration tracing the decline of mankind through the "primitive" to animality, Kingsley distils and satirises in a most insightful way the "negative" significance of the new theory. The last of the Doasyoulikes is incapable of convincing Du Chaillu not to kill him, for he has lost the use of language through disuse: the creature is shot, bringing about the extinction of the race.

Schopenhauer's pessimism infected the turn-of-the-century *Zeitgeist* and at the time of Queen Victoria's funeral it was said that Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* (1776-88),³⁰ with its prophecy of imperial decline, haunted the imagination of many.³¹ The late Victorian and Edwardian Ages were periods of anxiety for Britain: there were invasion fears, anxiety about the deterioration of the English "race" (it was claimed that sixty percent of Englishmen were unfit for military service in 1902³² - evolution's "waste products" were clearly no longer being weeded out), concern about an over-extended empire (recall the humiliation of British troops in the Boer War), class anxiety at home and of course the woman problem violently manifesting itself in the growing militant suffragette movement. This fair isle no longer felt as secure as it had a generation before. Witness a poem such as Kipling's "The Islanders" (1902), which castigates the English for letting the Empire down, for having become soft and effete on their island (like Axel Heyst in Conrad's *Victory*) and for leaving colonial troops to fight their battles.

During the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries there were a number of periods of national hysteria concerning the threat of a foreign invasion and many writers capitalised on these fears, the yellow press doing its best to fan the flames with scare-mongering articles. There was also the belief that internal decay would render the nation unable to defend itself from invading armies of Hun or Frog. H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The War in the Air* (1908), Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) and William Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910* (1906) are but the most well-known of a large output of invasion stories. The first of the Wells novels presents a "Darwinian" invasion scenario where a superior species from Mars takes over England. The other three works single out the Germans as the main threat in the decade leading up to 1914. All four were concerned with the reasons for England's decline: was it that the Empire was too unwieldy; had a democratic "slave morality" weakened the society; was it the demise of Christianity; were the problems racial or biological? We shall see during the course of

³⁰Several annotated editions of Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88; London, 1993) appeared in the nineteenth century and the influential seven volume, magisterial version - edited by J. B. Bury - was published between 1896 and 1900, at a time when many felt that the British Empire was teetering on the brink of its own decline.

³¹Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, p. 17.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 22.

this thesis how novelists were drawn to the *tabula rasa* of small, remote islands on which to isolate and investigate the confusing matrix of societal dilemmas.

The idea of deterioration of the race was closely related to the concepts of degeneration and decadence. Decadence was conceived as a failure of national energy, of general societal discouragement and a succumbing to pessimism.³³ The *fin de siècle* *Zeitgeist* was also described as the *mal de siècle* or even as the *fin du globe* and, as Bernard Bergonzi points out, Oscar Wilde, the decadent and "degenerate" homosexual, can be seen as a symbol for the period and state of mind.³⁴ Some believed that what was observed as physical deterioration was a Lamarckian (use-inheritance) adjustment of the species to the degrading new conditions of urban life.

Tories and Liberals alike were appalled at the thought that perhaps the creatures of the slums might be fittest to survive in the new world. And as with people, so with nations: Social Darwinism might promise the progressive evolution of nations, but it also held the possibility of decline.³⁵

A dedication to science was considered as a possible salvation, the instrument of progress. The middle of the nineteenth century had seen an unprecedented growth in confidence regarding a bright scientific future: in this new age of agnosticism and materialism, human progress had seemed unlimited. However, as the century drew to a close disillusionment grew regarding the triumphant Age of Science. As Masterman wrote:

The large hopes and dreams of the Early Victorian time have vanished: never, at least in the immediate future, to return. The science which was to allay all diseases, the commerce which was to abolish war, and weave all nations into one human family, the research which was to establish ethics and religion on a secure and positive foundation, the invention which was to enable all humanity, with a few hours of not disagreeable work every day, to live for the remainder of their time in ease and sunshine - all these have become recognised as remote and fairy visions.³⁶

³³In H. G. Wells' novel about decadent England, *Tono-Bungay* (1908), the protagonist, George Ponderova, journeys to an Atlantic island to collect a deposit of valuable quap (a strange radio-active ore) in order to save his uncle's failing financial enterprise. This dangerous substance is an objective correlative for the decay in English society and, when taken on board George's ship, it causes a breakdown in morale and sickness among the sailors, and burns a whole in the vessel causing it to sink.

³⁴Bernard Bergonzi, *The Turn of a Century: Essays on Victorian and Modern English Literature* (1973; New York, 1974), p. 24. The term *fin de siècle* was applied to a wide range of trivial behaviour and was associated with the idea that all established forms of intellectual, moral and social certainty were evaporating (ibid., p. 19).

³⁵Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, p. 25.

³⁶C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* quoted in ibid., p. 134.

Science did not have the answers to effect the "fairy visions". Many former biological and scientific certainties began to look tenuous as new fields opened up and the elements of chance and change loomed larger as guiding forces. Theories of relativism became central to scientific arguments, and after the turn of the century the optimistic, quasi-religious notions of neo-Lamarckians were more or less completely discredited by pioneers in the new science of genetics.

It was in the last decade of the nineteenth century that the idea of an imminent end to the world and a self-conscious feeling of anxiety about the future of the "race" and the species was felt most acutely across the spectrum of contemporary society. Lord Kelvin's Second Law of Thermodynamics - the theory of entropy which held that the sun was cooling and the end of life on earth was in sight - added a millenarian dimension to *fin de siècle Angst*. A slow devolution of the world was possible in which the predatory and instinctive in man resurfaced: survival of the fittest would again be the rule of law. And were not the current tendencies of rampant imperialism, *laissez-faire* capitalism and selfish individualism not the first signs of that decline? Perhaps degeneration would happen quickly in great leaps (the idea of "saltation" or abrupt variation) instead of a slow regression back down the "ladder" of evolution. Could it be that the faster breeding lower classes were better able to adapt to changing conditions and that the city slums were breeding a dangerous new species? Perhaps man would be superseded by another species, or be destroyed by invaders from outer-space. This was fertile ground indeed for novelists of the day.

Daniel Pick, in his excellent study of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideas about degeneration, points out that new discourses emerged during the nineteenth century that strongly appealed to evolutionary theory: concepts of atavism, regression, relapse, transgression and decline within a European context. He looks at the formation and dissemination of a natural-scientific and medico-psychiatric language of degeneration using as his case studies the work of Benedict Augustin Morel, Cesare Lombroso and Henry Maudsley. During the second half of the Victorian era there was an enormous output of scientific writings on social evolution in which the degeneration of European

society was discussed (particularly by eugenicists) as an empirically demonstrable biological, medical and physical fact: Morel's *Treatise*, Lombroso's *Criminal Man*, Lankester's *Degeneration*, Maudsley's *Body and Will* and Nordau's famous *Degeneration* are but a few important examples.³⁷ Even Wallace speaks of degeneration and extinction on his Malay islands and Tylor talks about degeneration carrying the connotation of atavism and regression to a "savage" state in his *Primitive Culture*.³⁸

Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, a sensationalist but influential book tracing aspects of European decline, appeared in England in 1895. In it he warns of the coming end of the world and speaks of a "*fin de race*", condemning the decadence in art and society and seeking to define exactly what constitutes a "degenerate". (There was great concern about the purity of the "race" and eugenic solutions were widely discussed. Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, was a pioneer in the field of eugenics and promoted discussion on racial, sexual, moral and artistic degeneration.) Nordau borrowed the idea that the artist and the genius are by nature degenerate from the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso who focused on the French Decadents in an attempt ^{to} draw analogies between literary decadence and biological degeneration. Lombroso investigated and articulated the concepts of atavism and degeneration as perceived by the Italian medical and scientific intelligentsia and showed the "backwardness" of peasants and the "degeneracy" of the urban proletariat. Nordau talks of madness, suicide and crime in these terms and sets out to prove that modern trends in art and literature "have their source in the degeneracy of their authors, and that the enthusiasm of their admirers is for manifestations of more or less pronounced moral insanity, imbecility, and dementia."³⁹ Amongst others he discusses Oscar Wilde (capitalising on the publicity of the homosexuality trial), Nietzsche, Zola, Wagner, the French symbolists - in fact almost all the important movements and exponents of modern art and literature - and tries to show that modern philosophy and experimental art are impure and thus threatening the advancement of the

³⁷Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848 - c. 1918* (1989; Cambridge, 1993), p. 20.

³⁸In *Primitive Culture* Tylor argued that societies may regress; he did not believe that evolution was a steady, irreversible progression. The advancement of culture was not inevitable: it required effort, discipline and restraint.

³⁹Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1892; London, 1895), p. viii.

"race". This pseudo-scientific book was tremendously popular in England and went through eight impressions in its first year of publication.

The issues of atavism and degeneration were particularly pertinent to those serving in outposts of Empire where the threats of "going native" and of miscegenation were ever present.⁴⁰ (Of course the idea of "going native" is as old as colonialism itself, but the notion of an "evolutionary ladder" and of saltation lent a "scientific" legitimacy to these fears.) From an evolutionary perspective "primitives" represented something unknown, unpredictable and threatening: they were representatives of *chance*, driving home the notion that life and evolutionary existence are unpredictable, a biological gamble. Tylor stressed that even for "savages" there was the possibility of falling further down the "ladder" of evolution. He postulated that the Asiatic ancestors of South Sea Islanders had known about metal, but that through emigration and separation from their mainland kinsfolk they had fallen back into the Stone Age. Guarding against any such decline, English settlers had to preserve the customs, clothing and social hierarchies of home, even on the most far-flung island colony; even shipwrecked castaways, such as the boys in Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, exactly replicate their society.

THE PRIMITIVE WITHIN

The notion of "going native" and of preserving the purity of the "race" had a deep psychological resonance.⁴¹ Many anthropologists and biologists believed that the human mind retained relics of the "primitive", an idea that was picked up later and given "scientific" credibility by Freud in his investigation of dreams and the unconscious.⁴² For Freud, dreams appeared to be a gateway to the "primitive" unconscious (in H. G. Wells' *The Croquet Player* the prehistoric dwellers of Cainsmarsh rise up out of the mud to

⁴⁰Tylor, *Anthropology*, p. 15.

⁴¹ Hynes points out that the term "psychological" was appropriated by many disparate groups ranging from spiritualists to researchers in "psychic phenomena" who regarded themselves as empirical scientists. What they all had in common was a desire to breach the boundaries set by mechanistic materialism, to "liberate" late-Victorian and Edwardian science (*The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, p. 138).

⁴² Butler had spoken of "unconscious memory" to account for the transmission of acquired habits (which he elucidates in his Lamarckian novel *Erewhon*). Henkin summarises the theory: "By the unconscious memory of an act or series of acts that has been repeated incessantly we have learned all that we know; and through us life has learned all that it knows from the amoeba up to man, or earlier still, from the primordial cell" (*Darwinism and the English Novel*, p. 210).

threaten the protagonist in his dreams⁴³). In this light, interest in "oriental" wisdom, ancient myths, the occult and in "primitive" life can be seen as a reflection of an interest in the unconscious realm and a rejection of the modern and the empirical. Caught without a God in a scientific and industrial world, the journey within seemed a natural response, a quest to become acquainted with the inner landscape and to replace the former bond with a deity. In literature the idea of a double or second self, a Mr Hyde figure or a Conradian "secret sharer", reflects the notion of another, "transcendental" dimension, an unseen world within the unconscious. We will find during our investigation that on an isolated island the id (representative of the instinctive and the "primitive") is outwardly manifested in various metaphorical ways, an externalisation of the "beast within". If God no longer existed, then there was no more Satan. Evil could now be interpreted as lurking within each human, perhaps a manifestation of a savage past, stored somewhere in the biological memory.

* * *

Darwin concludes the *Descent* with the hope that evolution is an "ascent" and that man is at an unassailable position at the top of the "ladder":

Man may be excused for feeling some pride at having risen, though not through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale; and the fact of his having thus risen, instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future.⁴⁴

During the course of this thesis I will show how writers challenge this optimistic assumption within the fictional laboratory of an island. Evolution is a neutral scientific concept that does not necessarily imply amelioration; on the contrary, we will witness how humans and animals "degenerate", falling back down the anthropological, and even biological, "ladder". An up-beat Huxley suggested that man, the microcosm, was pitted in a cosmic struggle against a hostile and irrational environment, the macrocosm; but that

⁴³In a nightmare vision the protagonist sees man's previous incarnations seeking revenge: "And yet, if cave-men, why not apes? Suppose all our ancestors rose against us! Reptiles, fish, amoeba!" (*The Croquet Player: A Story* [London, 1936], p. 35).

⁴⁴Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 619.

with his intellect, ethical nature and will, he would modify the conditions of his life into a utopian existence. Others felt that man had ceased to develop, that the sun was dying and that our species might some day, perhaps in the not too distant future, cease to exist.

2 THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU

INTRODUCTION

H. G. Wells was a graduate of the Normal School of Science in South Kensington and believed in the power of science to change the world. Impatient with the conservative attitudes of the ruling classes in England, he saw the liberating possibilities of modern science. Evolution was the dominant myth of the day - one that had destroyed the distinction between man and the rest of nature - and the young Wells, like his mentor at South Kensington, T. H. Huxley, played on the fears and challenged the complacent opinions of the reading public regarding Darwin's theories as they affected science, religion and ideas. He did this in numerous articles written for the popular and scientific press and, important for my study here, in his allegorical "scientific romances" of the 1890's. He was an extremely accurate observer of his age and when he writes imaginatively from his own experience (in the case of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* [1896], his background in biology and science proved invaluable) he is at his best.

Doctor Moreau dramatises the debate about evolution and ethics that was so much a part of the Victorian *Zeitgeist*. Wells also articulates the pessimism and nihilism that were felt by those who understood the full implications of Huxley's teachings concerning man's place in nature and the amorality of the evolutionary process. This chapter will examine how Wells incorporates Darwin's and Huxley's interpretations of evolution into his island tale. I will also show how ideas from the continent, such as those of Nietzsche and Nordau (and behind them the shadow of Schopenhauer), coupled with the *fin de siècle* and *fin du globe* mood, combine to create this late Victorian desert island scenario.

The optimistic,¹ later Wells applied the evolutionary model to *society* and preached creative evolution, a belief that we could mould ourselves and our future. After the "pessimistic" creative flowering of the 1890's he turned to the idea of educating humanity towards a new and glorious future and became increasingly interested in non-fictional,

¹Wells' optimism was partly in response to Weismann's conclusive confutation of Lamarck's theory of heredity which left no hope of successful acquired characteristics being passed to offspring - he needed another form of Lamarckianism and found it in cultural evolution.

"journalistic" and didactic work and less concerned with literary merit. He stressed that our ascent is not solely determined by evolutionary fate: it is also an *artificial* process that can be willed. "Artificial" man could be saved by careful social planning and education. In *Anticipations* (1901), *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *Men Like Gods* (1923), amongst numerous other texts and articles, these Platonic ideas are put into practice through birth-control, selective breeding and the stratification of society in terms of psychological differences (in these future, "eugenic" worlds the scientist-politicians have a strict moral code and a sense of social responsibility, something Doctor Moreau lacks).² After the early years Wells' world view became more utopian and hopeful with respect to human progress and he felt that he could make some contribution to the path of progress, that he could help to "[write] the human prospectus".³

By contrast the early Wells - imbued with Huxley's teaching, anxious to assault the anthropocentric fallacy, dubious about the "ascent" of humanity and worried about man's evolutionary "plasticity" and possible devolution or even extinction - echoed the concerns of the era:

The dominant note of his early years was rather a kind of fatalistic pessimism, combined with intellectual scepticism, and it is this which the early romances reflect. It is, one need hardly add, a typically *fin de siècle* note.⁴

In *Moreau* the pessimistic, early Wells, capitalising on the mood of degeneration and apocalypse, journeys to the horrific environment of Noble's Island where the aims expressed in the later utopian texts are taken to totalitarian extremes. "Moreau foreshadows the ruthless ruler of the modern scientific state in much of the later science fiction, a ruler devoid of ethical considerations, but armed with all the knowledge of biological and psychological conditioning necessary to give him complete control over his ignorant subjects."⁵ Wells asks whether scientists (and by implication technocrats and politicians) should be allowed to pursue their own utopian ends at the expense of animals

²In *Biology of the Human Race* Wells points out the advantages of eugenics and talks about a future reproductive policy for our species (H. G. Wells, Julian Huxley and G. P. Wells, [London, 1937]).

³H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866)* 2 (London, 1934), p. 646.

⁴Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances* (Manchester, 1961), p. 22.

⁵Roslynn D. Haynes, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future: The Influence of Science on His Thought* (London, 1980), p. 83.

or members of society? And can Galton-like eugenics be used to eradicate the "natural man"?

The novel is a satirical evolutionary fable that shocked the readers of the day with its cold look at the origins of man. Like Rudyard Kipling (*The Jungle Books*) and Edgar Rice Burroughs (*Tarzan of the Apes*), Wells takes the reader into a fictional environment where the distinction between human and animal is broken down, but in this instance the implications are much more sinister. As in so many island fictions, we are transported into a dream world: Moreau's isle is a nightmare which we experience vicariously through the eyes of the only "sane" man on the island, the marooned Charles Edward Prendick. When he arrives on Noble's Island the first person narrator's language betrays an expectation of the kind of palm-fringed paradise ubiquitous in English literature of the nineteenth century, but instead he has landed on a confused, "evolutionary" island where phantasms from his biological past will haunt him: "But in spite of the brilliant sunlight and the green fans of the trees waving in the soothing sea-breeze, the world was a confusion, blurred with drifting black and red phantasms."⁶

Thus Noble's Island is an anti-utopia on which Wells introduces evolution, the element of transformation, into the static island realm. The novel emphasises the indifference of Nature towards man. In *Men Like Gods* the Utopians explain Nature thus:

These Earthlings do not yet dare to see what our Mother Nature is. At the back of their minds is still the desire to abandon themselves to her. They do not see that except for our eyes and wills, she is purposeless and blind. She is not awful, she is horrible. She takes no heed of our standards, nor to any standards of excellence. She made us by accident; all her children are bastards - undesired; she will cherish or expose them, pet or starve or torment without rhyme or reason. She does not heed, she does not care. She will lift us up to power and intelligence, or debase us to the mean feebleness of the rabbit or the slimy white filthiness of a thousand of her parasitic inventions.⁷

As I will show during the course of this chapter, Doctor Moreau takes on the role of evolving Nature, but ultimately succumbs to its forces himself. And it is indeed ironic that this evolutionary anti-utopia, where all nobility is stripped from man and beast,

⁶Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896; Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 55.

⁷Wells, *Men Like Gods*, quoted in John R. Reed, *The Natural History of H. G. Wells* (Athens, Ohio, 1982), p. 32.

where the idea of a "noble savage" is totally discredited and where all living creatures are reduced to their component material, should be called Noble's Island.⁸

THE MAD SCIENTIST

The novel is, on one level, a critique of the scientist and the role of science in society.⁹ As we have already seen, science and "progress" were the centre of controversy in Victorian England and novelists took part in the debate. We recall that in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1871), a novel Wells was very familiar with, the protagonist journeys to a country where manifestations of science, technology and industrialisation have been destroyed in order to prevent science from taking over the lives of the inhabitants. William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1891) presents a similar backward-looking, anti-technological Arcadia. It was in this *fin de siècle*, anti-scientific mood that Wells embarked upon the story of a "mad scientist".

Before I take a closer look at Moreau in the context of Victorian science, it is necessary to discuss the antecedent archetypes that go into the making of the doctor. Roslynn Haynes suggests that "while drawing on earlier stereotypes of the scientist, Wells recasts and develops them in peculiarly modern terms, thereby introducing into the ethical debate occasioned by Darwinian theory implications which had not previously been recognised but which had appeared obvious enough to the science student at South Kensington."¹⁰ Indeed, on Noble's Island we encounter a whole range of varieties of the scientist breed, from cranky alchemist to orthodox laboratory worker.

The first group that must be considered is that which practised the hermetic "science" of alchemy. Alchemy is of a twofold nature. There is the "exoteric" aspect which concerns attempts to prepare a substance, known as the philosopher's stone or elixir,

⁸Wells situates Noble's Island in the region of Preudick's shipwreck, "ten days out of Callao" (p. 9), which places it appropriately in the vicinity of the Galapagos Islands where Darwin made his crucial evolutionary discoveries.

⁹Some critics have remarked that Wells' science is impractical, that animals could never be turned into humans, that time travelling is impossible. However I do not think this is a valid point: Wells is creating modern myths; he is pushing ideas to an extreme in order to dramatise and allegorise the implications of aspects of modern scientific thought.

¹⁰Roslynn D. Haynes, "The Unholy Alliance of Science in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The Wellsian* 11, (Summer 1988), p. 13.

which is endowed with the power of transmuting base metals into precious metals, most notably gold (a process that requires a laboratory and scientific equipment). Gold was thought to grow from base metals within the earth, and alchemical transmutation was thus an accelerated process of evolution. There was also the metaphysical or "esoteric" aspect, a process which endowed the stone with the divine power of prolonging life: this mystical alchemy developed into a devotional system in which the transmutation of metals was only a symbol for the transformation of man into a perfect being. Alchemists worked in great secrecy and passed their knowledge on to only a select few. In medieval times some alchemists believed they could create an artificial human child, called a homunculus, through an alchemical process (Paracelsus devised a complicated recipe which entailed placing human semen in an airtight container and burying it in manure¹¹).

Doctor Moreau is as secretive about his experiments as the alchemists were. On a metaphorical level he is also trying to transmute something "base" (animals) into something "precious" (humans). From an esoteric perspective he attempts to transform animal instinct into humanity using an evolutionary rather than a Christian paradigm. Prendick actually refers to one of Moreau's creations as "a little pink homunculus" (p. 150), a fact which proves that Wells had at least a rudimentary knowledge of alchemical science.

In the alchemical process (and we must remember that this scientific process is symbolic of other human and spiritual transformations) the base substance is first heated in a glass vessel over a "purifying" flame which leads to the "death" of the substance, a moment known as the *nigredo* or "blackening" phase. This corresponds with Moreau's bath of pain, the "death" or burning out of the instinctive, animal side of the creature. (Moreau is himself returned to the giant alchemical experiment of evolution at the end the novel when his body with its "black" wounds and "black" blood [p. 158] is set alight by Prendick.) But, after the "blackening", the "soul" of the matter still remains in vapour form in the sealed vessel and must be cooled and condensed into liquid, resulting in its

¹¹See *Time Life: Secrets of the Alchemists* (Amsterdam, 1991), p. 69. What Paracelsus tries to achieve in his experiments with semen, Moreau attempts to do with grafting, surgery and hypnotism.

"resurrection", better known as the "whitening" phase (this is the elixir in its first degree). "White-faced" (p. 114) Moreau with his "white dexterous-looking fingers", "white hair" (p. 100) and the "dead white moon" (p. 157) shining on him, is the perverted agent of "whitening" in the tale. Further treatment of the substance induces it to change colour, the "reddening" phase, ultimate goal of the process. A Symbolist such as Max Ernst, who was well-versed in alchemical theory, represented these three phases as processes of extreme violence: even the reddening phase is accompanied by the letting of blood (in his collage novel *Une Semaine de Bonté*, for example). Similarly the finished and perfected product of Moreau's alchemy is a "reddened" creature caked in blood. Thus we can see that Moreau adheres loosely to the processes and methods of alchemy, aligning himself with the unorthodox and hermetic side of scientific research.

A famous scientist from nineteenth-century fiction who has much in common with Moreau is Dr Frankenstein. But the story of man creating man goes back much further, at least as far as the myth of Prometheus stealing the fire of life from Zeus with which to animate his man of clay. Mary Shelley linked the myth to alchemical processes and to current scientific theories: electricity becomes the modern Promethean spark, the animating force, of life.¹² In her introduction to *Frankenstein* Shelley talks of the experiments of Erasmus Darwin who preserved a piece of vermicelli in a glass case until it began to move with voluntary motion. She conjectures: "Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth."¹³ The scientist takes on the role of a modern Prometheus, a usurper of divine power.

Frankenstein appropriately starts his career with a thorough investigation into alchemy and reads Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus. Then he begins his studies in modern science and tries to marry scientific knowledge and method to the type of high aspirations of the alchemists. Like Moreau he becomes intoxicated by the

¹²M. K. Joseph's introduction to Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, edited by M. K. Joseph (1818; Oxford, 1969), p. vii.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 9.

possibilities: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source".¹⁴ But, again like Moreau, he soon discovers the suffering and ordeal that the project entails: "Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I . . . tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay?"¹⁵ Both scientists use the Promethean image of *moulding* a man from clay: "I made my first man. All the week, night and day, I moulded him. . . . I thought him a fair specimen of the Negroid type when I had done him" (p. 109). Like the Beast Men, Frankenstein's monster also traces (popular conceptions of) the development of aboriginal man. Frankenstein's creation has our sympathy: he is a sensitive, Romantic figure and his creator does have moral scruples about the pain he has caused the monster. In Moreau this is not the case: his creations are merely laboratory experiments; the spirit is cruelly evolutionary, callously scientific. The doctor is to a certain extent a product of the "Darwinian" spirit in science: "humane", alchemical methodology is a being replaced by an advanced, empirical biological science.

Each of the humans on our island is a scientist and each represents a type. Coming from a working class background, Wells saw science as a salvation, a means of opening new horizons for humanity. However he understood the dangers of an unbridled scientific *Weltanschauung* and of a conception that science could replace the religious beliefs it had disproved. He insisted that science had to be governed by ethics. Moreau is a colourful figure partially modelled on the nineteenth-century "mad scientist" stereotype which might include Dr Jekyll and Frankenstein (all three^{of} these scientists create anti-types which destroy them in the end). Prendick, by contrast, is a modern, self-effacing researcher who is aware of the social responsibility of the scientist and of the moral code within which he must operate - a scientist whom Wells and Huxley might approve of.

In "The Limits of Individual Plasticity" (1895), written just before *Doctor Moreau*, Wells sets out what could serve as Moreau's manifesto:

There is in science, and perhaps even more so in history, some sanction for the belief that a living thing might be taken in hand and so moulded and modified that at best it would retain scarcely anything of its inherent form and disposition; that the thread of life might be preserved unimpaired while shape and mental

¹⁴Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁵Ibid.

superstructure were so extensively recast as even to justify our regarding the result as a new variety of being.¹⁶

He goes on to describe developments in grafting, surgery and vaccination and mentions pioneering work done by the eighteenth-century vivisectionist John Hunter - an obvious antecedent of Moreau - who allegedly managed to graft a cock-spur onto a bull's neck. But the modification of the living form need not stop at the physiological level. Wells concedes that it might be possible, moral issues aside, to transform the very consciousness of the "patient":

The thing does not stop at a mere physical metamorphosis. In our growing science of hypnotism we find the promise of a possibility of replacing old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas. Very much indeed of what we call moral education is such an artificial modification and perversion of instinct; pugnacity is trained into courageous self-sacrifice, and suppressed sexuality into pseudo-religious emotion.¹⁷

Moreau moulds his creatures into the most fantastic forms - the "bogle", the snake-like thing and his mythological, satyr-like monsters - and behaves like a mischievous Creator, wantonly blending the forces of evolution, God, modern science and mythological deities. He takes a creature's "personality" to be as plastic as its physiology and borrows discoveries in the fields of hypnosis and psychiatry to demonstrate this. However Wells warns of the amorality of such actions: at what point does surgery begin to violate the identity of the individual? The debate is given graphic currency when Prendick describes his horror at the sudden transformation of the puma's howl into the cry of a woman. This shocking image forces us to reconsider the boundary we have created between animal and human suffering.

In "The Province of Pain" (1894) Wells suggests that as science ousts instinct, pain becomes superfluous and Moreau uses this idea to justify his cruel experiments: he argues that pain is just a phase in the evolution of life. Moreau feels that pleasure and pain are "marks of the beast" and that evolution will sooner or later "grind them out of existence" (p. 107). So long as pain sickens us and so long as it underlies our propositions about sin we are, says Moreau, thinking a little less obscurely what an animal feels. An evolving

¹⁶Wells, "The Limits of Individual Plasticity" (1895) in Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (eds.) *H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction* (Berkeley, 1975), p. 36.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

species is a suffering species with pain and death playing the role of sculptors that "[carve] out new forms of life".¹⁸ The coming man will not feel pain because he does not need it. When the doctor immerses his animals in the bath of pain, it appears that he is trying to subordinate the physical:

As we ascend from the dog to the more complex human, we find physical pain becoming increasingly subordinate to the moral and intellectual. In the place of pain there come mental aversions that are scarcely painful, and an intellectual order replaces the war of physical motives.¹⁹

Prendick belongs to the tradition of voyagers who are washed ashore on unknown but inhabited islands and are educated into a new way of life and a new way of thinking (Raphael Hythloday in More's *Utopia* or Swift's Gulliver, for example). When he first arrives on the island he condemns Moreau's experiments outright, but when he comes to realise that the doctor is not transforming humans into animals he is slightly appeased. After all, they are both scientists and Prendick can understand the doctor's commitment to "progress", to discovering the limits of individual plasticity and extending the boundaries of knowledge. Indeed, despite the horrific nature of his experiments, Moreau is acknowledged to be a great physiologist with a noble devotion to research and no desire for personal fame or personal gain. There is definitely a part of Wells that admires this grim, determined loner whose whole life is committed to his work. If science was becoming a new religion in a materialist world, then Moreau would certainly rank as one of the chosen. However he also represents the arrogance of scientists who see themselves as exempt from any responsibility to society's mores: he pushes the boundaries of rational research until they collapse into the irrational. This is manifest in his sadistic explanation of the bath of pain: "This time I will burn out all the animal, this time I will make a rational creature of my own" (p. 112). Wells is warning us of the hubris of the scientist and, with a heavy dose of irony, a scientist is shown trying to burn humanity into animals while he himself loses the important qualities of being human - altruism, sympathy, and adherence to a common and humane code of ethics. Wells is clearly attacking the belief

¹⁸Wells, "Bio-Optimism" (1895) in *ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁹Wells, "The Province of Pain" (1894) in *ibid.*, p. 198.

that science and technology are in themselves unequivocally beneficent and good and is reflecting the *fin de siècle* disillusionment with science.²⁰

MOREAU AND EVOLUTION

Philmus and Hughes show how deeply Wells' early writing was influenced by biological thinking and particularly by the reorientation of conceptions of time and space that the theory of evolution brought about. Man's position in relation to nature and to other species was being re-examined and the idea of isolation, be it in terms of space or time, was rendered anachronistic.²¹ Evolution enlarged our consciousness of time and taught us that no place, not even an island, can be so isolated as to be exempt from the forces of nature, from the struggle for existence. Wells turned away from anthropocentrism and in his early career directed many essays and articles at presenting *Homo sapiens* as a mere accident of natural history. He drives his point home most forcefully in "Zoological Retrogression":

[Man] it is who goes down to the sea in ships, and, with wide-sweeping nets and hooks cunningly baited, beguiles the children of those who drove his ancestors out of the water. Thus the whirligig of time brings round its revenges; still, in an age of excessive self-admiration, it would be well for man to remember that his family *was* driven from the waters by fishes, who still - in spite of incidental fish-hooks, seines, and dredges - hold that empire triumphantly against him.²²

When Prendick is picked up from his life-boat by the *Ipecacuanha* one of the first things Montgomery says to him is: "You were in luck" (p. 14). If this were *Robinson Crusoe* we would be looking for the hand of Providence in instances of luck and chance. However, in a Darwinian age, and certainly with a writer like Wells, we must be alert to the fact that luck or chance are an important part of the mechanism of evolution. And the theme of chance is made explicit in this novel: it is by accident that Prendick ends up on Noble's Island, three times he is set adrift in an open boat (this recurring motif - a man

²⁰The anonymous author of *Regeneration: A Reply to Max Nordau* (London, 1895) writes of the contemporary disillusionment with science:

It was not only the hollow arrogance of the scientists and the failure of science to fulfil the promises of its superstitious votaries which had created disgust with scientific atheism: the practical results of the anti-religious tendencies became alarmingly apparent; experience began to prove that the discarding of all personal responsibility did not produce the *ultra man - der Uebermensch* - of which the scientists claimed to be the prototypes. (p. 85)

²¹Philmus and Hughes (eds.) *H. G. Wells*, p. 3.

²²Wells, "Zoological Retrogression" (1891) in *ibid.*, p. 167.

drifting alone in an open boat - successfully conveys the aimlessness of evolution²³), and the slightest unlucky slip of a scalpel results in the deaths of the creatures in Moreau's early experiments. Even Montgomery acknowledges that it is by "luck" that Moreau saved him from prison and brought him to Noble's Island. When Montgomery and Prendick discuss the rescue we are left wondering whether blind chance has replaced God as the governing force of the universe:

"If I may say it," said I, after a time, "you have saved my life."

"Chance," he answered; "just chance."

"I prefer to make my thanks to the accessible agent."

"Thank no one. You had the need, and I the knowledge, and I injected and fed you much as I might have collected a specimen. I was bored, and wanted something to do. If I'd been jaded that day, or hadn't liked your face, well - ; it's a curious question where you would have been now." (p. 28)

Such a conversation would have been impossible in *Robinson Crusoe*. Here it is almost as though Montgomery is playing the part of a disinterested anthropomorphisation of evolution. He acts as a Darwinian god, an "agent" of chance, who treats humans as "specimens" that can be saved or killed off at will. Similarly when Moreau is asked why he had taken the human form as a model for his creations "he confessed that he had chosen that form by chance" (p. 105). Here an amoral "god" of evolution alludes to the *ad hoc* and random process that has raised us from single-celled animals to the shape we today inhabit.

Thus Doctor Moreau is Evolution personified, giving new life and taking it away - he even changes the local ecology to suite his own needs. He populates the isle with his own breed of man and, in order to provide food for himself, he irresponsibly introduces rabbits to "increase and multiply" (p. 43). Thus he speeds up and modifies a process of evolution that would have taken place over millions of years.²⁴ Just as the Time Traveller is able to compress time in the description of his journey into the future, so Moreau is able to contract the whole evolution of our species from animal to hominid into a brief period. This device makes the process far more comprehensible and dramatic. In trying to

²³The motif of a rudderless boat goes back as far as Greek and Roman mythology and traditionally signified the "process" of Fate: in a post-Darwinian world, fate has a distinctly evolutionary cast.

²⁴For a comprehensive description of the process of evolution on islands, see Darwin, "Geographical Distribution" in *The Origin of Species*.

emulate evolution, Moreau matches the salient aspects of his understanding of the process in his laboratory - pain, waste and chance. It is as though Moreau is conducting an experiment in which pain is the catalyst and because the outcome is, in a simplistic reading of Darwin, merely a matter of chance; there is inevitably going to be a certain amount of "waste": some creations will be "terminated". In trying to recreate the evolutionary process, Moreau still adheres to Lamarckism, misguidedly believing that his surgical and grafting techniques will be permanent and will be transmitted to future generations.²⁵

Prendick undergoes a period of reeducation on the island and slowly comes to understand the force of evolution and his position in relation to it. First there are the cries from the laboratory, "as if all the pain in the world had found a voice" (p. 54), which we might interpret as symbolic of the process of evolution. He flees the enclosure walking in a direction "diametrically opposite to the sound" (p. 58), but he does not get far before he is confronted with a disturbing example of the origin of life, "foliaceous lichen . . . deliquescing into slime at the touch" (pp. 58-9). Nearby he finds a reminder of the bloody struggle for existence that has raised man to his privileged position in nature, "the dead body of a rabbit, covered with shining flies, but still warm, and with the head torn off" (p. 59). Prendick recognises that even the vegetation is fighting for supremacy: there are "fungoid ruins of a huge fallen tree" and in a glade of the forest "seedlings were already starting up to *struggle* for the vacant space, and beyond, the *dense* growth of stems and *twining* vines and *splashes* of fungus and flowers *closed in* again" (p. 59, italics mine). During his flight from Moreau, he finds that although he might be able to elude this agent of evolution, he can never hide from the natural world and its processes: he hears "the thin hum of some small gnats that had *discovered* [him]" (p. 76, italics mine). Prendick is deeply unnerved by what he sees and senses:

²⁵By the time he was working on *Moreau* Wells was aware of, and had been forced to accept, August Weismann's conclusive proto-Mendelian confutation of Lamarck's theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics (this much is clear from an article such as "The Limits of Individual Plasticity" of January 1895), however he does not grant his obsessive scientist this knowledge.

The thicket about me became altered to my imagination. Every shadow became something more than a shadow, became an ambush, every rustle became a threat. Invisible things seemed watching me. (p. 59)

Apart from the obvious fear of being attacked, there is something quite profound happening to him. It is not only the thicket that is becoming altered in his imagination; his imagination is itself expanding to incorporate a new way of conceiving the evolution of life on this planet. The threatening shadows and those "invisible things" are not simply the predators of the island that threaten his life; they symbolise the lineage of biological ancestors which stretches back to the primordial "foliaceous lichen". Prendick is slowly becoming aware of the evolutionary incarnations that make up his inheritance. This fact is driven home at the epiphanic moment when he decides on suicide rather than becoming a victim in one of Moreau's experiments:

I looked past my interlocutors. Up the beach were M'ling, Montgomery's attendant, and one of the white swathed brutes from the boat. Further up, in the shadow of the trees, I saw my little Ape Man, and behind him some other dim figures. (p. 95)

In this image the chain of evolution starts with the most evolved in the foreground and stretches back to the "dim figures" lost in the obscurity of time. (The possessive pronoun "my" used with reference to the Ape Man recalls Prospero's famous acknowledgement of the Caliban within himself: "This thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine") The expanse of time that separates the three Englishmen from the figures among the trees is widened when Moreau breaks into Latin, the language of "civilisation", to explain what he is really doing. And for the moment Prendick is able to return uneasily to the world of "civilisation".

But later he confesses that he "lost faith in the sanity of the world when [he] saw it suffering the painful disorder of this island" (p. 139) and gives an eloquent and pessimistic explanation of the workings of evolution: "A blind fate, a vast pitiless mechanism, seemed to cut and shape the fabric of existence, and I, Moreau (by his passion for research), Montgomery (by his passion for drink), the Beast People, with their instincts and mental restrictions, were torn and crushed, ruthlessly, inevitably, amid the infinite complexity of its incessant wheels" (p. 139). Here he shows that he has come to understand that there is no escape from biological determinism. Just as Moreau remodels

flesh, evolution acts like a blind surgeon cutting and shaping life on this planet. This pessimistic and implicitly atheistic statement certainly reflects the kind of fear that Darwin's theories had unleashed on the Victorians.

MORALITY AND THE LAW

"Evolution and Ethics"

At this point I would like to take a close look at Huxley's famous essay "Evolution and Ethics" (1894), in which he outlines the moral dilemmas with which the theory of evolution confronts the world, and consider how it throws light on my reading of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. During the late Victorian era a great many works on "ethical science" and the evolution of morals were produced in response to Darwin. Wells writes: "After Darwin it has become inevitable that moral conceptions should be systematically related in terms of our new conception of the moral destiny of man."²⁶ Huxley (we must remember that both Wells and Prendick were students of his) was a more pessimistic man than Darwin (the public Darwin at any rate) and his influential lectures brought home the full moral and political implications of the theory of evolution. Like so much of his writing during the 1890's, Wells' novel is inspired by the ideas of his master.

Huxley starts his paper by showing that evolution excludes Creation or any other kind of supernatural intervention. He describes how if we trace our ancestors back far enough we will come to low groups of life among which the boundaries between animal and vegetable become effaced: "man, physical, intellectual, and moral, is as much a part of nature, as purely a product of the cosmic process, as the humblest weed."²⁷ He argues that no absolute structural line of demarcation can be drawn between the animal world and ourselves and yet he remains convinced of the vast gulf that separates man from the nearest apes. It is man's "evolution" of an ethical code that has raised him out of the

²⁶Wells, "Human Evolution: Mr Wells Replies", *Natural Science: A Monthly Review of Scientific Progress* 10 (May, 1897), p. 244.

²⁷T. H. Huxley, "Evolution and Ethics: Prolegomena" (1893) in *Evolution and Ethics* (London, 1894), p. 11.

amoral realm of nature. In effect the process of nature must be reversed and thereafter continually combated to prevent any regression.²⁸

Huxley takes the example of the colonisation of an island to demonstrate how artificial are the environment and ethics of man. Comparing the actions of English settlers in Tasmania to those of a horticulturist forming a garden, he describes how they set about transforming an "alien" state of nature to suite their own ends. They clear away the indigenous vegetation, kill or drive out the animal population and take measures to defend themselves from the re-immigration of either. They introduce a new (in the Tasmanian example, an English) flora and fauna. "The colony is a composite unit introduced into the old state of nature; and thenceforward, a competitor in the struggle for existence, to conquer or be vanquished".²⁹ If the colonists intelligently combine all their forces they will "vanquish" the island, but if they are slothful or careless the immigrants will be killed by the natives, English animals and plants will be extirpated by their indigenous rivals or pass into the feral state and themselves become components of the strata of nature. Huxley then imagines some administrative authority, far superior in power to man, charged to deal with the human elements in such a manner as to assure the victory of the settlement over nature's antagonistic influences. The "administrator" would select his human agents with a view to his ideal of a successful island colony, just as a gardener selects his plants. He would make arrangements whereby laws could be sanctioned which would restrain the self-assertion of each man within the limits required for the maintenance of peace and the efficiency of the corporate whole. Thus between settlers the struggle for existence would be suppressed and selection of the fittest entirely excluded. In other words, the state of nature should be replaced by a state of art, a situation created entirely by artificial means. But as every Eden has its serpent, Huxley admits that reproduction introduces factors that could lead to degeneration. If colonists multiply very rapidly within the confined environment of an island, then the administrator would have to face the re-introduction of the cosmic struggle.

²⁸The debate is not new and the origins of his evolution-ethics argument can be traced to J. S. Mill and much further back even, to the writings of the ancient Stoics.

²⁹Huxley, "Evolution and Ethics: Prolegomena", pp. 16-17.

This description closely matches what Moreau is trying to achieve on his island. The doctor acts as the grand administrator who selects and shapes the creatures that are to inhabit his colony. He institutes the rudiments of a rule of law to which his subjects must adhere and through the threat of a return to the House of Pain he tries to quell the animal instincts of his creations. But in the same way as the indigenous fauna and flora threaten to overthrow the immigrants, so the "call of the wild", the instincts and animal traits, well up in the Beast Folk and eventually destroy Moreau's artificial world. In the light of Huxley's comments on reproduction, the introduction of rabbits, who multiply exponentially, creates a temptation too great for the Beast Folk and they return to being carnivores.

Huxley terms the evolution of feelings out of which the primitive bonds of society are largely forged into the organised, personified sympathy we call conscience, the ethical process. Since morality and law are restraints upon the struggle for existence between men in society, the ethical process tends to suppress the qualities best fitted for success in the battle for the survival of the fittest. In the Romanes Lecture (1893) Huxley argued that social progress means a checking of the cosmic struggle at every turn and the substitution for it of the ethical process; the end of which is not the survival of the fittest, but rather of those who are ethically the best.³⁰ However on the island this basic requirement for the maintenance of a harmonious society is missing. On the one hand the Beast People seem to be "under-evolved" and thus "amoral"; they are precariously beached on the shores of civilisation and could, it appears, be washed back into the sea of instinct at any moment. It is only a matter of time before the blood taboo will no longer have any hold on them and the strong will begin to devour the weak. On the other hand Moreau appears to be "over-evolved", a man who has shuffled off common morality and only adheres, god-like, to his own code of scientific ethics. (Or perhaps he is still making a Nietzschean distinction between himself and even his most advanced creations: as long as "the other" is different enough - be they Martians or rabbits - our morality need not extend to them.) Thus it is certainly one of Wells' projects in this novel to make us question to what extent

³⁰T. H. Huxley, "Evolution and Ethics: The Romanes Lecture, 1893" in *Evolution and Ethics*, p. 81.

civilisation is "natural" and how much it is an ethical or intellectual construct superimposed on nature. But his verdict is not identical to his master's.

In "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" (1896) Wells, like Huxley, suggests that all the important changes in humanity have been the result of the human mind rather than natural selection. However John Huntington draws an interesting distinction between the arguments of the two men in this matter.³¹ He suggests that Huxley accords man an ethical heroism in having raised himself above the beast; whereas in Wells the opposition is not so clear:

In civilized man we have (1) an inherited factor, the natural man, who is the product of natural selection, the culminating ape, and a type of animal more obstinately unchangeable than any other living creature; and (2) an acquired factor, the artificial man, the highly plastic creature of tradition, suggestion, and reasoned thought. In the artificial man we have all that makes the comforts and securities of civilization a possibility. That factor and civilization have developed and will develop together. And in this view, what we call Morality becomes the padding of suggested emotional habits necessary to keep the round Palaeolithic savage in the square hole of the civilized state. And Sin is the conflict of the two factors - as I have tried to convey in my *Island of Dr. Moreau*.³²

Huntington feels that the difference in tone between the two thinkers denotes an essential logical difference. Huxley's high ethical ideal (his position is clearly in opposition to the social Darwinists) has been reduced to "the padding of suggested emotional habits". Huxley tries to dignify man's struggle and show that our ideas about ethics and fair play are weapons with which to hold back the chaos of nature and the universe. Wells would say that nature and civilisation have become value-free and it takes the two together to define humanity. The disjuncture between the artificial element in our make-up and the innate Palaeolithic disposition is, Wells suggests, the source of our moral conflict. The shape and form of our social organisation, our civilisation, "is nothing more nor less than the algebraic sum of the artificial factors of its constituent individuals - a fabric of ideas and habits."³³ Wells inhabits a world of moral relativity: morality "is as much a natural adjustment to needs and environment as a claw or a skull or a swimming bladder; it is a

³¹John Huntington, *The Logic of Fantasy: H. G. Wells and Science Fiction* (New York, 1982), pp. 16-17.

³²Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" (1896) in Philmus and Hughes (eds.) *H. G. Wells*, p. 217.

³³Wells, "Morals and Civilization" in *The Fortnightly Review* (February 1887), p. 263.

thing of the same kind [and] is subject to the same ecological laws."³⁴ Wells is saying that man must master nature by working with it and incorporating its forces rather than fight against it in a Manichean battle as Huxley suggests (and Moreau puts into practice). We must remember that the laws that scientists deal with (Moreau, Prendick, Montgomery and Wells included), are the laws of nature, entirely distinct from human law. The realm of science is inherently amoral. Our ethical beliefs are revealed as being accidental, mutable, reversible and at war with man's animal instincts. Repeatedly in his writing he makes it clear that evolution by natural selection does not necessarily imply a concomitant advance in the intrinsic moral qualities of man. The only advance he is prepared to admit to, is "an evolution of suggestions and ideas"³⁵ which has propelled man through a series of stages commencing with gregarious animalism and progressing through tribal savagery and militant barbarism to the militant civilised state.³⁶

Taken a step further we might view the ethical confrontation between beast and man as only part of a series of similar dualistic confrontations that occur between "races", classes, genders (or even aliens, as in the case of *The War of the Worlds*) and we shall see how central these "ethical" conflicts are to the island condition later in this thesis when I discuss anthropological and post-colonial issues from a Darwinian perspective. Wells deplored the jingoistic and social Darwinist view that there are superior and inferior nations, "races" and types. He defamiliarises and breaks down the boundaries men create between themselves on his laboratory isle where the very nature of humanity is interrogated. McConnell points out that when reading *Doctor Moreau* it is important to remember that even in Victorian times the humanity of native populations was called into question and that there was still wide-spread feeling that "savages" were largely non-human (jungle dwellers or Beast Folk) until they could be trained to humanity by leaders

³⁴Wells, *The Fate of Homo Sapiens* (New York, 1939), p. 29. It was anthropology that brought home most forcefully to Victorians the relative nature of morality. As Wells writes in "Morals and Civilization":

Now it is scarcely necessary to say that, in accordance with this view, there is no morality in the absolute. It is relative to the state, the civilization, the corporate existence to which the man beast has become adapted on the one hand, and to the inherent possibilities of the man on the other. And the data of morality must vary with the state, the social environment rather, in which the man exists; the alternative judgements of right and wrong in action, that is, must vary. (*Fortnightly Review*, 61 [February 1897], p. 263)

³⁵Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process", p. 211.

³⁶Wells, "Morals and Civilisation", p. 263.

from "civilised" cultures (Moreau, Mowgli or Tarzan).³⁷ Similarly in Wells' short story "Æpyornis Island" the protagonist stresses the link between himself and a prehistoric bird, but thinks nothing of murdering his two native employees: here blacks are treated like animals while an animal is treated morally. Wells creates an absurd scenario in order to highlight the ethical debate.

If an individual or creature is different enough, man seems to take that as enough of an excuse to regard the "other" as insentient, or at any rate less sentient and of less value than himself. In *The War of the Worlds* the Martians and the humans each regard themselves as sufficiently alien to exterminate each other. The Morlocks consider the Eloi an entirely different species and so avoid the charge of cannibalism. But Wells' satire gets even sharper than this. On a number of occasions he mentions the extermination of Tasmanians by British settlers in the eighteenth century. In *Mr Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* he shows us that the kind of prejudice, the objectification of the other, that makes men capable of reducing "primitives" of another tribe to potential contents for the cooking pot, persists in our own time. Unmistakable analogies are drawn between the actions of "civilised" combatants in the First World War and the island "savages".

Moreau's Martial Law

If ethics are so *ad hoc* and mutable, only a rigid set of laws will keep society from plunging into a state of evolutionary anarchy. It is only the crude rule of law inculcated (we should say "hypnotised") into the Beast Folk that has prevented the island from descending into chaos. Prendick's experiences are an education in the nature of law. What is made clear to him during his stay on the island is that the laws of God have been replaced by the laws of nature and the new laws of science - something that many Victorians had trouble coming to terms with. A recognition of the laws of nature and the absence of a God-given morality left a deep void at the foundation of contemporary ethics, as Wells so accurately portrays in this novel (and for him there was no such thing

³⁷McConnell, *The Science Fiction of H. G. Wells*, p. 99.

as natural law³⁸ as this would posit a nature common to all men³⁹). There are a number of scenes in which different aspects of law are challenged and which encourage us to question the nature of law. Prendick's brush with cannibalism in the open boat (see below) foregrounds the debate on the difference between human law and the law of survival. When he is taken on board the *Ipecacuanha* Prendick comes face to face with the autocratic power of a sea captain, the dictator of his own little ship of state: "I'm the law here, I tell you - the law and the prophets" (p. 24). But this is only a foretaste of the situation on the island, an isolated environment governed by "outlaws": having been set adrift from the vessel Prendick is an outlaw by chance, Montgomery is an outlaw due to an impulsive act back in England and Moreau is one by virtue of his vivisection practices that resulted in his self-exile.⁴⁰

Better than his contemporaries, Moreau understands the bankruptcy of Victorian ethics: he is an atheist who recognises the relativity of morality and, like Wells, does not believe in natural law. However the doctor knows that he must instil in his creations the rudiments of a morality in order to maintain law and order. He has to enforce strict prohibitions in order to prevent the Beast People from reverting to the laws of nature (this parallels the struggle of early hominids to curtail their instincts and agree on a rudimentary idea of continence and taboos before a community could be established⁴¹). "Wells' reader is forced to recognise that any law without a natural source is a false

³⁸Natural law is an unwritten law based on the belief that there exists a moral order which normal people can discover by using their faculty of reason.

³⁹In "The Rediscovery of the Unique" (1891) he argues for the individuality and uniqueness of each living creation (in Philmus and Hughes [eds.] *H. G. Wells*).

⁴⁰Reed, "The Vanity of Law in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*", p. 135.

⁴¹Nietzsche writes of the trauma attendant upon the evolution of consciousness, a process of millennia that Moreau packs into a short period:

Just as happened in the case of those sea creatures who were forced to become land animals in order to survive, these semi-animals, happily adapted to the wilderness, to war, free roaming, and adventure, were forced to change their nature. Of a sudden they found all their instincts devalued, unhinged. They must walk on legs and carry themselves, where before the water had carried them: a terrible heaviness weighed upon them. They felt inapt for the simplest manipulations, for in this new, unknown world they could no longer count on the guidance of their unconscious drives. They were forced to think, deduce, calculate, weigh cause and effect - unhappy people, reduced to their weakest, most fallible organ, their consciousness! I doubt that there has ever been on earth such a feeling of misery, such a leaden discomfort. (*The Genealogy of Morals* [1887, translated 1899] in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals* [New York, 1956], p. 217)

law"⁴² and certainly Moreau's laws are, from the point of view of the animals, totally arbitrary.

A number of critics have mentioned the parody of Kipling's presentation of the Law of the Jungle in his two *Jungle Books* (1894-95), but few have given this aspect much attention. In Kipling, humanity is raised to an almost sacred level - men are wise, powerful and inviolable; Wells satirises this assumption and reveals the animal in all of us. In "How Fear Came" Baloo states that "The Law of the Jungle - which is by far the oldest law in the world - has arranged for almost every kind of accident that may befall the Jungle People, till [*sic*] now its code is as perfect as time and custom can make it."⁴³ However he warns that there are extreme occasions, such as bad drought, when all animals have to obey the same law. Moreau tries to recreate this type of situation by a reign of terror (Kipling introduces fear into the jungle through the agent of a hairless creature walking on hind legs: man). In both the jungle and on the island the law is firm on one point: "Not to eat Flesh nor Fish; *that* is the Law. . . . Not to chase other Men; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?" (p. 85) chant the Beast People, while Mowgli, the white, male superman, imputes in a similar manner: "To kill Man is *always* shameful. The Law says so."⁴⁴ On the night when the tiger Shere Khan kills a human and brings shame upon the jungle animals, each species separates off into its own tribe: evolution is introduced into Eden. In the same vein when the puma kills Moreau, Prendick feels that the island creatures are about to revert. Both sets of animals begin to understand their animal nature through the killing of a man. The "Law" has proved powerless against the resurgence of instinct. In each case a blood taboo, a crude form of law, has been broken and (self-inflicted) retribution is swift. In both instances the creatures are anthropomorphised (benignly by Kipling, surgically by Moreau) and forced to conform to injunctions that go against their animal instincts. Wells is asking us whether our laws are so artificial, contingent and opposed to instinct that they too will peel away quite naturally given the right circumstances (when starving in a life-boat, for example).

⁴²Reed, "The Vanity of Law in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*", p. 141.

⁴³Rudyard Kipling, "How Fear Came" in *The Second Jungle Book* (1895; London, 1962), p. 7.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 15.

In Butler's *Erewhon* there is a chapter entitled "Rights of Animals" in which the Professor of Worldly Wisdom explains to the narrator (a modern Raphael Hythloday) how a craving for human flesh has been refined away and how the Erewhonians have created an Arcadia (satirised by Wells in *The Time Machine*):

Once upon a time your forefathers made no scruple about not only killing, but also eating their relations. No one would now go back to such detestable practices, for it is notorious that we have lived much more happily since they were abandoned. . . . Now it cannot be denied that sheep, cattle, deer, birds, and fishes are our fellow-creatures. They differ from us in some respects, but those in which they differ are few and secondary, while those that they have in common with us are many and essential. My friends, if it was wrong of you to kill and eat your fellow-men, it is wrong also to kill and eat fish, flesh, and fowl.⁴⁵

Moreau would endorse this injunction. The partial success of his experiments has proved that, at least biologically, the differences between humans and the higher mammals is very small. However even the doctor, a man with much stronger will than his creations, is unable to live without meat (he introduces rabbits onto the island for the pot). There is no way he can expect predators far closer to their instincts to resist temptation if he himself cannot. The Professor of Worldly Wisdom goes on to say that

animals molest one another, and that some of them go so far as to molest man, but I have yet to learn that we should model our conduct on that of the lower animals. We should endeavour, rather, to instruct them, and bring them to a better mind. To kill a tiger, for example, who has lived on the flesh of men and women whom he has killed, is to reduce ourselves to the level of the tiger, and is unworthy of people who seek to be guided by the highest principles in all, both their thoughts and actions.⁴⁶

Wells is parodying the Professor of Worldly Wisdom in the character of Moreau who takes the professor's advice to "instruct" the animals and "bring them to a better mind". He takes the professor's recommendation to its logical conclusion thereby exposing the euphemistic language and short-sightedness of the man's "wisdom". On another level the idea of moral perfectibility alluded to in the professor's advice about not modelling one's conduct on that of the lower animals is everywhere undermined in *Moreau*: humans are desensitised, brutalised and even contemplate anthropophagy.

⁴⁵Samuel Butler, *Erewhon or Over the Range* (1872; London, 1915), pp. 278-9.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 279.

Nietzschean Morality

Regarding the ethics espoused in *Doctor Moreau*, I will consider the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche on the early Wells. But before I discuss morality in the light of his philosophy, I will assess Nietzsche's impact on *fin de siècle* England and on Wells in particular. Bernard Bergonzi points out that Nietzsche's writings only became known in England in the late eighties and only received any real attention after Nordau's attack on him in *Degeneration*.⁴⁷ The first long essay on Nietzsche was written by Havelock Ellis and was published in *The Savoy* in 1896. Also in that year there appeared the first two volumes of a projected translation of all his works, including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5), *The Twilight of the Idols* (1889), and *The Antichrist* (1895). Wells would have been quite familiar, even if he had not actually read much Nietzsche, with the essential aspects of his thought by the time he came to writing *Doctor Moreau*. Nietzschean motifs occur in Wells long before the German philosopher was available in English. David Thatcher notes that in "The Rediscovery of the Unique" (1891) Wells tries to

demolish the validity of logic, mathematics, atomic theory, and conventional morality in a manner familiar to readers of Nietzsche's *Will to Power*. Wells is on common ground with Nietzsche in his repudiation of the notion of original sin, his insistence on the law of change and his premonitions of impending world wars.⁴⁸

Bergonzi draws attention to the fact that the chapter "Dr Moreau Explains" is very similar to Alexander Tille's attempt to assimilate Nietzsche and Darwin in his introduction to the English translations mentioned above. Tille, in a very reductionist reading, claims that Nietzsche uses the word "higher" in two different senses when speaking of man as opposed to animals:

In the first case the "higher" being among a species is that which leaves the stronger and more numerous progeny, in the latter case the "higher" being is that which does a larger number of such acts as are believed to serve certain ends particularly esteemed by a certain portion of the community to which it belongs.⁴⁹

Tille says that Nietzsche refused to acknowledge any definite distinction between man and beast and, taking a stand in opposition to Huxley, he roped Nietzsche into the social Darwinian camp trying to show that the evolutionary struggle for existence extended to

⁴⁷Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells*, p. 9.

⁴⁸David S. Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England 1890-1914* (Toronto, 1970), p. 82.

⁴⁹Alexander Tille in his introduction to *The Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* 11 (London, 1895), p. xiii.

man in his attempt to gain the status of *Übermensch*. Although this is a very narrow reading of Nietzsche's view (and few early critics understood the multi-layered and ironical nature of Nietzsche) it does throw light on how the philosopher was interpreted in Victorian England.⁵⁰ More importantly it elucidates the kind of ethical debate and the reinterpretation of man's place in the universe that Nietzsche's reading of Darwin aroused in the mid-1890's when the philosopher started to receive public attention in England.

In *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878, translated 1909) Nietzsche points out that since belief in God has ceased, man has to set himself ecumenical goals.⁵¹ He rejects the distinction between "good" and "evil" feeling that they encapsulate a theological morality no longer appropriate to modern man. He also rejects Kant's view of a universal morality for a mankind "ascending" in accordance with innate laws of progress. He posits that at given times and in certain circumstances individuals might have to perform "evil" tasks (he does not see these acts as amoral, but rather as conforming to a morality that adheres to the doctrine of the "will to power").

In *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche, like Huxley during the same period, probes the origins of our value judgements and tries to determine how man has constructed "good" and "evil". In an attack on Schopenhauer he explains that man's overestimation of self-denial and pity are life-denying forces. He suggests that there is a chance that qualities we call "good" may, in fact, be detrimental to man's ascendancy, even "a temptation, a narcotic drug enabling the present to live at the expense of the future."⁵² In this view it is just possible that morality is a *hindrance* to man's development. In a sense

⁵⁰Nietzsche was credited with being far more Darwinian than he actually was. Certainly the Darwinian revolution deeply affected him and he took the replacement of God by evolution as his starting point, feeling that man, or certainly some men, needed to be "remade" in accordance with this new understanding of the universe and of man's animal nature. However, he felt that the distance separating Everyman and the man of "genius" was greater than that between Everyman and animals. He saw Darwinian natural selection as working in favour of the herd while he himself was an advocate of the few against the many: he wanted to see selection in favour of the happy accident, the exceptional and unique loner. He deplored what he thought of the instinctive conspiracy of the mediocre and the stupid. His *Übermensch* was thus not, as contemporary critics would have it, simply the final outcome of evolution, but a selective combating thereof. Concomitantly his ethical formulations apply evolution to moral problems in a ruthless way, going much further than Darwin or Huxley - who felt that an evolutionary ethics had to be fought at every turn.

⁵¹Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human* in *A Nietzsche Reader* (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 30. Elsewhere Nietzsche points to the profound affect of Darwin's theory on man's conception of himself: "Formerly one sought the feeling of the grandeur of man by pointing to his divine *origin*: This has now become a forbidden way, for at its portal stands the ape." (*Daybreak* [1881, translated 1903] in *ibid.*, p. 199.)

⁵²Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, p. 155.

we can label Moreau a Nietzschean who is prepared to sacrifice common morality in order to extend the boundaries of scientific knowledge and to speed up the process of evolution.

According to the society we live in, to be ethical and "good" means to practice obedience towards established laws and traditions. Nietzsche feels that the state and society intimidate man into conformity, tempting him and forcing him to betray his proper destiny. What Moreau does is remove himself from society, and hence from the laws of society, and install himself in the amoral space of a desert island where he is free from all constraints and can create a world according to his own "scientific" morality⁵³ (however he must also accept that those who live by an evolutionary ethics also die by it⁵⁴). This is made easier for him as he comes from a world that has lost its theological *raison d'être*:

In comparison with the mode of life of whole millennia of mankind we present-day men live in a very immoral [*unsittlich*] age: the power of custom [*Sitte*] is astonishingly enfeebled and the moral sense [*Gefühl der Sittlichkeit*] so rarefied and lofty it may be described as having more or less evaporated. . . . The free human being is immoral [*unsittlich*] because in all things he is *determined* to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition: in all the original conditions of mankind, "evil" signifies the same as "individual", "free", "capricious", "unusual", "unforeseen", "incalculable".⁵⁵

And in a similar vein Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science* (1882, translated 1910):

There is nowadays a fundamentally false theory of morality which is especially celebrated in England: according to this theory the judgements "good" and "evil" are the summation of experiences of "useful" and "not useful"; that which is called "evil" is that which injures the species.⁵⁶

In his contempt for conventional ethics Moreau seems to symbolise the Nietzschean "transvaluation of values". Moreau is a free - and therefore immoral - spirit who has rejected the overdetermining tradition and embarked upon a course of action that is

⁵³By isolating himself on an island he also escapes the contractual aspects of living in a community which bring with them the baggage of guilt, conscience and duty.

⁵⁴In connection with the death of Moreau it is interesting to consider what Huntington writes about *The War of the Worlds*:

There is a strong ethical element in the novel: humanity as a whole, despite the Sunday schools, has lived by an evolutionary code itself. Though it had the chance to act ethically towards the rest of nature, it has not. Those who live by evolution will die by it. (*The Logic of Fantasy*, p. 84)

As a representative of irresponsible humanity and of evolutionary ethics, Moreau dies by evolution when one of his creature-creations batters in his head with its fetters.

⁵⁵Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, p. 87.

⁵⁶Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* in *A Nietzsche Reader*, p. 98.

individualistic, capricious and unusual.⁵⁷ According to this line of argument Moreau is guilty of sinful actions simply because we determine them to be "not useful" to the species. Hence it is only Prendick's censorious presence on the island that renders the doctor guilty. While Moreau's world remains inviolate his actions are "moral" so long as he and Montgomery consider them "useful".

To achieve his aim of speeding up evolution Moreau must immerse his subjects in the bath of pain⁵⁸, something Nietzsche understood only too well:

Whenever man has thought it necessary to create a memory for himself, his effort has been attended by torture, blood, sacrifice. . . . All these have their origin in that instinct which divined pain to be the strongest aid to mnemonics. . . . The poorer the memory of mankind has been, the more terrible have been its customs. The severity of all primitive penal codes gives us some idea how difficult it must have been for man to overcome his forgetfulness and to drum into these slaves of momentary whims and desires a few basic requirements of communal living.⁵⁹

Elsewhere Nietzsche says that every elevation of mankind has been achieved through great suffering:

In man, *creature* and *creator* are united: in man there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine spectator and the seventh day - do you understand this antithesis? And that *your* pity is for the "creature in man", for that which has to be formed, broken, forged, torn, burned, annealed, refined - that which has to *suffer* and *should* suffer?⁶⁰

Moreau is in agreement with Nietzsche in his belief that pain will somehow burn the animal out of his Beast Folk and raise them to humanity. The doctor represents the "creative" aspect of man trying to refine away the "creature".

⁵⁷Nordau contends that many geniuses are lunatics, that they possess one extraordinarily developed faculty (in Moreau's case, his vivisection skills), but with the other faculties falling short of the average standard. He maintains that their intellect may attain a high degree of development, but morally they remain deranged (*Degeneration*, p. 23).

⁵⁸Nietzsche's model philosopher is depicted as applying the knife of his thought "vivisectionally to the very virtues of the time" (quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* [1950; Princeton, 1968], p. 108) and Moreau is the literal embodiment of this idea.

⁵⁹Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, p. 193.

⁶⁰Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886, translated 1907) in *A Nietzsche Reader*, p. 246.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE SUPERMAN

Übermensch

In *Degeneration* Nordau painted Nietzsche as an apostle of true aristocracy, the adherent of a master-slave morality and a man who was in direct opposition to altruistic values. Nordau even accused Nietzsche of imagining himself a new Saviour and of plagiarising and perverting the gospel in both form and substance. And during the 1890's the German philosopher would have been perceived in this light by the English public. In Moreau, Wells creates a character who personifies the popular interpretation of Nietzsche as a thinker who believed in unbridled egoism and the doctrine of the *Übermensch*:

The tendency of a belief in natural selection as the main factor of human progress, is, in the moral field, towards the glorification of a sort of rampant egoism - of blackguardism in fact, - as the New Gospel. You get that in the Gospel of Nietzsche.⁶¹

Nietzsche argues that even at the level of the individual organs in an organism there is a growth and a struggle towards perfection and that in some cases the partial destruction, atrophying or reduction of certain organs can be a sign of increasing strength for the organism.⁶² Borrowing from (and twisting) Darwin, he suggests that there is a will and a way to greater power which is carried through at the expense of smaller powers. He goes on to draw an analogy with humans and intimates that mankind in the mass might be sacrificed in order to ensure the prosperity of a new, stronger species of man.

When Nietzsche talks about the almost Lamarckian "willing" of a new self and a new "nature", he speaks in a way that would appeal to Moreau:

"To give style" to one's character - a great and rare art! He exercises it who surveys all that his nature presents in strength and weakness and then moulds it to an artistic plan until everything appears as art and reason, and even the weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large amount of second nature has been added, here a piece of original nature removed - in both instances with protracted practice and daily labour.⁶³

⁶¹Wells, "Human Evolution: Mr Wells Replies", p. 244. Again in *When the Sleeper Awakes* the tyrannical ruler Ostrog sounds like a caricature of Nietzsche:

The hope of mankind - what is it? That some day the Over-man may come, that some day the inferior, the weak and the bestial may be subdued or eliminated. Subdued if not eliminated. The world is no place for the bad, the stupid, the enervated. Their duty - it's a fine duty too! - is to die. The death of the failure! That is the path by which the best rose to manhood, by which man goes on to higher things. ([1899; London, 1927] p. 190)

⁶²Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* in *A Nietzsche Reader*, p. 12.

⁶³Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 237.

Moreau takes Nietzsche's figurative injunction quite literally and tries to reshape the nature of his creatures by surgical means, and on a deeper level he tries to alter the creatures' "characters" through hypnosis and the inculcation of a crude code of law and ethics. He is not attempting to elevate them to the status of *Übermensch*, but what he is trying to achieve by raising animals to the level of humanity is an equivalent exercise (the word "*über*" carries the sense of "overcoming" [the base instincts], which is the essence of what the doctor is attempting).

For the Beast People, Moreau can be none other than the superman, one could say the super-ego, to which they aspire:

What is the ape to men? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the superman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment.⁶⁴

Having adopted this role, Moreau can justify his autocratic control over the island as his right. On a Darwinian island devoid of any established religion, the Beast Folk resort to a "primitive" reification of their leader, what Nietzsche would call faith "bounded by conceivability".⁶⁵ Nietzsche's Zarathustra calls for the overthrow of accepted morality and the willing of a new, higher species of man that is half saint, half genius. Moreau is a grotesque parody of this idealism: he is accepted by his subjects as a genius and as a quasi-religious figure to which they aspire (recall the respect accorded the Ape Man who has all ten digits of his hands and is consequently perceived to be, evolutionarily speaking, closer to his "maker"). In this respect Moreau is not unlike Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*: both men have had to leave Europe due to an "indiscretion" and each has created his own little world in a remote part of the globe in which he is superman, the sole, deified and autocratic ruler.

God is Dead

In a Darwinian world the question of religion and the existence of God came under renewed scrutiny and the responses were manifold. Nietzsche claimed that God was dead, more precisely that mankind had destroyed its own faith in God, and all that remained

⁶⁴Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5; Harmondsworth, 1966), pp. 41-2

⁶⁵Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 2 in *A Nietzsche Reader*, p. 242.

was an "amoral" void. Hence there is a meaninglessness in the universe just as there is a meaninglessness in Moreau's experiments in evolution. Nietzsche's life's work can be interpreted as an attempt to somehow raise man up to fill the vacuum created by the death of his Creator. His doctrines of the will to power, eternal recurrence and the *Übermensch* all attest to this.

I have already noted that the doctor embodies the cosmic process, nature's great experiment, elevating some creatures and exterminating others. Far from combating the cosmic process, as Huxley prescribes, Moreau re-enacts it. He says:

I am a religious man, Prendick, as every sane man must be. It may be, I fancy, I have seen more of the ways of this world's Maker than you - for I have sought His laws, in my way, all my life. (p. 107)

A statement like this exposes the problems Darwin's theories raised with respect to orthodox religion. Moreau is presented to us as an imitator of the remorseless process of nature while the Beast Folk accept him as a kind of deity.⁶⁶ Wells is saying that a God who would allow the arbitrary suffering and waste that the cosmic process brings to all living things, would have to be like Doctor Moreau. Readers are being challenged to question man's relationship with God and to ask whether they are not perhaps reifying a natural force that they cannot comprehend, just as Moreau's creatures are doing. Wells undermines any hope of a *rapprochement* between science and natural theology. The basic underpinning of the Beast Folk's religion is fear, and we are left to wonder whether man's faith is not similarly determined (Hell and the House of Pain have a lot in common). When anarchy is let loose upon the island, Montgomery remarks on man's plight in a way reminiscent of King Lear's famous words: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, - / They kill us for their sport" (IV. i. 36-7). He says: "What's it all for, Prendick? Are we bubbles blown by a baby?" (p. 153). With Moreau dead the Beast People must be wondering, like atheist and nihilistic Victorians in a "godless" age, just who is the baby blowing the bubbles?

⁶⁶In *Joan and Peter* (1918) Wells describes God working in a laboratory crawling "with a buzzing nightmare of horrible and unmeaning life": everywhere are "returns of nature's waste, sample bones of projected animals" and blood oozes from drawers and "little cries came out of them" (quoted in Peter Kemp, *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Ape: Biological Themes and Imaginative Obsessions* [London, 1982], p. 20).

Moreau parodies aspects of orthodox Christianity in his own works of creation. He fashions a dangerous serpent-like creature to inhabit his Eden, the production of the Ape Man takes him a week after which time he rests, and phrases such as "increase and multiply" (p. 43) and "the mark of the beast" (p. 107) come directly from the Bible. Haynes contends that the bath of pain to which Moreau subjects the creatures is intended to have overtones of the baptismal ceremony and that the doctor's name alludes to this function: Moreau is a condensation from the French of "water of death".⁶⁷ Furthermore Moreau is variously depicted as the Christian God, Satan or the Antichrist and this rich biblical iconography is juxtaposed with the brutal realities of the island and sets up a dialectic with which Victorian readers would have been familiar. I will now consider Prendick's "religious experience" on the island as well as some of the religious allusions of this "theological grotesque" (Wells' own name for it) that throw light on the author's intentions.

When Prendick is lifted aboard the *Ipecacuanha* the first thing he sees is a Satan figure, the evil captain with his "big red countenance, covered with freckles and surrounded with red hair" (p. 12). While lying in his bunk he hears a voice shouting at some "Heaven-forsaken idiot" (p. 18), another proleptic allusion to the nature of the island for which he is bound. Only once does Prendick resort to prayer and that is just before he is taken ashore by the islanders: "I prayed to God that he would let me die" (p. 36). However his appeal is brief and lame in comparison with Crusoe's entreaties and is handled in a single sentence whereas Defoe lavishes pages on his hero's pieties. And by the time he sees the three hog-men dancing and chanting their religious refrain, "Aloola" or "Baloola" (p. 60), he realises that he is in a world where a deity such as Friday's Benamuckee is ritually worshipped: there can be no recourse to the Christian God here. When he escapes from Moreau's compound and joins the clan of Beast Folk he must take part in their religious rituals and chant the prohibitions as though they were some primitive Ten Commandments. Prendick is disgusted at their crude fervour and is horrified at the thought that perhaps "Moreau, after animalizing these men, had infected

⁶⁷Haynes, *H. G. Wells*, p. 33.

their dwarfed brains with a kind of deification of himself" (p. 86).⁶⁸ Like a high priest, the Sayer of the Law interprets the commandments, but the way he phrases his injunctions betrays his own weaknesses and only partially repressed desire to surrender to his instincts: "Some want to follow things that move, to watch and slink and wait and spring, to kill and bite, bite deep and rich, sucking the blood. . . . It is bad" (pp. 87-8). The pause suggests he is fighting to keep back the "beast within" that threatens to break free and reduce his language to a hungry growl.⁶⁹ When the population of the island is assembled before Moreau, Prendick notes that they appear to worship him in a great stooping, dust-throwing circle of semi-humanity. Here Wells is, of course, being deeply satirical about the piety of orthodox church-goers and is playing the ethnographer in drawing analogies between "civilised" and "primitive" religious practices.

But there is another god, a deity from the world of literature, that Moreau closely resembles: Setebos, the god of Caliban's mother. Robert Browning's "Caliban upon Setebos, or Natural Theology of the Island" (1864) is one of the first imaginative responses to Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and is an eloquent satirisation of man's attempt to hold onto anthropomorphic or natural theology in the face of evolution. The poem explores Caliban's relationship with his own deity, Setebos, and shows how the "salvage and deformed slave" creates an irrational, cruel, anthropomorphised god who is merely a deified version of himself. Caliban demonstrates the wanton and arbitrary nature of Setebos' reign by pretending that he is god ruling over a group of crabs:

'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,
 Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.
 'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots
 Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off;
 'Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,
 And two worms he whose nippers end in red;

⁶⁸If we take Moreau to be a Satan figure then the whole island can be viewed as Hell and the creatures as fallen humans. At one point Prendick confesses that when one of Moreau's creations comes near him he feels "a touch . . . of the diabolical" (p. 53).

⁶⁹Nietzsche mentions the interiorization of instincts as the beginning of what is later called man's soul, but this interiorization was also a torment to man, just as it is to the Beast People:

Lacking external enemies and resistances, and confined within an oppressive narrowness and regularity, man began rending, persecuting, terrifying himself, like a wild beast hurling itself against the bars of its cage. . . . [He] became the inventor of "bad conscience." (*The Genealogy of Morals in The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, p. 218)

As it likes me each time, I do: so He.⁷⁰

Setebos is the relentless process of nature/evolution, and Caliban exposes the folly of trying to anthropomorphise such a deity. Caliban, a creature that is half-beast, half-human, is a perfect choice to show the dethroned status of man in a post-Darwinian age, a creature struggling against the tide of biological science, trying to find metaphysical answers for his existence.

When the deity (Moreau) is killed, Prendick must outwit the Beast Folk in order to stay alive. Nietzsche had prophesied that when man fully understood that he had lost God, universal madness would break out. Prendick has the same sense of apocalypse and realises he must shore up the theological ruins in whatever way possible. He tells them that Moreau, although he can no longer be seen, is still alive and is watching and ruling over them from above (and in a parodic allusion to Christ walking on the water, "God's" deputy on the island, Prendick, is now called "That Other who walked in the Sea" [p.173]). Even the language used in the description of the doctor's "resurrection" is reminiscent of the Bible. From an anthropological perspective, what Prendick is effectively doing, is speeding up the evolution of theology, just as Moreau had done with biology. The Beast People have moved from worshipping their chief, who through his brutality and their fear has been accorded supernatural status, to an advanced ancestor worship, even a crude religion. When Prendick intimates that Moreau will one day return, he is clearly borrowing the idea of the Second Coming in order to bolster his hold over the tribe. Like Mr Blettsworthy during his stay on Rampole Island, Prendick has become a kind of soothsayer/priest who must live by cleverly formulating and interpreting the defining myths of the tribe.⁷¹

⁷⁰Robert Browning, "Caliban upon Setebos" (ll. 102-8) in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (New York, 1970), pp. 788-9.

⁷¹The two characters who acquire the status of demi-gods must maintain control with a firm hand, quite literally "the hand of God" (be it by wielding a scalpel, whip or firearm) - recall the chant of the Beast Folk (a parody of the Lord's Prayer):

"His is the Hand that makes."

"His is the Hand that wounds."

"His is the Hand that heals." (p. 85)

And both lose the use of their hand: the puma almost severs Moreau's hand at the wrist and Prendick breaks his arm.

DEGENERATION

The Nature of the Beast

When Prendick gets a chance to examine the Beast Man on board the *Ipecacuanha* he has a strange feeling of *déjà vu* which is only partially countered by the explanation that he had seen the creature before in his delirium. "I had never beheld such a repulsive and extraordinary face before, and yet - if the contradiction is credible - I experienced at the same time an odd feeling that in some way I had already encountered exactly the features and gestures that now amazed me" (p. 19). Indeed from a Lamarckian perspective one could argue that this half-evolved creature jolts some kind of "biological" memory in Prendick.⁷² Perhaps this accounts for the sailor's and captain's revulsion when confronted by the "ugly devil" (p. 23).⁷³ Even Prendick must admit to an irrational fear which is, I would suggest, a recognition of the beast that lies behind the "civilised" young scientist: "That black figure, with its eyes of fire, struck down through all my adult thoughts and feelings, and for a moment the forgotten horrors of childhood came back to my mind" (p. 30). And at night he dreams of guns and howling mobs, the anarchy and chaos of the beast in man let loose. Occasionally Prendick's narration betrays a proto-Freudian sense of the animal nature that is underneath the surface in all of us: "Then the poor *brute within* gave vent to a series of short, sharp screams" (p. 53, italics mine) and he admits that the yells provide an "emotional appeal" (p. 54), a biological link, that he cannot deny. On a few occasions Prendick finds himself being stalked by one of the Beast Men. The creature does not attack, but rather keeps at a distance, watching, but unable to meet his gaze.⁷⁴ One evening at dusk he hears an echo to his footsteps, sees a "shapeless lump" (p. 65) and realises that his "tawny-faced antagonist" (p. 65) is following him again. This time he picks up a stone and chases his adversary away brandishing the primordial

⁷²In many ways these hirsute characters with their pointed ears, long torsos, short legs and luminous eyes resemble early hominids. They are not unlike Wells' Neanderthals in "The Grisly Folk" with their "heavy chinless faces, retreating foreheads", "scant bristly hair upon their heads" (p. 60) and their undeveloped speech.

⁷³In *The Inheritors* Golding's New People, *Homo sapiens*, consider their surviving Neanderthal forebears to be devils incarnate.

⁷⁴On a number of occasions Prendick is able to out-stare the creatures. We recall Shere Khan's statement about the human gaze: "He is a man, and none of us can look him between the eyes" (Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book* [1894; London, 1983], p. 21).

weapon. But as darkness begins to fall their animal instincts threaten to overwhelm the Beast Folk and they become far bolder: the creature (Montgomery descriptively names it a "bogle") attacks Prendick on all-fours and the scientist only just manages to *stun* it by striking its head with a stone hurled from a sling made out of his handkerchief. Then he dashes back towards the compound:

Though I was faint and horribly fatigued, I gathered together all my strength, and began running again towards the light. It seemed to me a voice was calling me. (p. 68)

From a certain perspective this creature can be viewed as a doppelganger who begins to stalk Prendick when he arrives on the island, and will follow him for the rest of his life. Wells is here treating the duality of man's nature and the creature is a kind of double from out of the scientist's evolutionary past. The representation of this duality in Prendick is reminiscent of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) where we are shown the psychological battle between two aspects of a person's character. But Prendick forms only a small part of a much larger canvas that Wells is trying to paint: taken as a whole, the inhabitants of the island represent the dualities nature/civilisation, beast/human. The whole spectrum of life, from the newly-arrived animals to the doctor, is present on the island and the Beast People fill the gap between the two, ranging from almost-animal to almost-human. As such they trace the steps down which man will descend if he allows his animal instincts, the Mr Hyde in his nature, to gain the upper hand (see "Regression" below).

Prendick fights off the challenge from the past, a challenge to submit to his animal instincts. His means of defence becomes more sophisticated progressing from a stick to the combination of two elements, a sling and a stone (in evolutionary terms a crucial leap forward).⁷⁵ Having overcome the challenge posed by his primordial doppelganger, he heads from the primal and chaotic darkness towards the "light" of reason and of "civilisation". The statement about the voice calling to him (above) is the last utterance of

⁷⁵Later when Prendick tries to escape from Montgomery he uses the wooden side rail of his deck chair with a nail projecting from it as a crude weapon. His means of defence have leapt rapidly from the stone age to the iron age. In *The Time Machine*, the time traveller is also brought down to a very basic means of self defence: the Morlocks, like their animal ancestors, are scared of fire and he keeps them at bay using a box of matches he brought on his journey by accident.

the chapter entitled "The Thing in the Forest" and although in the following chapter we find out that it is Montgomery calling, the "voice" clearly has a deeper resonance. On the one hand it refers back to the chapter in question: it is a cry from the "forest", from the instinctive and animal side of Prendick. On the other hand the voice is linked to the "light" of progress. However this "light" is in itself not unproblematic. Just as Conrad used impressionistic chiaroscuro effects in a complex and often contradictory way in *Heart of Darkness*, so Wells complicates his imagery in a similar manner. The "light" to which Prendick runs is not simply that of reason and "progress", but also the light of Moreau's reason - two quite different concepts. When he gets back to the enclosure Montgomery sits him down in a chair and "for a while [he] was blinded by the light" (p. 69). He is so relieved to be back in the safety of the compound, one could almost say the safety of the present, that he blindly accepts it as a better option than the forest out there (and the forest he has glimpsed within).

Thus far I have been laying emphasis on the "animal" aspect of the creatures' nature. I will now consider to what extent the Beast Folk attain a degree of humanity and whether the group can be thought of as a community. When Prendick gets to know some of them better, he comes to realise that they have created a kind of society: they have a crude religion and law; they have built themselves homes, gather food and even marry. Despite these developments he admits that at bottom they are "a mockery of rational life" and that they have "the souls of beasts" (p. 113). However there are times when he depicts them and treats them as though they were human: he even describes them in a similar manner to contemporary ethnographers relating the features and customs of "primitives".⁷⁶

The more time Prendick spends with the Beast Folk the more human they seem to him and once Moreau and Montgomery are dead he joins them in their commune. The young scientist becomes a part of their society. He fears that some may be plotting against him and, like a chief who must kill his rivals to maintain power, he resolves to

⁷⁶In "On the Methods and Results of Ethnology" (1865) Huxley describes the natives of Australia in very similar terms to Prendick's account of the Beast Folk: "For the most part of fair stature, erect and well built, except for an unusual slenderness of the lower limbs, the Australians have . . . dark eyes, overhung by beetle brows; coarse, projecting jaws; broad and dilated, but not especially flattened noses" (in *Critiques and Addresses* [London, 1873], p. 144).

eliminate his predatory foes. However he does not grasp the vacant sceptre of Moreau; something in him refuses to perpetuate the farcical nightmare of the doctor's reign. Consequently, as far as the Beast Folk are concerned, all that separates him from them now is the firearm that he carries: his civilisation is reduced to "his trick of throwing stones and the bite of [his] hatchet" (p. 177). He becomes so immersed in the tribe that he starts to notice individual characteristics that allow some creatures to gain an advantage over others. The Monkey Man, for instance, has the

fantastic trick of coining new words. He had an idea, I believe, that to gabble about names that meant nothing was the proper use of speech. He called it "big thinks", to distinguish it from "little thinks" - the sane everyday interests of life. (p. 178)

Apart from being a parody of the genesis of a philosopher or high priest, the Monkey Man's creativity represents the most important driving element in the advancement of mankind: the development of a complex form of communication with which to co-ordinate the tribe. But as with so many of evolution's experiments, the Monkey Man is jabbering himself into an eddy beside the current of progress.⁷⁷ Huxley makes it clear that man "alone possess the marvellous endowment of intelligible and rational speech, whereby, in the secular period of his existence, he has slowly accumulated and organised the experience which is almost wholly lost with the cessation of every individual life in other animals".⁷⁸

Thus Wells is asking us to look closely at the similarities and differences between man and other life forms and to examine our place in and responsibilities to nature. Just as Huxley had done earlier, and Darwin before him, Wells refuses to allow us to rest on a simple and clear distinction between man and the rest of the animal kingdom. A closer

⁷⁷ In "On Methods and Results of Ethnology" Huxley points out that anthropologists may, in seeking to unravel the complexities of the human structure and to determine the relations between man and the animal, seek aid from researches into the most human manifestation of humanity - Language; and assuming that what is true of speech is true of the speaker - a hypothesis as questionable in science as it is in ordinary life - he may apply to mankind themselves [*sic*] the conclusions drawn from a searching analysis of their words and grammatical forms. (Ibid., p. 135)

In the case of the Beast Folk such an analysis, perhaps *the* litmus test of humanity, finds even the most eloquent specimen wanting.

⁷⁸T. H. Huxley, "On the Relation of Man to the Lower Animals" in *Man's Place in Nature and Other Anthropological Essays* (London, 1894), pp. 155-6.

look at the law that the Beast Men chant reveals the tenuous nature of any such distinction:

"Not to go on all-Fours; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?"
"Not to suck up Drink; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?"
"Not to eat Flesh nor Fish; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?"
"Not to claw Bark of Trees; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?"
"Not to chase other Men; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?" (p. 85)

The first and most obvious point to make is that none of the Beast Men on the island are able ^{to} uphold these laws. But upon reflection we realise that this does not necessarily disqualify them from the human camp. We find that *Homo sapiens* is almost as guilty as the other islanders: Prendick is deposited on all-fours when his hammock upends him, and even he is excited by the hunt for the Leopard Man; the men kill rabbits for the pot and in the open boat cannibalism becomes a real possibility. Thus humans sometimes act like beasts (Moreau and the captain of the *Ipecacuanha*) and beasts sometimes act like humans are supposed to (M'ling cooks for the men and the faithful Saint Bernard Dog Man altruistically protects Prendick right until the end).

We have noticed how distinctions become even more blurred after Moreau's death when Montgomery throws in his lot with the Beast Men: "He had been with them so long that he had come to regard them as almost normal human beings" (p. 120). When he announces that he is going drinking with the Beast Folk, Prendick tries to stop him:

"Get . . . out of the way," [Montgomery] roared, and suddenly whipped out his revolver.
"Very well," said I, and stood aside, half-minded to fall upon him as he put his hand upon the latch, but deterred by the thought of my useless arm. "You've made a beast of yourself. To the beasts you may go." . . .
"You're a solemn prig, Prendick, a silly ass!" (p. 155)

Since being forced to flee England, Montgomery has lived in a "twilight zone" of humanity where the only choices available to him are either to join the demi-god Moreau, or sink to the level of the animal. With neither does he feel comfortable, but finally, under the influence of alcohol, he lets his guard slip and sides with the beast, or should we say allows the beast within his own nature to gain the upper hand: he becomes one with his biological past. As he departs he too labels Prendick a beast, an ass. And superficially this

seems to be an accurate accusation, as soon afterwards Prendick joins the Beast People in their dwelling area.⁷⁹ He recalls his own transformation at this time:

My hair grew long, and became matted together. I am told that even now my eyes have a strange brightness, a swift alertness of movement. (p. 181)

He adopts the rhythms of the natural world, slumbering by day and remaining awake at night when the carnivores are prowling (we recall that in "Letting in the Jungle" the humans are confined to their huts at night for fear of the revengeful animals⁸⁰).

Wells leaves us with more questions than answers. What exactly distinguishes humans from animals and what is a beastly nature? Are animals that can be taught how to speak to be treated as humans? Moreau would say that only certain aspects of physiognomy need to be altered (the larynx in particular) to render an animal human. Victorian readers were shocked by the implications of such a claim. Prendick, and behind him Wells, remain uncertain of the boundaries, but their awareness of the ethical problems and contradictions is far more acute than their contemporaries.

Prendick has undergone a process of transformation and enlightenment on the island and although he is forced to become a part of their community, his attitude towards the Beast Men (and the beast in men) is more sophisticated than that of Montgomery or Moreau. Prendick feels a sense of the dethronement of *Homo sapiens* as the legitimate king of all living creatures. The words of the narrator of *The War of the Worlds* describing man's struggle against the highly-evolved Martians could stand for the humbling effect the island stay has on Prendick: "I felt the first inkling of a thing that presently grew quite clear in my mind, that oppressed me for many days, a sense of dethronement, a persuasion that I was no longer a master, but an animal among the animals, under the Martian heel."⁸¹ (In that novel disease bacteria, one of the lowest

⁷⁹Huntington comments that it is through the element of fire – a complex symbol in Wells' oeuvre – that Prendick is brought to a position where there is no alternative but to join the ranks of the Beast Men: fire destroys the careful distinctions and discriminations humanity has set up between itself and nature (*The Logic of Fantasy*, pp. 76-7). The creatures are kept in check by "the fire that kills" – that is the revolvers that the men carry. But towards the end of the novel fire gets out of control and threatens to plunge Prendick's world into total chaos: first a slightly unhinged Montgomery burns the boats to prevent their return to civilisation, and then Prendick accidentally knocks over a lamp which sets fire to the enclosure. With no chance of escape by sea or refuge on the island he must join forces with the Beast Folk.

⁸⁰Kipling, "Letting in the Jungle" in *The Second Jungle Book*.

⁸¹Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (1898; Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 154.

forms of life on the planet, are, by the end of the novel, referred to as "our microscopic allies".⁸²) Just as the fire on Noble's Island reduces Prendick to being merely another competitor in the struggle for survival, so does the arrival of the Martians in England: "A dog with a piece of putrescent red meat in his jaws . . . made a wide curve to avoid me, as though he feared I might prove a fresh competitor."⁸³ On Noble's Island Prendick becomes fully aware of what it is to be human: we all have animal instincts and irrational drives, but these need to be controlled. We all have a responsibility and are closely linked to nature, but our way forward must be by way of harnessing and guiding it, not by directly opposing it (Moreau) or by letting it overwhelm us (Montgomery).

Cannibalism

At the beginning of the novel we are introduced to one of the dark issues that the notions of survival of the fittest and degeneration reawakened in the minds of many Victorians: that of cannibalism. Prendick writes: "The long-boat with seven of the crew was picked up eighteen days after by H. M. gunboat *Myrtle*, and the story of their privations has become almost as well known as the *Medusa* case" (p. 9).⁸⁴ During the period in which Wells was writing *Moreau*, cases in which starving sailors had succumbed to cannibalism were widely debated and anthropophagy was morbidly dealt with in much late nineteenth-century travel and ethnographic literature. John Reed suggests that the issue of cannibalism at sea, as it is presented in Wells' novel, had acquired greater resonance due to the precedent-setting decision in the case of *Regina v. Dudley and Stephens* (1884) which determined that "human" law would not permit cannibalism to further survival (in this case the murder of a sailor in a life-boat).⁸⁵ Thus the preservation of life was deemed secondary to the law respecting human life, even where people were beyond the protection of the state, as on an island or in an open boat.

⁸²Ibid., p. 180.

⁸³Ibid., p. 177. Similarly in the short story "Æpyornis Island" the protagonist-narrator, Butcher, fights with a fourteen foot dinosaur bird, called Man Friday, over food.

⁸⁴In 1816 the French frigate *Medusa* was wrecked and some of her crew survived by resorting to cannibalism (inspiring Géricault's famous painting, *Raft of the "Medusa"*).

⁸⁵Cited in John R. Reed, "The Vanity of Law in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*" in Patrick Parrinder and Christopher Rolfe (eds.) *H. G. Wells Under Revision: Proceedings of the International H. G. Wells Symposium London, July 1986* (Selmsgrove, 1990), p. 134.

For Victorians cannibalism represented a denial of basic moral codes and hence an extreme form of atavism that fascinated authors like Conrad and Wells, and became a theme that they would return to again and again. A character such as Christian Falk in Conrad's short story "Falk" is faced with the moral dilemma of whether he and the rest of the crew have the duty as "civilised" human beings to die of starvation or whether to succumb to the atavistic instinct to consume the flesh of members of the same species. Kurtz's return to cannibalism in *Heart of Darkness* can be viewed in the light of beliefs concerning the devouring of enemies in "primitive" tribes. We must also remember that Lombroso's pseudo-scientific theory that criminals, prostitutes and other "degenerates" are capable of cannibalism would also have found some contemporary support. The idea of cannibalistic atavism was derived from an anthropological misconception of the nature and prevalence of the practice in "primitive" societies. Cannibalism was an extremely limited and ritually circumscribed event and thus the popular idea that contemporary anthropophagy was simply a reversion to "primitive" impulses was false. Nevertheless Darwinian ideas had put Victorians in touch with their evolutionary legacy and with the "cannibal" lurking within: it was a fixation of the age.

Wells believed that, given extreme circumstances, a return to cannibalism is "natural". Certainly in terms of evolutionary morality the fittest had every right to consume the weakest. In both *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* anthropophagy is shown to be a deep-seated "instinct". Three decades later Wells is still intrigued by the phenomenon: in *Mr Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* any infringement of the island's complex set of taboos results in summary execution and the flesh of the victim being divided among the tribe. Wells returns to the idea of eating human flesh with a disconcerting regularity and in *Bealby* (1915) there is even a recipe for the way he himself would prefer to be cooked:

If it should ever fall to my lot to be cooked, may I be fried in potatoes and butter. May I be fried with potatoes and good butter made from the milk of the cow. God send I am spared boiling; the prison of the pot, the rattling lid, the evil darkness, the greasy water.⁸⁶

⁸⁶Quoted in Kemp, *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Ape*, p. 6.

When the *Ipecacuanha* (the ship is appropriately named after a medicine which induces vomiting) reaches Moreau's island, the captain of the vessel labels Prendick a cannibal and makes a direct connection between him and the animals and half-animals he is transporting: "'Overboard,' said the captain. 'This ship ain't for beasts and cannibals, and worse than beasts, any more.'" Obviously he assumes that Prendick ate the sailors on board the life-boat in order to stay alive.

When Prendick is first rescued, a doctor (Montgomery) on board the vessel offers him "a dose of some scarlet stuff, iced" (p. 14) which Prendick admits tastes like blood, but makes him feel much stronger (incidentally the captain calls Montgomery a "Blasted Sawbones!" [p. 22] which, although referring to his profession as surgeon, also has an anthropophagic connotation). Later Montgomery gives Prendick his first square meal in weeks: "He came back again with the boiled mutton, and I was so excited by the appetising smell of it, that I forgot the noise of the beast forthwith" (p. 16).⁸⁷ Ironically it is meat that quells the animal instinct within Prendick (the pun on "noise of the beast" is explicit).

In *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Ape* Kemp draws attention to a feature of the animal world that fascinates Wells, namely teeth. In scientific articles he frequently pointed out that teeth were evidence of the antiquity of man (in *The Descent of Man* Darwin writes of how the human tooth was once our special weapon). For instance in *The Science of Life* Wells writes: "When Everyman chews his breakfast bacon he does it with teeth which are lineally descended from the shagreen of a cartilaginous fish in the Silurian waters."⁸⁸ On board the rescue ship Prendick is shocked to see a man whose "huge half-open mouth showed as big white teeth as I had ever seen in a human mouth" (p. 18). Prendick repeatedly remarks on the teeth of the Beast People, fascinated and horrified by the threat they seem to pose. Clearly Wells is drawing attention to the fact

⁸⁷The incident recalls the return of the Time Traveller to the present after his journey into the distant future in *The Time Machine* (1895). The first thing he desires after returning from the cannibalistic world of the Eloi and the Morlocks is a plate of red meat.

⁸⁸Quoted in Kemp, *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Ape*, p. 29.

that teeth are weapons, implements for sustenance and defence: in a situation where cannibalism is resorted to, our teeth are our sharpest and most effective tools.

When Prendick flees the enclosure, the Beast People chase him and he feels like a hunted animal or rather a man hunted by a band of cannibals. This recalls the Time Traveller's fear when he is treated as an edible specimen firstly by the Morlocks, who try to capture him, and then when a giant crab pursues him with "the palps of its complicated mouth flickering and feeling as it moved".⁸⁹ When the Beast Folk begin to regress to their original animal states there is another hunt and the moment a creature is shot, the Hyena-Swine seizes the opportunity to defy the blood-taboo and "thrust[s] thirsty teeth into its neck" (p.136).

In the open boat Prendick and his two ship-mates had drawn lots to see who would sacrifice himself: thirst had driven the men to crave one another's blood. A fight ensued and both sailors had fallen overboard and were drowned. This incident is mirrored at the end of the tale when a small boat with two dead sailors drifts past the island. "Something, a cold vague fear" (p. 186) keeps Prendick from swimming out to the vessel. I would suggest that it is a fear of finding evidence of cannibalism that prevents him from seizing the boat. He has advanced from the state of moral indifference that had allowed him to be drawn into gambling for human "meat" at the beginning of the tale. His terrible experience on the island is bracketed by two atavistic and cannibalistic moments of choice. Just as Robinson Crusoe fails to listen to the voice of Providence and must serve time on a purgatorial island, so Prendick fails to listen to the moral injunction not to eat human flesh (by agreeing to draw lots his guilt is implicit) and must serve time in a Darwinian purgatory in which the horrors of the mechanism of evolution are laid bare. When a life-boat (a "boat of life") crosses his path a second time, he is more cautious: he has learnt much about life and about humanity during his sojourn on the island. By chance the boat drifts ashore and Prendick is able to turn his back on the Beast People - who devour the remains of the sailors - and make for open sea. The first life-boat incident

⁸⁹Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895) in *"The Wheels of Chance" and "The Time Machine"* (London, 1935), p. 292.

was an atavistic step into a world where animals are still evolving towards full humanity; the second is a step back towards "civilisation", problematic though that concept may be.

Through the allegory of the return to flesh eating by the Beast Folk Wells shows us that the confident assumption that evolution means amelioration is misplaced. Likewise, *The Time Machine* propels us into the distant future where man is shown to have degenerated into two distinct species, where social distinctions have become biological ones. The descendants of the working class, the Morlocks, have begun to prey cannibalistically on the descendants of the wealthy, the effete Eloi. The taboo on eating the flesh of one's own species no longer holds as these two classes have branched off far enough to be considered separate species. Later, writing about the Great War in *Mr Blettsworthy on Rampole Island*, Wells describes the predatory nature of modern warfare in cannibalistic terms as though it were a tribal war between "primitives" on Rampole Island, with abundant meat as the prize for the victor. In a letter home Hugh Blettsworthy describes his feelings during bayonet drill, "bounding forward I imagine fat men, succulent men ahead" and visualises the enemy "skewered like cat's meat" (p. 237).

Wells uses anthropophagy as a reminder of our origins and as a counter-weight to the "Bio-optimists" who believed that nature was benign and that life was an unbroken line from primordial slime to "civilised" man and upward into a utopian future. Cannibalism serves as a powerful symbol both of man's potential for degeneration and as a reminder of his close relationship with the other inhabitants of this planet. Wells uses shocking imagery to remind readers that they are made of flesh and bone, and that at a biological level humans are both predator and prey, that our flesh is food for others in the great chain of life. His use of cannibalism urges us to draw evolutionary and anthropological analogies between the animal world, "primitive" society, humans in a "state of nature", and the contemporary condition of man.

Regression

When Prendick first realises that the inhabitants of the island are not entirely human, it comes as a terrible shock. He sees a man going on all-fours to drink and suddenly the

millennia that have gone into the making of *Homo sapiens* seem like a very brief and reversible moment in evolutionary time. He tries to convince himself that because the man is wearing clothing his eyes must have betrayed him. His most important moment of anagnorisis, when he fully perceives the long road the man has travelled - and along which he could easily regress - is when he is taken by his "ape-like companion" to the "village" of the Beast Folk:

Presently we came to trees, all charred and brown, and so to a bare place covered with a yellow-white incrustation, across which a drifting smoke, pungent in whiffs to nose and eyes, went drifting. On our right, over a shoulder of bare rock, I saw the level of the sea. The path coiled down abruptly into a narrow ravine between two tumbled and knotty masses of blackish scoriae. Into this we plunged.

It was extremely dark, this passage, after the blinding sunlight reflected from the sulphurous ground. Its walls grew steep, and approached one another. Blotches of green and crimson drifted across my eyes. My conductor stopped suddenly. "Home," said he, and I stood on a floor of a chasm that was at first absolutely dark to me. (pp. 80-1)

This is a passage rich in imagery suggestive of a spacial, temporal and even evolutionary regression. It is appropriate that Prendick is led by his closest ancestor, an Ape Man, back into the evolutionary past. We enter an almost "alchemical" landscape that is reminiscent of the early geological shaping of the earth with charred trees, volcanic lava, drifting smoke and sulphurous ground (Prendick often describes the topography of the island in primordial terms). After the blinding light of the present Prendick is conveyed down the dark passage of time (adjectives such as "drifting", "tumbled" and "knotty" suggest that the "chasm" of time, the abyss of ages, is filled with chaos and confusion out of which man has struggled). There is the definite sense that we are moving *down* and away from sunlight (recall that it is at dusk that the Beast People's inhibitions fall away and they revert to instinct). The narrowing of the ravine⁹⁰ and the dying of the light reflect the shrinking horizon of consciousness, the resurgence of the beast. And what of the "blotches" of "crimson" that drift across his vision? On the one hand they are, of course, the blood vessels in his eyes reacting to the sudden darkness: Prendick is unconsciously drawing attention to the physical, "animal" side of his being as he metaphorically

⁹⁰The narrow ravine is a favoured image for Wells. In *Mr Blettsworthy* the Rampole islanders have built their settlement in a dark ravine (symbol of unreason, irrationality and atrophy) where supposedly-extinct Megatheria still live.

descends into an animal past. On the other hand his statement might also be taken as an allusion to the bloodshed that each step up the path of civilisation has cost all the living organisms of this planet. This is only hinted at in Prendick's turn of phrase: the chasm is still "absolutely dark" to him.

Moreau's experiments are designed to speed up the process of evolution, but when nature resurges, the process of degeneration is almost as quick. Evolution cannot be tampered with: "Somehow the things drift back again, the stubborn beast flesh grows, day by day, back again" (p. 110). When the Beast Folk bear offspring it is palpably obvious that Lamarck's theory of the inheritance of acquired human characteristics does not hold. Moreau admits that there are things he just cannot alter: "And least satisfactory of all is something that I cannot touch, somewhere - I cannot determine where - in the seat of the emotions" (p. 112). This is both the genetic make-up and the "essence" of the creature (and this of course applies to humans as well), the root of its instincts, areas that contemporary science could not reach.

Gradually the Beast Folk begin to remember their old habits. By the time the Leopard Man defies Moreau, the whole island is in the process of reverting; this is made explicit when, in a fight with the Swine Men, M'ling discards his axe and returns to using his teeth as a weapon. A short while later Prendick sees a "little pink homunculus" with a "feral monster in headlong pursuit, blood-bedabbled" (p. 150). Sexual depravity takes over and the weaker animals have to flee or be devoured: the law of the jungle is reintroduced into Noble's Island.

Appropriately the first aspect of humanity to go is the speech faculty (we have already mentioned the close link between language and the ascent of man), then their carriage:

Can you imagine language, once clear-cut and exact, softening and guttering, losing shape and import, becoming mere lumps of sound again? . . . They held things more clumsily; drinking by suction, feeding by gnawing, grew commoner every day. I realized more keenly than ever what Moreau had told me about the "stubborn beast flesh". They were reverting, and reverting very rapidly. (p. 179)

They start to abandon their clothing, hair begins to spread over their exposed limbs, their foreheads recede and their faces start projecting. In fact the description of their degeneration to a certain extent mimics (in faulty revue) the "ladder" of human "descent"

sketched by Huxley and Darwin. But as many scientists and biologists were aware, the process of degeneration would not follow the steps of generation exactly: creatures can regress to grotesque travesties of their former selves (a theme I will look at in detail when considering *Victory*).

Of course these creatures did not decline into such beasts as the reader has seen in zoological gardens - into bears, wolves, tigers, oxen, swine, and apes. There was still something strange about each. (p. 181)

The English medical psychiatrist Henry Maudsley makes the point forcefully in *Body and Will* (1883) when he discusses the cultural atavism that would ensue after a future ice age. He believed that the "savages" who would result from this coming degeneration would be worse than anything yet witnessed on this planet, largely because they had fallen from such a "height" of civilisation. His description of these "degenerates" reminds one of Wells:

Not that humanity will retrograde quickly through the exact stages of its former slow and tedious process, as every child now quickly goes through them; it will not in fact reproduce savages with the simple mental qualities of children, but new and degenerate varieties with special repulsive characters - savages of a decomposing civilization, we might call them - who will be ten times more vicious and noxious, and infinitely less capable of improvement, than savages of the most primitive barbarism; social disintegration of the worst kind, because bred of the corruption of the best organic development, with notions and properties virulently anti-social.⁹¹

Wells saw degeneration as a "plastic" process in nature and felt that man did not have enough "plasticity" (evolutionary variability) to adapt quickly enough. In "Zoological Retrogression" (1891) he writes that the educated public have

decided that in the past the great scroll of nature has been steadily unfolding to reveal a constantly richer harmony of forms and successively higher grades of being, and it assumes that this "evolution" will continue with increasing velocity under the supervision of its extreme expression - man. This belief, as effective, progressive, and pleasing as transformation scenes at a pantomime, receives neither in the geological record nor in the studies of the phylogenetic embryologist any entirely satisfactory confirmation.⁹²

In fact the Wells of the scientific romances often portrays extinction as a likelihood for humankind. In "On Extinction" (1893) he looks at how sophisticated organisms - even *Homo sapiens* - invariably, at a certain stage in their development (often the moment of

⁹¹Maudsley, *Body and Will*, p. 321.

⁹²Wells, "Zoological Retrogression" (1891) in Philmus and Hughes (eds.) *H. G. Wells*, p. 158.

complete ascendancy), begin to degenerate into some humbler creature with extinction as ultimate *dénouement*.⁹³ Moreover, many novels are diffused with an apocalyptic, "thermodynamic" light: for example, the Time Traveller journeys into a twilight future where the earth is threatened by a total and final eclipse of the sun. In *The War of the Worlds* there is a "blood-red" sun that throws "an unfamiliar lurid light upon everything" and the humans flee through this ravaged landscape like "a menagerie suddenly let loose in a village".⁹⁴ Similarly when Prendick is trying to escape Moreau he is chased through a part of the island where there is a thin sulphurous fog that filters the light.

Montgomery's dying words express something of the *fin de siècle* pessimism: "'The last,' he murmured, 'the last of this silly universe. What a mess'" (p. 162). Apart from reflecting on the mess of his own life, Montgomery is also alluding to the end of the universe, an entropic winding down of the clock of evolution. Montgomery dies at dawn and Prendick finds himself facing the new day alone, the last civilised man on a tiny sea-locked planet:

Before me was the glittering desolation of the sea, the awful solitude upon which I had already suffered so much; behind me the island, hushed under the dawn, its Beast People silent and unseen. The enclosure with all its provisions and ammunition burnt noisily. (p. 162)

This scene has a distinct *fin du globe* atmosphere; were nuclear weapons invented, one could almost call it an apocalyptic post-atomic bomb scene.⁹⁵ It is as though Prendick is the last rational man on Earth, hemmed in on a patch of sand with the "amoral" sea on one side and chaotic forest on the other. Neither the sea nor the island offers any solace. Looking back towards the threatening forest it is as if the Beast People are grotesque

⁹³Wells, "On Extinction" (1893) in *ibid.* In an extract discarded from the final version of *The Time Machine*, the Time Traveller kills a rabbit-like creature, but upon closer examination he finds that it had "five feeble digits", "a projecting forehead and forward-looking eyes" and other human characteristics. The "disagreeable apprehension flash[es] across his mind" that these might be our distant descendants! ("XIII. The Further Vision" [1895] in *ibid.*, p. 97). Man began life as a degenerate, a mudfish fleeing persecution in open water, and ends life as a degenerate, rabbit-like creature.

⁹⁴Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, pp. 46, 81.

⁹⁵There are similarities between the furthest point of the Time Traveller's voyage into the future and Prendick's description of what the sailors of the *Scorpion* discovered on Noble's Island four years after he had left. They found "nothing living thereon except certain curious white moths, some hogs and rabbits, and some rather peculiar rats" (p. 8). In the twilight world of the future the Time Traveller encounters "rabbits or some breed of kangaroo" and "a thing like a huge white butterfly" (*The Time Machine*, p. 292) and a tentacled hopping creature: our most distant descendant. The island mirrors the landscape of devolution: Moreau's acceleration of evolution has resulted in an equally speedy regression towards extinction and an allegorical end of the world.

nuclear fall-out victims - lost souls who can no longer propagate the race. Prendick is in a hopeless situation and the atavism of the Beast Folk forces him into the stance of petty despot: like the artillery man in *The War of the Worlds*, he must fight for his patch of turf and compete for his food. This is not a reversion to the benign hunter-gatherer stage of evolution; it is, rather, the nightmare, "Mad Max" scenario of every man/beast for himself.

As a highly evolved creature, when it comes to manual skills, Prendick is far less accomplished than his ancestors would have been: he is himself a modern, "over-evolved" degenerate. In a sense he has to "regress", returning to the basics of carpentry in order to build a raft, but despite his "litter of scientific knowledge" (p. 182) this modern hero ends up a failed Robinson Crusoe. Where his illustrious antecedent kept persisting until he had made a seaworthy canoe near enough to the water for launching, Prendick gives up after his first abortive attempt to get the raft to the water in one piece. Like Crusoe, he thinks of making pottery in which to store water, but cannot find any clay. The mantles of *Homo economicus* or *Homo domesticus* do not fit comfortably on this *fin de siècle* anti-hero.

When the Dog Man relates the mood of the others, there is perhaps an echo in Victorian society: "We have no Master, no Whips, no House of Pain any more. There is an end" (p. 173). Certainly Wells and his contemporaries felt that there was no longer a Master in Heaven, that the strictures that orthodox religion and autocratic government imposed were gone and Hell, or any sense of metaphysical retribution, had been swept away by Darwin. Thus "there is an end" to many things, but worst of all there is an end to the world - even the Beast Folk have a sense of apocalypse. I have already discussed the evolution of morality as an artificial process: during degeneration instinct wins out over societal injunction and the faculties of conscience and self-consciousness lapse. If acquired characteristics cannot be passed on from one generation to the next, then morality has a tenuous hold over our species and atavism is ever possible. In "Evolution and Ethics" Huxley recognises that the "State of Art" that raises us above the animals will eventually fade: a day will come when "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."⁹⁶

RESCUE

When Prendick arrives back in England he finds himself in a very similar position to Gulliver upon his return from the island of the Houyhnhnms; indeed their island experiences have been very alike. Like Prendick, Gulliver is at first disgusted by the "Beast Folk" of the Houyhnhnm island: the Yahoos. But soon both castaways come to realise the similarities between themselves and the creatures:

My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed, in this abominable animal, a perfect human figure; the face of it indeed was flat and broad, the nose depressed, the lips large, and the mouth wide. . . . The great difficulty that seemed to stick with the two horses, was, to see the rest of my body so very different from that of a Yahoo, for which I was obliged to my clothes, whereof they had no conception.⁹⁷

Just as the Beast Folk show their "humanity" with vestiges of clothing and wrapped cloth, Gulliver has to assert his distance from creatures that take a human form by pretending that his clothes are some kind of evolutionary appendage.

Moreau's transformation of other animals into the human form betrays an arrogant anthropomorphic bias, the assumption that *Homo sapiens* is at the top of the "ladder" of creation. This kind of "speciesism" is satirised by Swift: the etymology of the word Houyhnhnm signifies, in their own language, "the Perfection of Nature".⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Swift's island is more or less Arcadian while Wells' is anti-utopian. The Houyhnhnms' practice a very benign genetic engineering and have no need for, and no conception of law as it was believed that "Nature and Reason were sufficient guides for a reasonable animal".⁹⁹ The situation is reversed on Noble's Island.

The two writers have similar intentions when they isolate their protagonists on remote islands. In both cases they are drawing attention to and satirising elements of contemporary English society: for Swift the butt of his wit is the social and political

⁹⁶Huxley, "Evolution and Ethics: Prolegomena", p. 45.

⁹⁷Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726; London, 1985), p. 276.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 295.

situation of eighteenth-century England; Wells focuses on Victorian attitudes towards Darwinism. Sometimes Prendick makes the analogy between the island and his home explicit. In response to the howling of the puma he says: "I'm damned . . . if this place is not as bad as Gower Street - with its cats" (p. 70). When wandering the island he sometimes happens to "meet the Fox-Bear Woman's vulpine, shifty face, strangely human in its speculative cunning, and even imagine I had met it before in some city by-way" (p. 121).

Gulliver and Prendick are equally affected by their return to civilisation. Their island experiences have granted them an altered perception of mankind and neither of them particularly wants to be returned to society. Gulliver ruminates:

My design was, if possible, to discover some small island uninhabited, yet sufficient by my labour to furnish me with the necessities of life . . . so horrible was the idea I conceived of returning to live in such a solitude as I desired, I could at least enjoy my own thoughts, and reflect with delight on the virtues of those inimitable Houyhnhnms, without any opportunity of degenerating into the vices and corruptions of my own species.¹⁰⁰

The sailors who rescue Prendick, like those who rescue Gulliver, surmise that he is a bit mad:

So I drifted for three days, eating and drinking sparingly, and meditating upon all that had happened to me, nor desiring very greatly to see men again. . . . No doubt my discoverers thought me a madman. It is strange, but I felt no desire to return to mankind. (p. 188)

Having gone through a process of anagnorisis on their islands, the castaways have become far more perceptive (and a little cranky) about the workings of their own societies. Prendick experiences an enhancement of the uncertainty and dread he felt on Noble's Island and senses that he has "caught some of the natural wildness of [his] companions" (p. 189). He has come to see the island as a microcosm of the world and he cannot help but feel that the people around him are actually only passably human, that they are "animal half-wrought into the outward image of human souls, and that they would presently begin to revert, to show first this bestial mark and then that" (p. 189). Similarly Gulliver is so appalled at the bestiality of humans that he keeps his nose stopped with rue or tobacco in order not to have to smell them.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 332.

Prendick finds London so oppressive that he moves to the country. But he cannot handle the gnawing degenerationist fear that "the animal was surging up through them; that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale" (p. 190). He tries to convince himself that the men and women he sees around him are "perfectly reasonable creatures, full of human desires and tender solicitude, emancipated from instinct, and the slaves of no fantastic Law" (p. 190), but, like Gulliver, he cannot quite believe it. The satire here is very biting. Prendick tries to find solace in a church, but finds that the preacher merely gibbers "big thinks" like the Ape Man - in a post-Darwinian world orthodox religion does not have the power to overcome the resurgent beast. He withdraws to a country villa where he surrounds himself with wise books and bright windows and devotes his time to experiments in chemistry and the study of astronomy:

There is, though I do not know how there is or why there is, a sense of infinite peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven. There it must be, I think, in the vast and eternal laws of matter, and not in the daily cares and sins and troubles of men, that whatever is more than animal within us must find its solace and its hope. (pp. 191-2)

Prendick turns to the glittering islands in the sky to fix his hopes for mankind¹⁰¹ while Gulliver looks to an uninhabited island as the ideal space to live out his days in monastic contemplation. Prendick sees the cosmos as unchanging and eternal, governed by laws that are somehow uplifting, inspirational. But the peace and protection he discovers in the sky is surely a false security. Prendick threatens the Beast Folk with a resurrected Moreau in the sky above their heads, while he smugly believes that the sky has been deprived of a god. But there is an equally terrible god up there in the heavens, a cosmic force that Moreau tried to emulate on his laboratory isle: the evolutionary dynamic is at work in the universe as much as it is on earth.¹⁰² While Prendick finds solace in the stars, Gulliver

¹⁰¹ Wells often uses stars as a symbol of aspiration in his novels. In the introduction to *The Fate of Homo Sapiens* (1939) he writes of his thoughts on this matter as a young scientist: "I saw a limitless universe throughout which the stars and nebulae were scattering dust, and I saw life ascending, as it seemed from nothingness towards the stars" (quoted in Reed, *The Natural History of H. G. Wells*, p. 44).

¹⁰² A year after the publication of *Doctor Moreau* Wells would be writing a novel about extra-terrestrials invading the earth from one of the shining hosts of heaven. Recall also that when the Time Traveller is in the world of the Morlocks and the Eloi he looks up to the stars for "friendly comfort", but finds that "all the old constellations had gone from the sky . . . that slow movement which is imperceptible in a hundred human lifetimes, had long since rearranged them in unfamiliar groupings" (*The Time Machine*, p. 267).

retreats to the stable where he feels more at home talking to his horses: both men have been unhinged by their island experiences and have felt compelled to retreat into themselves; both are being poked fun at by their creators.

Wells' criticism of science extends not only to Moreau and Montgomery (who failed to restrain the doctor), but also to Prendick. Instead of exposing and challenging unrestrained science (the consequences of which he had witnessed first hand) he flees from the city and from society and resorts to the "pure" sciences - astronomy and chemistry - that will have little or nothing to do with human biology; he has shirked his social responsibility.

* * *

Mankind unmasked is still a beast. Wells returns to this idea sporadically throughout his career and as late as *The Croquet Player* (1936) he explores the rising animal nature in *Homo sapiens*.¹⁰³ He compares our condition to that of the Beast Folk and shows that our lives are also governed, all be it to a lesser extent, by instinct, fear, superstition, a relative and utilitarian morality - in short our lives, viewed by some future time traveller, would be considered "poore, nasty, brutish and short". He understands that it takes an effort of will, of restraint, a concentration of our intellect and a sound education to hold back the weight of our biological conditioning.¹⁰⁴ In "The So-Called Science of Sociology" (1905) he writes:

The history of civilization is really the history of the appearance and reappearance, the tentatives and hesitations and alterations, the manifestations and reflections in this mind and that, of a very complex, elusive idea, the Social idea . . . struggling to exist in a world of egotisms, animalisms, and brute matter.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³There is a brooding atmosphere of primordial evil that suffuses the tale. Instinct, irrational elements, fear and confusion gain the upper hand in Cainsmarsh and it is suggested that the Neanderthal origins of the inhabitant's are resurfacing into their consciousness and sweeping away the thin layer of civilisation.

¹⁰⁴Nordau puts it more strongly in *Degeneration*:

Constant self-restraint is a necessity of existence as much for the strongest as for the weakest. It is the activity of the highest human cerebral centres. If these are not exercised they waste away, i.e., man ceases to be man, the pretended "over-man" becomes sub-human - in other words, a beast. By the relaxation or breaking up of the mechanism of inhibition in the brain the organism sinks into irrevocable anarchy. (p. 431)

¹⁰⁵Wells, "The So-Called Science of Sociology", *Independent Review* 6 (May 1905), p. 34.

Human beings are the only animals who seem to be able to mould their destiny, to reason and organise, and despite the setbacks and possibility of regression, Wells constantly reminds us that it is our intellect alone that raises us above the bestial. It is our only weapon against the beast within.

3 VICTORY

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

This chapter will consider the case of an "over-evolved" island isolate, a refined gentleman who represents the empty propriety, the spiritual and ideological bankruptcy of pre-war England, a man who is visited, and ultimately destroyed, by agents of the real world and by a biological inheritance that catches up with him. Having been a sailor and ship's captain in his early career, Joseph Conrad developed a fascination for islands and used them as the setting for a number of his tales. Like so many writers, Conrad was drawn to the enclosed island space: the encircling horizon that limits and contains, the sense of isolation, the importance of the celestial spheres in determining one's location (temporally, geographically and metaphysically), a place where biological time appears irrelevant next to the island's geological time scheme, and where species and ways of life can develop outside the main current of existence.¹

In early works such as *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) he began to experiment with the range of possibilities that these isolated locations presented. *Lord Jim* (1900), in which an ostracised European seeks to live according to his dreams on Patusan Island, until intruders arrive to shatter his paradise, is Conrad's island masterpiece (however only half the novel takes place on the isle). *Victory* (1915) is thematically similar to *Lord Jim* and although it does not rate with his best novels (the prose is sometimes embarrassingly bad and all but one of the characters two-

¹Most of Conrad's island settings are to be found adjacent to the Malay Archipelago or in Indonesia, an area of the world where, in Darwinian terms, one could still find vestiges of "old mankind". The "missing link", a speechless ape-man, was thought to have been discovered on Java in 1894. And perhaps it is fitting that so many of Conrad's European outcasts should drift amongst these islands and wash up on these shores where the presence of an earlier, less evolved, mankind was so palpable (cannibalism was still practised in New Guinea at the time). The evolutionary ideas of Wallace (*The Malay Archipelago*) and Darwin (*The Voyage of the Beagle*) originated from their observations during long voyages, and their most important breakthroughs came as a result of their examination of species on remote islands. Conrad was fascinated by these writings and incorporated and criticised many of their theories in his novels in a way that shows his keen perception of the nuances and implications of their ideas. Indeed, Richard Curle remarks that Wallace's *Malay Archipelago* was Conrad's favourite bedside book, although he did not agree with Wallace's more optimistic view of evolution. (Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Eastern World* [1966; Cambridge, 1971], p. 142). When he came to write *Victory* many years had elapsed since the novelist had visited the archipelago and Wallace's book provided him with many details regarding the islands and the islanders that would have proved invaluable.

dimensional²) it does represent his most mature, sustained examination of the enisled state and offers some the most evocative island descriptions.³ The "evolutionary" subtext of *Lord Jim* has been comprehensively dealt with by Redmond O' Hanlon, whereas *Victory* explores a number of hitherto unnoticed Darwinian (at times Lamarckian) and Darwin-related themes, and it is on this novel that I wish to focus.⁴

Victory is a complex novel that operates on a number of different levels, but it is on the level of evolutionary allegory that I would like to examine the tale. Conrad's is a bleak and pessimistic view of evolution. In a much quoted letter to Cunninghame Graham he writes:

There is a - let us say - a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold! - it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. I feel it ought to embroider . . . it's only a question of the right kind of oil. . . . Alas no. You cannot by any special lubrication make embroidery with a knitting machine. And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself; made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident - and it has happened. You can't interfere with it.⁵

Where Darwin is reluctant to get drawn into a discussion of the ethics of his evolutionary theory, Conrad was certainly under no illusions as to the "withering" implications. The sentiments of this letter are clearly similar to those of his equally agnostic protagonist who resolves to efface himself, to remain "invulnerable because elusive" (p. 90), and to have as little to do with the machinery of existence as possible.

In his "Note to the First Edition" Conrad hints at the evolutionary ideas that suffuse *Victory*. When speaking of war he talks of the "pagan residuum of awe and wonder which lurks still at the bottom of our old humanity".⁶ Similarly the opening paragraph of the

²H. M. Daleski, in an article entitled "*Victory* and Patterns of Self-Division", takes a particular dislike to the novel: "The main action is melodramatic rather than epiphanic, the narrative method is arbitrarily inconsistent rather than intricately functional, the language is frequently flat or rhetorical, and the characterization of most of the figures surrounding Heyst hovers between the crudity of caricature and the bluntness of allegory" (in Ross C. Murfin [ed.] *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties* [Alabama, 1985], p. 107).

³It is interesting to note that one of Conrad's working titles for the novel was *Island Story* (Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives: A Biography* [London, 1979], p. 747).

⁴Redmond O' Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin: The Influence of Scientific Thought on Conrad's Fiction* (Edinburgh, 1984).

⁵Conrad, *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunninghame Graham*, edited by Cedric T. Watts (London, 1969), p. 56; letter dated 20 December 1897.

⁶Conrad, *Victory: An Island Tale*, edited by John Batchelor with an introduction by Tony Tanner (1915; Oxford, 1986), p. xxxi.

novel compares the close chemical relation between coal and diamonds (they are both carbon based). This description draws attention to the geological clock (given enough time, coal can turn to diamonds): the whole history of the island is being alluded to. From an evolutionary perspective, carbon is the most protean of all elements and can, appropriately, be considered the stuff of life.⁷ The narrator goes on to say, "At the same time, there is a fascination in coal, the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped" (p. 3). Here the contemporary age of progress is linked to a distant geological past and looks more tenuous, more precarious. The "permanence" of geological time and the "immovability" of the laws of physics dwarf even the laws of biological evolution to which all island inhabitants are subject.

Progress is by no means a certainty in this "Age of Evolution" and chance or luck - central tenets in the theory of evolution - are loaded "evolutionary" concepts for Conrad (the evil trio are gamblers, amoral capitalism is a game of luck, Heyst names himself an agent of luck in his rescue of Morrison and Lena, and the villains reach Samburan by chance). Life, like evolution, is one long card game and Heyst, who removes himself to the apparent safety of an island, is dealt a particularly bad hand "in the lamentable or despicable game of life" (p. 203).

Heyst's retreat to an island is appropriate in Darwinian terms. In *The Descent of Man* Darwin points out that man diverged from the Old World division of the Simiadae, closely related to the Lemurs who became extinct in most parts of the globe. "Most of the remnants survive on islands, such as Madagascar and the Malayan archipelago, where they have not been exposed to so severe a competition as they would have been on well-stocked continents."⁸ Darwin also observes that on a small island, "the race for life is less severe, and there will have been less modification and less extermination."⁹ It is to an idyllic setting such as this that Heyst, after years of drifting, escapes from the real world and eludes, or so he imagines, the struggle for life.

⁷Henry J. Laskowsky, "Esse Est Percipi: Epistemological and Narrative Method in *Victory*", *Conradiana* 9, 3 (1977), p. 276.

⁸Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 157.

⁹Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, p. 151.

Wallace makes an analogy between the spread of animals, the spread of vegetation and the distribution of humans. When analysing the success of European civilisation, Darwin draws attention to the disadvantage of "nomadic habits" and stresses the advantages of a temperate climate. He writes: "It is notorious that each species is adapted to the climate of its home: species from an arctic or even from a temperate region cannot endure a tropical climate, or conversely."¹⁰ During his fifteen years of travelling in the East our protagonist has disregarded both these guidelines. Heyst admits to Lena that he too is not a "tropical bird" from these parts (he thinks of her as a sea-bird of high latitudes) and goes on to say:

I am a transplanted being. Transplanted! I ought to call myself uprooted - an unnatural state of existence; but a man is supposed to stand anything. (p. 217)

Nancy Stepan notes that in the late nineteenth century it was argued that "races", like animal species, tended to be confined to definite parts of the earth.¹¹ A "race's" ties to its geographical, national and social place were seen as aboriginal and functional, and movement away from this location was thought to result in "degeneration". When the white "race" moved out of its "proper" place (Europe) it underwent a process of biological degeneration: it became "tropicalised". From a Darwinian perspective Heyst's fastidiousness and extreme cerebration are debilitating, a form of degeneration. He is not a useful member of society and, as with some species of tropical island birds that lose their flight capability through disuse, metaphorically Heyst loses his instinct for survival and his ability to act. He is a male member of his species that has uncharacteristically lost his "weapons" of survival.

This chapter, then, will examine the impact of various branches of evolutionary thought on *Victory*. I will consider the pessimistic intellectual, philosophical and metaphysical forces, influenced by Darwinian thought, that affect Conrad and his protagonist. First I will show how the *fin de siècle* mood, in conjunction with the popular contemporary philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (perceived in the light of

¹⁰Ibid., p. 180.

¹¹Nancy Stepan, "Biology and Degeneration: Races and Proper Places" in J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (eds.) *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York, 1985), p. 99.

Victorian science¹²) colour the cerebral landscape of *Victory*. Radical doubt concerning the Christian religion, or any metaphysical system, also impacts upon this post-Darwinian, anti-theological novel.

The main thrust of this chapter concerns the issues of degeneration and devolution (dealt with in "Degeneration", "Degenerate Anti-Masque" and "Sex and Sexual Degeneracy") and in this respect I will examine contemporary fears concerning cannibalism, thermodynamics, atavism and the anarchy resulting from a corrosion within society (a collapse of class hierarchies and the growth of unrestrained capitalism) or without (an invasion by "foreign" desperadoes). I will show further how the issue of sexuality (with relation to such issues as miscegenation, heredity and perversion) bears directly upon the idea of degeneracy.

Finally the chapter will consider the case of the imperial subject, the other "races" represented on Samburan. Here I am particularly interested in the anthropological application of Darwinism: far from being degenerate or inferior, Conrad depicts the racial other as having the advantage. Where the rootless Europeans of an over-extended empire are shown to be degenerate, a Chinaman is presented as being better evolved, while the "primitives" are shrewd enough to retreat and isolate themselves from the negative influence of the white settlers. Both "races" are shown to be better in touch with their environment and with their instincts than the Europeans and thus "fitter" to survive in nature's selection process.

¹²Apart from the impact of evolutionary biology, Conrad's exposure to contemporary theories of physics also left him with a deep sense of pessimism concerning human existence. In two letters to Edward Garnett he writes of his response to the new science of radiology:

The secret of the universe is in the existence of horizontal waves whose varied vibrations are at the bottom of all states of consciousness. . . . There is no space, time, matter, mind as vulgarly understood, there is only the eternal something that waves and an eternal force that causes the waves - it's not much. (*Letters from Conrad, 1895-1924* [London, 1928], pp. 136-7; letter dated 29 September 1898)

Conrad further remarks to Garnett that he is "like a man who has lost his gods . . . [whose] efforts seem unrelated to anything in heaven and everything under heaven is impalpable to the touch like shapes of mist" (*ibid.*, p. 152; letter dated 16 September 1899).

HEYST'S PHILOSOPHICAL MAKE-UP

Axël

As early as the eighteen nineties, Conrad had been drawn to the phenomenon often called the *mal du siècle* or the "paralysis of will" - a phenomenon that was eagerly adopted and adapted by many Symbolists and decadents. It manifested itself in different ways, ranging from a loss of the will to live, to the disdain for ordinary, bourgeois life. It prided as a goal the perfect will-lessness of art or of life lived as art.¹³ Artists took their cue from Schopenhauer's philosophy which preached a refinement of life and pointed out the futility of action in a world of middle-class aspirations.¹⁴

In Conrad's early Malayan novels, characters such as Almayer and Willems show distinct tendencies towards this kind of will-lessness which is clearly inspired by French writers such as Flaubert and Villiers de L'Isle Adam. Villiers' famous Symbolist and Schopenhauerian play, *Axël* (1890), was an important influence on the heroes of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, novels in which Conrad explores the predicament of an isolated "existential" protagonist who experiences a failure of will. Both men create a dream of identity requiring no power of will to sustain it, one that is based on their supposed racial superiority over native islanders.¹⁵

Victory is a much more carefully considered study of a Symbolist/Schopenhauerian search for a kind of island nirvana. In her biography, Jocelyn Baines is fairly certain that at the time of writing, Conrad had recently re-read Villiers' drama and decided to use it as a loose framework for his novel¹⁶: Axël Auërsperg leads a lonely existence in his castle in the Black Forest while Axel Heyst removes himself to a remote island; both Axels display a Schopenhauerian fear of the insatiable will, both are noblemen and are thought to be concealing buried treasure; on the one hand a Rosicrucian mentor, and on the other hand a Schopenhauerian father, preach a renunciation of life and of the world of

¹³Bruce Johnson, *Conrad's Models of Mind* (Minneapolis, 1971), p. 9.

¹⁴The influence of Schopenhauer can be traced from the beginning of Conrad's literary career. John Galsworthy was to say of the novelist: "Of philosophy he had read a good deal, but on the whole spoke little. Schopenhauer used to give him satisfaction twenty years and more ago" (*Castles in Spain* [New York, 1927], p. 121).

¹⁵Johnson, *Conrad's Models of Mind*, p. 15.

¹⁶Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* (1960; Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 479.

"becoming"; both their realms are invaded by a villainous agent/s from the outside world and in each case a woman tries to break into their cerebral solitude (Sara flees the death-in-life of a nunnery while Lena escapes the ladies orchestra to which she is attached).

Villiers' Axël rejects a world that can never live up to his ideal conception of it: why live in a sphere where the reality, the realm of will, can never match the dream? He closes himself off in a private world of his own imagination, but as Edmund Wilson points out, there is a price to be paid: the "man of imagination who, while remaining in the modern world, declines to participate in its activities and tries to keep his mind off its plight, is usually to succumb to some monstrosity or absurdity."¹⁷ For Auërsperg this "monstrosity or absurdity" is a suicide pact in lieu of the sexual consummation of his love for Sara.¹⁸ (Axël's act is the termination of a line, the capturing and entombing of a virgin moment before the ravages of degeneration set in.) For Heyst it is (selective) over-refinement of his sensibilities that leaves him helpless before real threats and emotions and leads ultimately to his suicide. In both couples there is a renunciation of the outside world, the world of progress, industry, science and biology. Indeed, in a sense the Symbolism of de L'Isle Adam fights a romantic rear-guard action against the dehumanisation and despiritualisation of the society of the Age of Evolution. Axël denies the material and seeks to become "a purified spirit, a distinct essence within the Absolute Spirit".¹⁹ His is an alchemical quest for the philosopher's stone of which the buried treasure is only a crude physical manifestation. In the same way the mythical treasure on Samburan is Conrad's objective correlative for the invulnerability, or nirvana, that Heyst seeks to attain.

¹⁷Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York, 1931), p. 289.

¹⁸I quote from Axël's celebrated speech in which he sums up the essence of his position:

As for living? our servants will do that for us. Satiated for all eternity, let us rise from the table, and in all justice let us leave to ordinary mortals whose ill-fated nature can measure the value of realities only by sensation, the task of picking up the banquet crumbs. - I thought too much to stoop to act! (Villiers de L'Isle Adam, *Axël*, [1890; London, 1986], p. 170)

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 129.

Schopenhauer

Conrad was drawn to Arthur Schopenhauer who appealed to the pessimistic side of his character,²⁰ and in *Victory* he borrows, tests and ultimately finds his philosophy of being wanting. In the novel Conrad seeks to explore the psychological effects of a pursuit of a more or less Schopenhauerian way of life rather than to elucidate the details of his philosophy (which he keeps fairly vague). Heyst's father is a philosopher of the ascetic, Schopenhauerian mould and the old man's portrait hangs in his son's house on Samburan, casting a shadow over his island existence. The personality of the father, the course of his career and the old man's disengagement closely resemble those of the famous philosopher: Heyst and his father offer a number of pessimistic aphorisms that recall those of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* (1818). Like Conrad, Heyst's mother died when he was young and the boy grew up under the cold, negative and rational light of his father's "affection". Heyst's last words in the novel throw light on the tragedy of his upbringing as well as the ultimate pitfall of his father's philosophy: "Woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love - and to put its trust in life!" (p. 410). The word "learned" implies that these attitudes are acquired characteristics; characteristics that are neither natural nor spontaneous.

Schopenhauer was the most fashionable *fin de siècle* philosopher and his theories appealed to artists who were disillusioned with the pace and direction of "progress". He identified the "will" as a threatening force; it is the urge or "instinct" to go on living and to produce new life. This procreative aspect of will which leads us towards bringing beings into existence, is but a new occasion for suffering and death. We are all primarily "ego" striving to gain an advantage over others and are doomed to be driven by unseen forces within us and become victims of a greedy, self-devouring world. We are subjects

²⁰In a letter to Cunninghame Graham Conrad expresses his (*fin de siècle*) belief in the tragic condition of humankind:

To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of this earth is very well but soon as you know of your slavery, the pain, the anger, the strife - the tragedy begins. We can't return to nature, since we can't change our place in it. Our refuge is in stupidity, in drunkenness of all kinds, in lies, in beliefs, in murder, in thieving, reforming - in negation, in contempt - each man according to the promptings of his particular devil. There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror is always but a vain and fleeting appearance. (*Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunninghame Graham*, edited by C. T. Watts, pp. 70-71; letter dated 31 January 1898)

of will, part of a continuum of other life forms and in this Schopenhauer is not far from a proto-evolutionary theory. Thus life is ultimately unworthy of the dream, the "idea". The solution is to refuse to enter the contest, to deny the individual will: chastity, asceticism, elusiveness, and a retreat to an island are Heyst's attempts to reach a state of "nirvana". Since the will is in itself aimless (the gratification of desire being a spurious delaying of the inevitable action of will), we can only know "happiness" through a metaphysical renunciation of it, a suppression of the ego, of selfishness and of self-consciousness. In effect we must deny our biology. Schopenhauer proposes that we reject the mundane and retreat into a dream or "art" world, foregoing earthly cares and earthly pleasures. Through ascetic discipline one can lose one's identity temporarily, by an immersion in the realm of art, or permanently, in what he calls the "transcendence of Maya" (the penetration of "appearance"). The subject must become a mirror of the world: the will-less ego loses consciousness of his individuality and becomes a disinterested percipient, merging entirely with that which is contemplated.²¹ This idea was taken up enthusiastically by French writers of the second half of the nineteenth century and I will interpret Heyst's cerebration and his reticence regarding Lena in the light of these effete ideas.

The tenor of the altruism/egotism duality as it arises in Conrad is clearly derived from Schopenhauer. On the one hand there is the will (basically Conrad's "ego"), an irrational life force that occurs in all living creatures - one could almost call it an evolutionary will to survive (although the philosopher's writings appeared before the publication of *The Origin of Species*). On the other hand there is self-abnegation and altruism: knowing that the suffering of others is, metaphysically, one's own suffering, leads one to try to alleviate it. Altruism is one of the anomalies of evolution as it involves an apparently irrational sacrifice of the will to life for the sake of an other. Compassion for one's fellow man is thus a means of mitigating the impact of the ego. Conrad sees the need for a balance between the two forces. Sympathetic identification, or altruism, is a theme that re-emerges in much of Conrad's fiction. In *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, he explores the relations between egotism and altruism as they pivot on the crew's reaction to James

²¹Christopher Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford, 1989), p. 9.

Wait, showing the corrosive effect on the crew's morale due to their collective sympathy for Wait. (In social Darwinian terms a society that indulges in altruism makes itself vulnerable to decadence and possibly even degeneration.²²)

Like T. H. Huxley, Schopenhauer (and Conrad) was trying to understand morality without recourse to the supernatural or to a god. He based his theory of morality on human behaviour, on the principle of sympathy and compassion as a tempering force for the rampant ego - in effect, a proto-evolutionary argument. As we will see later in this chapter the ending of *Victory* proposes a somewhat contradictory view: Conrad believes that the will can also be a positive force. Unbridled selflessness was, for Conrad, as dangerous as an unrestrained ego. He experiments with, but ultimately rejects, detachment and a total denial of will.²³ Conrad realises that, carried to its ultimate conclusion, selflessness leads to the taking of one's own life. Although Schopenhauer does not endorse suicide, his philosophy can easily be interpreted this way - certainly the French Symbolists were seduced by the idea of a final renunciation. "Ultimately the only real good is extinction: the realization that the perceived universe - the 'world as idea' - is as nothing, the conscious acceptance of the need for annihilation as the only true cure for the sickness of life, and finally the acceptance of annihilation itself."²⁴

Heyst removes himself from the "world-as-will" and takes up residence in a space where he can be part of the "world-as-idea". Conrad had a great deal of sympathy for his creation and it could be argued that on one level the novel is a vindication of Heyst's father's injunction to remain aloof from the world; altruism certainly involves one in the "mud" of existence, with possible dire results. However this is not Conrad's intention: he knows the dangers involved in "profound reflection", a habit he calls "the most pernicious

²²Nietzsche influenced the egotism/altruism debate and challenged the emphasis placed on altruism and sympathy in human evolution. In his preface to *A Genealogy of Morals*, Alexander Tille states that the English study of ethics rests upon "the enunciation of unselfishness as something morally better than egotism; of the welfare of the neighbour" (Tille's preface to Nietzsche, *A Genealogy of Morals, Poems* [London, 1899], p. xi). Nietzsche was an advocate of a true aristocracy, an ultimate egotism, as opposed to the "democratic", slave-morality of altruism.

²³Decoud (*Nostromo*) and Razumov (*Under Western Eyes*) are obvious other examples of introverted "existential" heroes in the Heyst mould, while Falk ("Falk") and Kurtz (*Heart of Darkness*) epitomise aspects of the egotistical will to survive.

²⁴R. J. Hollingdale in his introduction to Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms* (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 23.

of all habits formed by civilized man" ("Author's Note", p. xxxv). Heyst's cerebration and over-refinement are all very well for an island isolato (he is, of course, a flawed Schopenhauerian isolato: his unnecessary visit to Sourabaya is proof of his "weakness"), but when he needs to act in order to save himself and Lena, his scepticism leaves him entirely paralysed. Thus a lack of will can bring as much suffering as the act of willing.

Conrad was well aware of the uncertainty of earthly appearances and was himself sometimes infected by the world-as-idea. As he writes to Cunninghame Graham:

Even writing to a friend - a person one has heard, touched, drunk with, quarrelled with - does not give me a sense of reality. All is illusion - the words written, the mind at which they are aimed, the truth they are intended to express, the hands that will hold the paper, the eyes that will glance at the lines. Every image floats vaguely in a sea of doubt - and the doubt itself is lost in an unexplored universe of incertitudes.²⁵

Heyst also experiences the world as a projection of the "idea", as a dream. Schopenhauer writes in *The World as Will and Idea* :

Such a man who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature, has finally conquered entirely, continues to exist only as a pure, knowing being, the undimmed mirror of the world. Nothing can trouble him more, nothing can move him, for he has cut all the thousand cords of will which hold us bound to the world, and, as desire, fear, envy, anger, drag us hither and thither in constant pain, he now looks back smiling and at rest on the delusions of this world. . . . Life and its forms now pass before him as a fleeting illusion, as a light morning dream before half-waking eyes, the real world already shining through it so that it can no longer deceive; and like this morning dream, they finally vanish altogether without any violent transition.²⁶

Conrad shows the impracticability of such a pose by presenting his protagonist's consciousness in similar terms. "Enchanted Heyst" is described as one of the "dreamers, to whom it is given sometimes to hear the music of the spheres" (p. 66). He believes that he is "on a Shadow inhabited by Shades" (p. 350). This dream-like quality is further enhanced by reference to Jones as a spectre and by the narrator's descriptions of the mysterious island. When Lena is out of Heyst's sight she feels that if he "were to stop thinking of [her she] shouldn't be in the world at all!" (p. 187). Indeed she *is*, on one level, a figment of Heyst's unconscious mind: she is the libidinal trap his mind sets to lure the "super-ego", the realm of idea, away from its ascetic course. Similarly the trio is a

²⁵Conrad, *Letters from Conrad 1895 to 1924*, edited by Edward Garnett (London, 1928), p. 153; letter dated 16 September 1899.

²⁶Quoted in Tony Tanner, "Joseph Conrad and the last gentleman", *Critical Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1986), p. 127.

lure set to draw Heyst back into the world-as-will (see below). The denial of the will that Schopenhauer espoused leads to a debilitating detachment, the lack of any feeling of justification for existence. Like so many of their contemporaries, Conrad and Heyst felt this particular strain of *mal du siècle* most acutely; however we shall see that in *Victory* Conrad's final judgement on the philosophy is that it is an unjustifiable, life-denying pose.

Nietzsche

Erdinast-Vulcan finds Conrad to be a *homo duplex* who

has predicated the best of his work on a purging of his own temperament, a rejection of the Nietzschean outlook. He could neither accept its celebration of ethical and epistemological relativism, nor endorse its view of the role of art as the supreme lie. His moral heritage . . . impelled him into a heroic (and foredoomed) struggle with the modern temper.²⁷

In *Victory*, as in so many other Conrad novels, the protagonist is removed to an exotic setting and the plot appears to be following a romantic course - a modern evocation of the popular island myth. But the flaw to this modern allegory is precisely its modernity - a fact that undermines the mythical element. And I will suggest that the threatening modern temper that invades the island, brought by the trio, is what we might term a "Nietzschean morality". Nietzsche's scepticism undermined spiritual certainties (far more radically than even Schopenhauer, who had retreated into his own brand of metaphysics) and presented a post-Darwinian theory of ethics that profoundly shocked the late Victorian and Edwardian public.

Although Conrad shares Nietzsche's *Weltanschauung* in many respects (agnosticism, a kind of universal pessimism, scepticism) he also challenges the philosopher and tries to chart a course in the wasteland of the modern temper. He fights against Nietzsche's "transvaluation of values" and against his own nihilism; for instance he invests characters with a moral code (the adherence to duty, to simple truths and a fixed standard of conduct, of a Captain MacWhirr or a Marlow), but the "affirmations" fail to stem a tide

²⁷Daphne Erdinast-Vulcan, *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper* (Oxford, 1991), p. 4. Erdinast-Vulcan makes a strong case for Conrad's familiarity with popular conceptions of Nietzsche's philosophy and casts him as a man very much of the post-Nietzschean age, afflicted by the implications of epistemological and ethical relativism (ibid., pp. 1-21).

that breaks through repeatedly (even in his later phase, the supposedly "positive" period of his fiction).

The world of both Heysts, like that of Nietzsche, is devoid of a spiritual realm as well as of a fixed moral code. The elder Heyst "claimed for mankind that right to absolute moral and intellectual liberty of which he no longer believed them worthy" (p. 91).²⁸ He writes: "The so-called wickedness must be, like the so-called virtue, its own reward - to be anything at all" (p. 219). The younger "colonist" refuses to impose his ethical will (unlike Crusoe and Prospero) on his island; thereby creating a vacuum in which Nietzsche's ethical relativism can flourish like some prolific exotic import. The trio represent a retribution for Heyst's lack of moral will: they are the logical conclusion of the philosophy of Heyst Sr., of the "mad individualism of Niet[z]sche".²⁹ As we saw in the chapter on Wells, a "transvaluation of values" quickly ushers in a crude "evolutionary morality" of survival of the fittest. Heyst's inability to attempt to kill the trio is by no means a moral decision: on the contrary it is a symptom of the amoral condition he has forged. The father had created an ethical vacuum in the mind of the son, a vacuum that allows in the three amoral chimeras who represent a Nietzschean will to power: said in another way, Samburan is an island of Being invaded by agents of the process of Becoming. Where Schopenhauer advocates withdrawal, Nietzsche calls on us to obey our

²⁸Some aspects of the philosophy espoused by Heyst Sr. are also reminiscent of Nietzsche. I do not mean to suggest that this in any way contradicts the influence of Schopenhauer; I am rather contending that Conrad's knowledge of Nietzsche colours his depiction of the more or less Schopenhauerian philosopher. The elder Heyst is described as "the destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs" (p. 175) who "had spent his life in blowing blasts upon a terrible trumpet which had filled heaven and earth with ruins, while mankind went on its way unheeding" (p. 175). He was a man who had "plunged headlong" into "the universal nothingness" (p. 219). This aspect of his father's philosophy sounds more like the fire and brimstone of Nietzsche than the asceticism of Schopenhauer. Indeed the title of Heyst Sr.'s book, *Storm and Dust* recalls a title such as *Will to Power* and the volume is described as being a "broken text of reflections, maxims, short phrases, enigmatical sometimes and sometimes eloquent" (p. 219) - recalling the style of Nietzsche as much as that of Schopenhauer. Compare the philosophy of Heyst Sr. (who equates pity with contempt):

Clairvoyance or no clairvoyance, men love their captivity. To the unknown force of negation they prefer the miserably tumbled bed of their servitude. Man alone can give one the disgust of pity; yet I find it easier to believe in the misfortune of mankind than in its wickedness (p. 220)

with this passage from volume 1 of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

What is the greatest experience you can have? It is the hour of the greatest contempt. The hour in which your happiness, too, arouses your disgust, and even your reason and your virtue. (Quoted in Tanner's explanatory notes to *Victory*, p. 420)

Like Heyst Sr., Nietzsche also poured scorn on the "ethics of pity" (see footnote 30). John Batchelor notes that on one level these references to Nietzsche also "operate as an ironic commentary on the novel's dramatic content, since such themes in Nietzsche's work as self-assertion, will to power and hero-worship, are systematically negated by Heyst and his father" (*The Life of Joseph Conrad* [Oxford, 1994], p. 232).

²⁹Conrad, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters* 2, edited by G. Jean-Aubrey (London, 1927), p. 188; letter dated 22 July 1899.

will, our inward striving, and to *act*. (Nietzsche felt that Schopenhauer's idea of a stoic withdrawal from life was a cowardly retreat from the logical conclusion to his theory of will and attacked his decadence and asceticism.³⁰) This existential injunction is the Nietzschean challenge that the trio present the will-less, Schopenhauerian Axel.³¹

Christian Isle?

Closely related to the idea of Heyst's philosophical make-up is his metaphysical outlook. I have already considered the extreme secularising influence of Darwinian thought on nineteenth-century orthodox Christianity. Conrad was heir to this relativistic, sceptical way of thinking and concomitant moral disorientation, and the main protagonists of most of his novels are agnostic or nihilistic. Operating in an ethical and religious vacuum they must try to formulate their own code of behaviour and find some "metaphysical" dimension to their lives. Certainly Heyst has no time for religion; but then why is it that this novel is so loaded with biblical allusions? The manuscript makes it clear that Conrad had intended *Victory* partly as a meditation on Christian love, hope and virtue, a study of deviant religious experience, but that the novelist sensed that he lacked the convictions that the theme required.³² Why, then, are the religious allusions retained? In this section I will ascertain to what extent the novel can be viewed as a conventional and referential biblical allegory.

³⁰In *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche writes of Schopenhauer and the origin of ethics:

The value of the non-egotistical instincts, the instincts of compassion, self-denial, and self-sacrifice, which Schopenhauer above all others had consistently gilded, glorified, "transcendentalized" until he came to see them as *absolute* values allowing him to deny life and even himself. Yet it was these very same instincts which aroused my suspicion, and that suspicion deepened as time went on. It was here, precisely, that I sensed the greatest danger for humanity, its sublimest delusion and temptation - leading it whither? into nothingness? . . . I began to understand that the constantly spreading ethics of pity, which had tainted and debilitated even the philosophers, was the most sinister symptom of our sinister European civilization - a detour to a new Buddhism? to a European species of Buddhism? to nihilism? (in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, [pp. 153-4])

³¹A related point would be Nietzsche's development of Schopenhauer's dichotomy of the world-as-will and the world-as-idea into his own formulation of the Dionysian (Dionysis being the god of chaos and fruitfulness) and the Apollonian (Apollo is the god of ordered form and of the dream seen as the silent re-casting of life). If we take Heyst to represent the Apollonian (indeed he lives life somewhat as a dream of his own ordering) then the trio become the chaotic Dionysian element ushering tragedy onto the island stage.

³²Dwight H. Purdy, "The Manuscript of *Victory* and the Problem of Conrad's Intentions", *Journal of Modern Literature* 10, 1 (1983), p. 91.

Certainly there are seemingly overt religious allusions, but these are often confused by contending voices. Heyst is reluctantly drawn into the Providential role of rescuing the pious Morrison and Sunday-school educated Lena, both of whom see him as a sort of guardian angel; in fact Ricardo ironically calls Heyst "an angel from heaven" (p. 238). But Heyst is disturbed by his role: "That I should have been there to step into the situation of an agent of Providence. *I*, a man of universal scorn and unbelief" (p. 199). Heyst, whose name rhymes with Christ, is also associated with the Christian saviour; however this modern and ironic Christ (it is Magdalen who ultimately "saves" him) does not fit the archetype. Heyst's "fall" is similarly complicated: given his own cosmology he has sinned against a father who commands that "he who forms a tie is lost" (pp. 199-200); like Crusoe his roving spirit (recall that Darwin notes that most animals keep to their own homes and do not needlessly wander about) and Schopenhauerian will-lessness can, in evolutionary terms, be considered a kind of "original sin". Thus he sins against his father, against Darwin, and also against Lena's God - in her eyes their "living in sin" on the island is wrong: having tasted the apple of sexual fulfilment the couple will be cast out of Eden, a simplistic biblical interpretation might hold.

Of the contending allegorical voices, it is the evolutionary that offers the most cogent and sustained alternative to the biblical. Heyst realises the similarities between himself and the "original Adam" (p. 173) on Edenic Samburan. He is forced to admit that his own biological conditioning still has a hold on him:

He reflected, too, with the sense of making a discovery, that this primal ancestor is not easily suppressed. . . . There was in the son a lot of the first ancestor who, as soon as he could uplift his muddy frame from the celestial mould, started inspecting and naming the animals of that paradise which he was so soon to lose. (pp. 173-4)

Here we have an interesting conflation of biblical and evolutionary language to connote the ascent of man: biblical fall initiates Darwinian ascent. Similarly the trio are devilish "envoys of the outer world" (p. 329) and Jones is frequently associated with death and with Satan "coming and going up and down the earth" (pp. 317-18); he says of himself: "I am he who is -" (p. 317).³³ But Jones is also an agent of evolution (see "Degenerate Anti-

³³In his "Explanatory Notes" to *Victory*, Tanner compares Jones' remark to that of the Antichrist in *John* 8, 28: "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (p. 423).

Masque" below) while Neanderthal-like Pedro is referred to as a serpent in paradise, a metaphor which also threatens a fall down the evolutionary "ladder".³⁴

Thus Conrad employs the convention of a religious allegory, but uses it ironically and frequently subverts it with a corrosive evolutionary allegory: the island is a paradise turned coal mine (suggestive of the fires of Hell). The biblical allusions prove to be hollow, out of place and "Eurocentric" in the stark, "evolutionary" landscape of Samburan. Our protagonist can find no solace in the shade of orthodox religion: he is unable to take on the mantle of a biblical Adam or Christ. Towards the end of the novel when Jones describes himself as "a sort of fate" (p. 379) we get the distinct impression that he represents the lottery of evolutionary fate/morality rather than Christian Providence. From a religious perspective Heyst "dates too late" and regrets that he has "no Heaven to recommend this fair, palpitating handful of ashes and dust" (p. 354). Furthermore, John Lester suggests that Conrad's use of a religious lexis often indicates the spiritual nature of society's malaise.³⁵ Indeed the Darwinian and Nietzschean revolutions had left a spiritual vacuum, one Heyst fills with his father's life-denying philosophy (biblical allusions highlight the "religious" nature of Heyst's renunciation of the world, for example when his father's furniture arrives on Samburan, Heyst "felt like a remorseful apostate before these relics" [p. 177]). The secular use of religious terminology exposes the secular nature of modern, post-Darwinian man's (often misguided and immoderate) "devotions".

DEGENERATION

Introduction

Where the mid-Victorians had been primarily concerned with the impact of Darwin on theology; the late-Victorians and Edwardians were particularly worried about the possibility of degeneration and of a regression back down the evolutionary "ladder". On one level we can view the situation on Samburan as a microcosm of Western, particularly

³⁴The emphasis on evil and the Satanic (Schomberg even thinks Heyst is a devil) also points to the anti-Christian temper, the moral relativism of a post-Darwinian, post-Nietzschean and post-Christian world. Religious imagery emphasises the negativity of Heyst's position and of the secular age.

³⁵John Lester, *Conrad and Religion* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 168.

English, society. In this Age of Evolution Conrad confronts a crisis of values "epitomised by imperialism, capitalism, the decline of family and national ties, and the replacement of human relationships based upon personal ties with relationships based on economic ties."³⁶ Schwarz goes on to point out that Schomberg's hotel is a mnemonic device to depict what the narrator calls "an age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel" (p. 3) and the hotelier symbolises the lust, malice and greed of the age. As Jones says: "This, Mr. Heyst, is a soft age. It is also an age without prejudices" (p. 379), which is another way of saying that traditional morality no longer applies. The criminal practices of the trio allude to the kind of capitalist "games" that companies and governments were engaged in at the time (particularly in the colonies), of which the coal mining venture is the most obvious example. The fact that the mine and bungalows are deserted, the island raped of its resources and then left with open scars, points to the corruption and degeneracy of the venture. Tellingly the villains are housed in the mine's derelict counting-house. This economic parasitism and exploitation, along with the concomitant decadence and complacency, can be viewed as a manifestation of a degenerating imperial civilisation.³⁷

The refined Heyst appears to be a "degenerate" outside the stream of evolution: the kind of over-refined Edwardian gentleman, of which Heyst is a prime example, was soon to be extinct. He has removed himself from degenerate London, the heart of the darkness of the age, a city that produces the urban squalor in which Lena grows up (she is a "child of the streets" in the "hopeless grip of poverty" [p. 78]), a whited sepulchre where dreams are soon extinguished (houses "look like the tombs of an unvisited, unhonoured cemetery of hopes [p. 174]).³⁸ In *Body and Will* Henry Maudsley made the connection between extreme egoism and moral insanity and applied the idea of biological degeneration to the pathology of the individual, particularly in relation to the city, "modernity" and mass

³⁶Daniel R. Schwarz, *Conrad: The Later Fiction* (London, 1982), p. 60.

³⁷There are recurrent references to money in the text: we are certainly in an age of burgeoning *laissez-faire* capitalism, unsuited to the likes of Heyst and Lena.

³⁸Daniel Pick writes: "From the fear of 'Outcast London' in the 1880's to the disenchanting new-liberal perception of democracy, mass society and urban life around the turn of the century, social critique was powerfully inflected by biological theories of decline" (*Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848 - c. 1918* [1989; Cambridge, 1993], p. 5).

democracy. He identified egoism as a potentially atavistic, primitive force that threatened to overwhelm the individual. He believed further that degeneration was the major counter-force to evolution and that it could proceed from the top down, affecting the highest civilisations and cultures first.

The controversy around Nordau's *Degeneration* served to popularise the concept and Conrad was certainly familiar with the content of the work.³⁹ Nordau writes: "We stand in the midst of a severe mental epidemic; of a sort of black death of degeneration and hysteria, and it is natural that we should ask anxiously on all sides: 'What is to come next?'"⁴⁰ Like Lombroso, Nordau's project was to identify (and ostensibly "neutralise") "primitive" and degenerate elements in society (particularly in the field of art and literature). He condemned the decadence of aspects of European culture and claimed that he had identified the evolutionary throw-backs in a modern society that was diseased and atavistic. Nordau borrowed liberally from Lamarckian anthropologists such as Lubbock, Tylor and Pritchard who held that even the most "civilised" humans contain vestigial elements of the "primitive".

Nordau speaks of the melancholia - that *fin de siècle* frame of mind - of the intellectual degenerate, and Heyst perfectly fits the description. He calls this type "the predestined disciples of Schopenhauer and Hartmann", a morbid variation of the species:

The degenerate who shuns action, and is without will-power, has no suspicion that his incapacity for action is a consequence of his inherited deficiency of brain. He deceives himself into believing that he despises action from free determination, and takes pleasure in inactivity; and, in order to justify himself in his own eyes, he constructs a philosophy of renunciation and of contempt for the world and men, asserts that he has convinced himself of the excellence of Quietism, calls himself with consummate self-consciousness a Buddhist.⁴¹

The Buddhist reference is not inappropriate; indeed Heyst on Samburan is said to be out of harm's way, as if "perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas" (p. 4) - like a Buddhist monk seeking nirvana perhaps?

³⁹See William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* [Cambridge, 1994], p. 107.

⁴⁰Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 537. By the time he came to write *Victory*, Conrad was extremely sceptical about the scientific underpinnings of the degeneration debate (certainly its quack element which had flowered in the 1890's); however degenerationist discourse did accord with his pessimism concerning "progress" and science, his political conservatism and disenchantment with man's ethical capacity (see Greenslade, *Degeneration*, pp. 106-7) and he continued to make use of degenerationsit conventions in his writing (most notably - and deeply ironically - in *The Secret Agent* [1907]).

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 20.

This section will deal with certain aspects of degeneration as they occur in *Victory*. On the one hand I will examine how extreme over-refinement can be viewed as a form of degeneration and on the other hand how atavism and a regression down the evolutionary "ladder" (shockingly manifested in contemporary incidents of cannibalism) can be seen as other forms of degeneration that threaten society. I will conclude by showing how the Second Law of Thermodynamics casts an apocalyptic shadow over the actions and thoughts of the protagonist.

Over-evolved Gentleman

Tanner notes that the word "gentleman" is used over sixty times in *Victory*, usually with reference to Heyst and Jones, and that it is employed in a number of different contexts and takes on a host of different meanings: in the tale the concept is tested and found to be hollow.⁴² Once protagonists are removed to an isolated, Malaysian milieu, any conventional, society-based meaning of the word (Conrad shows that even in Victorian England the concept "gentleman" is hard to define) becomes difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. Furthermore the term appears increasingly indefinable when the theory of evolution is brought to bear. After all, if a "gentleman" traces his noble family tree back far enough, he is sure to discover humans (or creatures) that he could hardly define as in any way pure or refined. Ricardo finds it impossible to explain to Schomberg (a German) what constitutes a "gentleman" and resorts to a cryptic xenophobia:

I am an Englishman, and I know a gentleman at sight. I should know one drunk, in the gutter, in jail, under the gallows. There's a something - it isn't exactly the appearance, it's a - no use me trying to tell you. You ain't an Englishman; and if you were, you wouldn't need to be told. (p. 125)

But Heyst is not the only gentleman in *Victory*; various characters are used to explore the concept and investigate to what extent it is a debilitating social construct. Captain Morrison is a gentleman who cannot find it in his heart to force his poor trading partners to pay their debts. When Heyst steps in to rescue him, the encounter is described as that of a "prince addressing another prince on a private occasion" (p. 12). Their over-refined sensibilities trap them in a relationship based on a false feeling of propriety: Heyst's

⁴²Tanner, "Joseph Conrad and the last gentleman", p. 109.

delicacy does not allow him to extricate himself from Morrison's disproportionate gratitude. Captain Davidson, on the other hand, seems to be a model gentleman, with "native [hence innate] delicacy" (p. 177), kindness and subtlety. He keeps his distance but is always prepared to step in when he is needed. Morrison and Heyst fail due to their over-refinement, but Davidson, a captain and thus presumably an adherent of Conrad's much-vaunted nautical code of ethics, survives and offers an example of more balanced and practical "gentlemanly" conduct.

Mr Jones is a travesty of the concept "gentleman", an egoist (as opposed to the "altruistic" gentleman) who puts greed and self-interest before anything else. He is a degraded descendant of that breed of aristocrat-pirates, those "knights-errant of the sea" mentioned in the opening of *Heart of Darkness*, who, like the Romans in Britain, "grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got."⁴³ Propriety and the "correct" way of doing things are parodied in Jones' explanation of the "correct" and "proper" way to murder someone (p. 137). When Heyst suggests that Jones might not have enough "pluck" for his business, he retorts:

Strange as it may seem to you, it is because of my origin, my breeding, my traditions, my early associations, and such like trifles. Not everybody can divest himself of the prejudices of a gentleman as easily as you have done, Mr. Heyst. (p. 383)

Jones' explanation throws up some of interesting points: he suggests that the traditional gentlemanly qualities are "trifles" as well as admitting that the attitudes which keep the "gentleman" afloat above the tide of the masses are in fact "prejudices"; it is an artificial and precarious, socially evolved state of mind that can be discarded like a cloak. The concept is by no means stable.

The gentleman condition comes under close scrutiny and we are challenged to ask ourselves how natural the state of refinement is and to what extent it is a product of evolution. I will now closely consider the case of Axel Heyst, showing how he has "evolved" himself out of a place on the upwardly straining "ladder".

Heyst looks and behaves like a highly refined Edwardian dandy, a most "evolved" specimen, dressed all in tropical white with his "uncovered intellectual forehead", "long

⁴³Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) in *Youth and Heart of Darkness* (London, 1969), p. 53.

reddish moustaches" (p. 78), his "courtesy" and "quiet, polished manner" (p. 79). In accord with his father's teachings, Heyst calls himself "a man of universal scorn and unbelief" (p. 199). Heyst Sr. teaches his son gentlemanly reserve, to view humanity with pity which he equates with contempt (quite paradoxically, as it is an emotion that in fact tempts him into involvement and "action"), which more or less precludes the son from ever having an emotion without being critically self-conscious of it. This obviously leads to a state of emotional, not to say literal, inertia: his sceptical detachment prevents him from engaging in any meaningful way with others. In social evolutionary terms this could be viewed as an intellectual over-refinement, the cerebral mutation of an over-evolved creature.

After his father's death he travels in the region of Indonesia, resolving to remain aloof by "a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes . . . - invulnerable because elusive" (p. 90). For years he drifts around the Malay Archipelago, "flitting from tree to tree in a wilderness" (p. 32); indeed he is frequently referred to as a migratory bird or a bird without a nest. In evolutionary terms birds were major "colonists" of far flung desert islands, animals that brought with them new seeds in their stomachs and the genetic flexibility to produce new and varied species on the island. The over-evolved Heyst has no such intention. As a defence against life he says he will drift "like a detached leaf drifting in the wind-currents . . . without ever catching on to anything" (p. 92). Drifting - a dangerous nautical condition - is associated with meaninglessness and leaves the protagonist at the mercy of any wayward current. Furthermore a severed leaf is a dying leaf, cut off from its life force, from that which might sustain it.⁴⁴

However Heyst is an imperfect exponent of his father's philosophy and even the "contemptuous" pity he is advised to cultivate, fails to prevent him from getting involved in the affairs of other members of his species. In *The Descent of Man* Darwin writes: "The aid we feel impelled to give to the helpless is mainly an incidental result of the instinct of sympathy, which was originally acquired as part of the social instincts, but

⁴⁴Daleski, "Victory and Patterns of Self-Division", p. 111.

subsequently rendered, in the manner previously indicated, more tender and more widely diffused."⁴⁵ In Heyst too the "instinct of sympathy" penetrates his Schopenhauerian reserve. He finds himself being drawn to Captain Davidson and later he cannot control the "impulse" (p. 71) to rescue Morrison, and subsequently Lena (Nordau notes that impulsiveness is one of the roots of "moral insanity"⁴⁶). These two crucial moments of unreflecting spontaneity, actions that rightly belong to creatures less evolved than himself, draw Heyst out of his isolation.⁴⁷ Indeed, as is the case with Lord Jim, Heyst automatically "jumps" down the evolutionary "ladder" in response to certain stimuli; his rescue of Morrison is presented as a downward leap: "he plunged after the submerged Morrison whom he hardly knew" (p. 77). Similarly the knowledge that people are gossiping about him, disturbs him more than he would care to admit.⁴⁸ Slowly he gets dragged back into the real world, a world he is ill-equipped to face: he admits that he has a "great delicacy in the perception of inhuman evil" (p. 207). The pity/"contempt" with which he regards Morrison and Lena is potentially the key to drawing him back into a meaningful interaction with the world. If he would only allow it, his pity could be transformed into sympathy and possibly even love. This is a process that begins on the island, but is cut short by the arrival of the trio.

Having staked his claim on a patch of earth it is inevitable that flotsam and jetsam of one form or another will sooner or later wash ashore and then how will he manage to remain detached?⁴⁹ The first arrival is Lena, a woman Heyst rescues from a travelling orchestra and brings back to Samburan. He finds that he simply "could not defend himself

⁴⁵Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 134.

⁴⁶Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 18.

⁴⁷Schopenhauer explains that the intellect supplies the will with motives, but the intellect does not necessarily have insight as to which motives will be acted upon. The will can act quasi-autonomously, at odds with our intellectual self-understanding (Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, p. 260).

⁴⁸If we take language to be the most sophisticated form of sound developed by any animal, then it is pertinent to note how in *Victory* this uniquely human faculty becomes corrupted and "degraded". Tanner draws attention to the significance of gossip in the tale, "a kind of verbal 'mud' which sticks to him and drags him back to the old earth of our common origin" ("Joseph Conrad and the last gentleman", p. 111). Heyst's courtesy is powerless against the gratuitous slandering of Schomberg, revengeful gossip which ultimately results in the hero's death. He does not realise that his inertia and lack of engagement provoke others to give him (fictitious) identities and he unwittingly acquires a series of appellations, for example: "Enchanted Heyst" (p. 7), "Hard Facts" (p. 8), "Utopist" (p. 8) and "Heyst the Spider" (p. 21).

⁴⁹In this respect a fitting epigraph for *Victory* might be the aphorism "no man is an island" - advice that Heyst fails to heed.

from compassion" (p. 79). He cannot help being touched by the will (symbolically the nearby volcano rains mud on his spotless white clothing), being drawn back into the realm of action⁵⁰: an Adam (biblical and biological) succumbs to the embrace of an Eve. Although he tries, he cannot remain aloof: "When one's heart has been broken into in the way you have broken into mine, all sorts of weaknesses are free to enter" (p. 210).

Even with Lena on the island, he tries to hold onto his detachment and tells her, "Nothing can break in on us here" (p. 223); however his shell has already been cracked open twice and it is not long before the evil trio arrive to test his resolve to the full. Let us consider the last moments before their landing:

Heyst and Lena entered the shade of the forest path which crossed the island, and which, near its highest point, had been blocked by felled trees. But their intention was not to go so far. After keeping to the path for some distance, they left it at a point where the forest was bare of undergrowth, and the trees, festooned with creepers, stood clear of one another in the gloom of their own making. Here and there great splashes of light lay on the ground. They moved, silent in the great stillness, breathing the calmness, the infinite isolation, the repose of a slumber without dreams. They emerged at the upper limit of vegetation, among some rocks; and in a depression of the sharp slope, like a small platform, they turned about and looked from on high over the sea, lonely, its colour effaced by sunshine, its horizon a heat mist, a mere unsubstantial shimmer in the pale and blinding infinity overhung by the darker blaze of the sky.

"It makes my head swim," the girl murmured, shutting her eyes and putting her hand on his shoulder.

Heyst, gazing fixedly to the southward, exclaimed:

"Sail ho!"

A moment of silence ensued. (pp. 189-90)

There are a number of interesting points that arise from this passage. Firstly, these refined northern creatures are no longer well-adapted to bright, tropical sunlight. They walk in the shade, out of the "blaze of the sky" (earlier referred to as "devouring sunshine" [p. 189]), avoiding the threatening "great splashes of sunlight", sunlight which "effac[es]" the colour of the sea. The narrator comments that it is not their intention to go as far as the point where the path is "blocked by felled trees". These trees were cut down by the Alfuros who have, in this manner, tried to block the path of European "progress". Heyst has narrowed the horizons of his cerebral world and cannot conceive of "go[ing] so far" as to bridge the gap between himself and the native islanders. He has lost touch with the "primitive", and all the ideas associated with it for Edwardians, within himself. Not only

⁵⁰From a Darwinian perspective "action" draws one back into the realm of space and time; it introduces change, chance and all the other aspects of evolution.

has he shut himself off from the inhabitants, but the natural world seems to threaten a protagonist who has lost touch with nature (this is hinted at in phrases that suggest an alienated natural environment: there is the "sharp" slope, trees have a "gloom of their own making" and are "festooned with creepers"). Descriptions such as "infinite isolation" and "lonely" convey more than their obvious predicament; they suggest a metaphysical, evolutionary and temporal isolation. The couple are said to be in a "slumber without dreams", a dreamless realm that is soon to be shattered by the intrusion of the trio, agents that bring the "nightmare" of time and biological inheritance to this mind-forged Arcadia. They are made aware of their utter isolation when they contemplate the shimmering horizon, the "blinding infinity" of sea and sky. They stand on a "small platform" like actors in a drama that is too big for them, staring at the marine and celestial blues and contemplating their existential position: "it makes [Lena's] head swim". Then Heyst spies the villains' sail, the vessel bearing their destiny, and there is a moment of silence. The passage quoted has a number of references to silence: "silence in the great stillness", a "moment of silence ensued". Silence connotes inaction or inertia (aspects of Heyst's passivity), elements that are about to be shattered by agents of chance and change (for a discussion on the significance of silence in the novel, see "Lena" section below).

When the trio arrive, Heyst treats them as though they are guests although their intentions are obviously malicious. His breeding and his refinement preclude him from acting in any other way: he upholds "the sacred virtue of hospitality" (p. 358). Tanner reminds us how important the guest/host roles are in all tribes and that hospitality is the way of mediating between the known and the unknown ("guest" originally meant "enemy" as well as "stranger").⁵¹ By being a guest one accepts being "tamed" or "domesticated" according to the rules of the host. Once the trio have proved that they are obviously not going to abide by any civilized codes of hospitality, Heyst is unable to make the adjustment, to alter his courteous role and move onto the defensive as a "less evolved" host would do. He sits up late, smoking his cheroot and wondering what can be done about his uninvited "guests":

⁵¹Tanner, "Joseph Conrad and the last gentleman", p. 118.

[The night] was going very slowly. Why it should have irked him he did not know; for he had nothing to expect from the dawn; but everything round him had become unreasonable, unsettled, and vaguely urgent, laying him under an obligation, but giving him no line of action. He felt contemptuously irritated with the situation. The outer world had broken upon him; and he did not know what wrong he had done to bring this on himself. (p. 258)

It is as though the elements (and the will) are urging him to act, to respond to his biological conditioning. He feels only contempt for a situation that has been thrust upon him and forces him to enter the world-as-will. By contrast the predatory Martin Ricardo is alert to signs, in touch with nature. When Heyst throws his cheroot into the darkness, the action is "noted as a symptom of importance by an observer with his faculties greedy for signs, and in a state of alertness tense enough almost to hear the grass grow" (p. 259).

Heyst, in search of total detachment, has refined the real world away to the extent that he experiences it as a dream, his own reality being that of his books and his thoughts. This imbalance leaves him unable to communicate with the physical world:

I don't know how to talk. I have managed to refine everything away. I've said to the Earth that bore me: "I am I and you are a shadow." And, by Jove, it is so! But it appears that such words cannot be uttered with impunity. (p. 350)

He is "over-evolved", a product of a decadent and degenerating age:

I date later - much later. I can't call myself a child, but I am so recent that I may call myself a man of the last hour - or is it the hour before the last? (p. 359)

Heyst, like Jones, has evolved himself into an eddy outside the stream of evolution: these two gentlemen have dealt themselves out of a biological future by evolving (respectively) dangerous extremes of introspective refinement and decadent destructiveness. Heyst's nihilistic, over-refined and sterile way of life place him outside the current: extreme cerebration is shown to be an aberrant mutation of social evolution. He represents the effete, "over-civilised" Edwardian period, an exponent of a doomed aestheticist-decadent outlook.⁵² It is as though Conrad is conducting a Lamarckian experiment: he "evolves" an almost perfect gentleman in the green-house of a tropical island only to prove that such

⁵²Hynes writes:

The Edwardian period was an Age of Propriety, of propriety carried to absurd extremes. Conventional standards of behaviour which had developed from the evangelical ethics of a century earlier had become rigid and empty gestures of decorum, important not because they implied moral rightness, but because they seemed to protect social stability, public morals, religion, and the British Empire against the threat of change. (*The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, p. 6)

The "threat of change" was, as we have seen so far in this discussion, an "evolutionary" threat; and it is agents of evolution, as well as social instability, who come to pay a visit to Heyst's Edwardian island.

creations would become extinct when they came into contact with untamed nature or untamed humanity. Heyst is simply not one of Spencer's "fit" and admits that there is no way that he could find it in himself to go onto the offensive and attack the villains.⁵³

Heyst represents an effete upper class position, but Conrad is also interested in broader class issues to which he gives an evolutionary inflection. The hierarchical nature of society and the class structure in particular were considered to be the stabilising factor, a highly-wrought, socially evolved system, that distinguished advanced society from "primitive" anarchy. Darwin had shown that there was no biological foundation for division of society along class lines. In the late Victorian and Edwardian eras it was feared that the crumbling class system was a symptom of the general degeneration of society (and the "evolution" of the over-refined gentleman can be seen as a response to this threat).

Schwarz writes;

The invasion of Samburan by Jones, the man who both belongs to and is alienated from the very class on which England had depended for moral and political leadership, may reflect Conrad's perception that England had more to fear from inner decay than outside invasion. . . . The alliance between Ricardo and Jones spoke to the secret fear in pre-war England that an alliance between the disaffected element of the wealthy and the anarchical element in the working class would destroy England's parliamentary democracy.⁵⁴

The trio are reminiscent of the anarchists of *The Secret Agent* and represent disruptive elements in society: they have no emotional ties, no social or national allegiances. They are agents of a modern age, agents of change, come to disrupt an effete and ineffectual Edwardian world. Jones is a grotesque parody of the English upper-class gentleman, a grim warning of the path of degeneration for his breed: he represents the threat of decay within the ranks of the upper classes in England. Ricardo stands for the new, upwardly mobile, "unceremonious classes, which are so unlovely, untrustworthy" (p. 390), product of a materialistic age of expansion and progress. Lena is presented as being of the same

⁵³Huxley's Prolegomena of "Evolution and Ethics" is relevant to Heyst:

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 essence of the ethical process, . . . may, by excess, become ruinous to it. (Quoted in Stanley Renner, "The Garden of Civilization: Conrad, Huxley, and the Ethics of Evolution", *Conradiana* 7, 2 [1975], p. 118)

⁵⁴Schwarz, *Conrad*, p. 75.

class as Ricardo and Heyst's relationship with her, seen in the light of theories about the connection between racial and social degeneracy, could be seen as extreme folly:

Both Morel and Gobineau saw the analogy between class and race as a valid one. Class mobility was perceived as almost as dangerous as "hybridization" or, to use the mid-nineteenth-century term of American racial pseudo-science, "miscegenation". Indeed the attraction of the Other as a sexual being in nineteenth-century fiction was enhanced by the Other being another race or another class.⁵⁵

Pedro represents the uneducated lower classes, the common wage-slaves (at one point a furious Ricardo actually calls Pedro "*Esclavo*" [p. 231]) and stands as a warning to European civilisation of the threat of the proletariat, the possible slide into barbarism.

One gets the sense in *Victory* that the old hierarchies are breaking down, that gentlemen of Jones' and Heyst's ilk are doomed. From an evolutionary perspective, as the traditional religious and moral codes that propped up the class structure fall away, an evolutionary morality begins to take its place: the Ricardos of this world begin to challenge the authority of former leaders. Ricardo, in a Marxist parody, bemoans the condition of his class:

They give you wages as they'd fling a bone to a dog, and they expect you to be grateful. It's worse than slavery. . . . And if you sell your work - what is it but selling your own self? (p. 145)

Indeed Jones must concede that "the gentleman is no match for the common herd. And yet one must make use of the brutes" (p. 388). He realises that, at bottom, it is a world of survival of the fittest: "He depended on himself, as if the world were still one great, wild jungle without law" (p. 133). And when he discovers that Ricardo has betrayed him he curses Ricardo's breed and, using the metaphor of "mud" again, associates him and his class with base and primordial origins:

Mud souls, obscene and cunning! Mud bodies, too - the mud of the gutter! I tell you, we are no match for the vile populace. (p. 392)

His sentiments are echoed in an article in the *Spectator* in 1886 entitled "Fear of Mobs":

Whence comes the feeling that the mob will be specially wicked, more wicked than any of its compound individuals, more cruel, more murderous? That idea,

⁵⁵Sander L. Gilman, "Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race to a Race to Theory" in J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman, *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York, 1985), p. 77.

quite universal in Europe, and the first cause of the dread of mobs, is not born of terror only, but is more or less substantially true.⁵⁶

Anthropophagy

In the chapter on Wells I mentioned how cannibalism was viewed as a form of degeneration, a return to an earlier rung on the "ladder" of evolution. I noted that the short story "Falk" is Conrad's most explicit treatment of the theme (the protagonist resorts to cannibalism when his ship breaks down and drifts into the Antarctic circle), but it is a preoccupation that recurs again and again in his fiction.⁵⁷ In "Falk", when the social structure and the moral code that holds a ship's crew together finally comes apart, the protagonist must make the transition to a morality of survival of the fittest. Conrad draws a direct connection between cannibalism and sexual drive in the story:

[Falk] was hungry for the girl, terribly hungry, as he had been terribly hungry for food.

Don't be shocked if I declare that in my belief it was the same need, the same pain, the same torture.⁵⁸

As such Falk is the diametrical opposite of Heyst whose sexual drive and will to live can hardly be described as "hungry". Schomberg totally misreads Heyst when he suggests that the ascetic protagonist might eat Lena (p. 45). Rather it is Ricardo who displays anthropophagic characteristics: "The secretary retracted his lips and looked up sharply at Schomberg, as if only too anxious to leap upon him with teeth and claws" (p. 112); and later Ricardo, when speaking of trying to quit tobacco, uses a "cannibalistic comparison" (p. 138) that upsets Schomberg: "I had not broken myself of the habit then, and I couldn't be happy unless I had a lump as big as a baby's fist in my cheek". He has a "thirst for blood" (p. 336) and at one point Ricardo emits "a grunt of astonishing ferocity, as if proposing to himself to eat the local people" (p. 101). Conflating woman and meat again,

⁵⁶Quoted in Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, p. 222. Conrad would no doubt have been aware of contemporary theory concerning the "regressive" mob and may well have read Hippolyte Adolphe Tain's extremely influential *Origins of Contemporary France* (1875-93 [22 editions by 1899]; English translations from 1874-94) which is dominated by the author's fear of mobs: he describes how in times of anarchy (such as during the French Revolution) the ruling power does not proceed from above, but from below, and lawless brigands seize control of "government".

⁵⁷In *Lord Jim*, for instance, the character Robinson (a grotesque parody of Robinson Crusoe) resorts to cannibalising those less "fit" than himself in order to survive on a desert island.

⁵⁸Conrad, "Falk" (1903) in *"Typhoon" and Other Tales* (1986; Oxford, 1990), p. 184.

Ricardo refers to Lena as "no meat for that tame, respectable gin-slinger" (p. 299). If we recall the heads on stakes at Kurtz's Inner Station in *Heart of Darkness*, then the description of Jones as "a painted pole leaning against the edge of the desk, with a dried head of dubious distinction stuck on the top of it" (p. 376) leaves us in little doubt as to the narrator's cannibalistic insinuations.

From an evolutionary anthropological perspective we might identify levels of human development, as I believe Conrad did, in accordance with their eating habits. Indeed, like language, the preparation and cooking of food, separates humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. The narrator describes the two extremes of "civilisation" to be found in the Archipelago as, on the one hand, the cannibals of New Guinea, and on the other, the café culture of Saigon (p. 25). On their travels the evil trio have to eat like the natives, sitting "round a bit of fire outside the sleeping-shed, eating broiled fish off plantation leaves, with roast yams for bread - the usual thing" (p. 139). The refined world of "civilised" dining around a white table-cloth and the primordial fireside feast are succinctly juxtaposed when Pedro serves at table: Heyst exclaims, "A creature with an antediluvian lower jaw, hairy like a mastodon, and formed like a prehistoric ape, has laid this table" (p. 358). However the world of cannibals and that of cafés are shown to be not that far apart, indeed they intersect and overlap: Heyst says that Mrs Zangiacomo "is infinitely more disagreeable than any cannibal" (p. 75) he has encountered; Pedro and Wang work at the same fire and Pedro serves at table. Similarly, a moral vacuum in conjunction with a life-threatening situation (like that created in an open boat of shipwreck survivors⁵⁹ or a desert island) can easily result in degeneration into cannibalism for "civilised" Europeans. The trio drift around the Archipelago from Saigon to New Guinea, a metaphorical oscillation between the white table-cloths and silverware of Schomberg's hotel or Heyst's home, and cannibalistic fireside slaughter (Jones shoots

⁵⁹The notion of cannibalism amongst shipwreck survivors, so prevalent in nineteenth-century island texts, makes its appearance again in *Victory*. As in *Moreau*, there are also three men in an open boat and the description of their landing on Samburan is loaded with the threat of anthropophagy (with a telling association of "thirst" and "blood"):

[Ricardo's] upturned face was swollen, red, peeling all over the nose and cheeks. His stare irrational. Heyst perceived stains of dried blood all over the front of his dirty white coat, and also on one sleeve. . . .

"Blood - not mine. Thirst's the matter." (p. 228)

Antonio who pitches forward into the cooking fire where his greasy head begins to sizzle [p. 140]). The anthropophagic past of Europeans is shown to be just below the surface.

Thermodynamics

One of the concerns in the degeneration debate was an extinction of our planet. Lord Kelvin's Second Law of Thermodynamics held that the sun, like any other element in the universe, had a limited life span and that it would eventually begin cooling, resulting in entropy, a slow degeneration of our planet and the ultimate extinction of all life forms.⁶⁰ Given the *fin de siècle* mood of despair, the Second Law appeared to render life meaningless. Conrad tries to put on a brave face:

The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness, and silence.⁶¹

In *The Time Machine* the protagonist travels into the distant future to find a dying sun, humanity extinct and only a few doomed creatures still roaming the planet. The burning question for many was how long before the "clock" wound down? Some fed off the fears of the public and, in alarmist manner, predicted an imminent extinction of planet Earth. Nordau articulates the more extreme *fin de siècle* paranoia of world annihilation:

In our days there have arisen in more highly developed minds vague qualms of a Dusk of Nations, in which all suns and all stars are gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations is perishing in the midst of a dying world.⁶²

And he goes on to suggest that

to the voluptuary this means unbridled lewdness, the unchaining of the beast in man; to the withered heart of the egoist, disdain of all consideration for his fellow-men, the trampling under foot of all barriers which enclose brutal greed of lucre and lust of pleasure.⁶³

⁶⁰Of course what Lord Kelvin's law boils down to, is an introduction of evolution into our solar system and into the universe as a whole.

⁶¹Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad* 2, edited by Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge, 1986), p. 17; letter to Cunninghame Graham dated 14 January 1898.

⁶²Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 2.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 5

Conrad was intrigued by this debate and was particularly interested in the psychological effect and philosophical implications of the knowledge of an end to life and the dreaded path of degeneration that would precede extinction.

Entropy, the loss of energy through increasing randomness, is linked to the Second Law and Brian Spittles suggests that Heyst's restless wandering through the Malay Archipelago is in itself a kind of entropic randomness, an aspect of degeneration.⁶⁴ He shows that this concept is expressed metaphorically in the description of Lena and Heyst's secret meeting: "While she was growing quieter in his arms, he was becoming more agitated, as if there were only a fixed quantity of violent emotion on this earth" (p. 123). Recall too that Heyst calls himself "a man of the last hour - or is it the hour before last" (p. 359), an assertion that refers not only to his position on an evolutionary time-scale, but also to the imminent end of the world (indeed, the climax of the novel is played out under an apocalyptic sky filled with lightning and thunder).⁶⁵ Furthermore, the mood of entropic pessimism in England at the time was fuelled by a fear of impending war, a catastrophic, even self-destructive confrontation that was to break out within weeks of Conrad's completion of the novel. Pick writes that the "profuse pre-war imagery, intimating the death of the sun, the decline of the race and the degradation of civilisation prefigured the real catastrophe ahead and powerfully mediated its interpretation and representation."⁶⁶

When the trio arrive, it is as though the end of the world, rather than merely the end of the day, has come. The imagery is thermodynamic and apocalyptic and Mr Jones is the Grim Reaper:

The night descending on Samburan turned into dense shadow the point of land and the wharf itself, and gave a dark solidity to the unshimmering water extending to the last faint trace of light away to the west. Heyst stared at the guests whom the renounced world had sent him thus at the end of the day. The only other vestige of light left on earth lurked in the hollows of the thin man's eyes. (p. 238)

⁶⁴Brian Spittles, *Joseph Conrad: Text and Context* (Basingstoke, 1992), p. 154.

⁶⁵Characters are depicted as ghosts or as being dead already: to Heyst, Lena is "like an appealing ghost" (p. 86), Wang is a ghostly presence, Jones is a spectre and Heyst "considered himself a dead man already" (p. 354). From a thermodynamic perspective this death-in-life condition can be interpreted as a reaction to the knowledge of impending extinction. When Heyst says that he is "on a Shadow inhabited by Shades" (p. 350) it resonates as a proleptic image of the eternal shadow of a darkened universe. Heyst's inability to act can, in these terms, be viewed as a paralysis before the damning fact of entropy.

⁶⁶Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, p. 221.

In the novel the sun appears to be dying: it is referred to as being "reduced to a spark, glowing very low in the breathless twilight" (p. 236) and Venus is described as a "bright lamp hung above the grave of the sun" (p. 241); at sunset "a piece of dark red sun" appears in the "crimson crack" (p. 355) of a chaotic, cloud-strewn sky.⁶⁷ When darkness fell the volcano,

a feather of smoke by day and a cigar-glow at night, took its first fiery expanding breath of the evening. Above it a reddish star came out like an expelled spark from the fiery bosom of the earth, enchanted into permanency by the mysterious spell of frozen spaces. (p. 356)

From the outset of the novel, parallels are drawn between the protagonist and the nearby volcano: indeed it is his "good-natured, lazy" neighbour (p. 193). Heyst sits out on the veranda in the evenings smoking a cheroot which makes the same size orange glow as his twin across the water. Thus both creation and extinction, human and planetary, are alluded to in this passage: "the fiery bosom of the earth" recalls the molten beginnings of this planet while the word "frozen" suggests the extinguishing of the sun, the end of all life.

Using cannibalistic and thermodynamic metaphors Conrad is playing with the idea of extinction on a micro and macro scale. In a world where the process of degeneration and devolution is taking place, it might be argued that "savages", humans more in touch with their "origins", would be better adapted to survive and Europeans would be the first to succumb. If we take Samburan to be a microcosmic planet (indeed it is referred to as the "Round Island" [p. 5]) then the "extinction" of the entire white population is entirely appropriate.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Nordau writes of a recent eruption in the Malay Archipelago that seemed to be a proleptic *fin de siècle* symbol: "Such is the spectacle presented by the doings of men in the reddened light of the Dusk of Nations. Massed in the sky the clouds are aflame in the weirdly beautiful glow which was observed for the space of years after the eruption of Krakatoa" (*Degeneration*, p. 6).

⁶⁸Conrad here reverses the Tasmanian example where the native population degenerated, decreased and finally became extinct after coming into contact with European settlers.

DEGENERATE ANTI-MASQUE

The evil trio are roving bandits, removed from a societal structure that would "manage" and contain their criminality within defined parameters (in *The Secret Agent* Conrad distinguishes between the criminal, a part and product of society, and the nihilist). The ideas of the criminal psychologist Lombroso - adapted and popularised in England by Havelock Ellis - influenced Conrad's writing at a time of general anxiety about reversion and retrogression in individuals, society, empires, races and *Homo sapiens*. Building on the work of Morel, Lombroso postulated that the criminal represented an evolutionary throw-back, a "savage" in the midst of civilised society.⁶⁹ Hans Kurella paraphrases Lombroso:

The occasional appearance of one or two additional atavistic characters . . . is hardly so incredible an occurrence. . . . Modern man has freed himself from much that was rooted in the blood and bone of his forefathers. But unquestionably he has not freed himself from all that was so rooted.⁷⁰

Lombroso felt he could prove that the behaviour patterns of criminals and of "primitives" were virtually identical (using the pseudo-science of craniology he even showed that there were similarities in the skull shapes and sizes of the two). He found that the absence of feelings of pity, shame or horror were common to both "savages" and criminals. The idea of atavism in relation to criminals captured the popular imagination and when Conrad describes his villainous trio using allusions to Neanderthals, apes and other animals we must be aware that he is indulging in a convention that would have been familiar to contemporary readers.⁷¹

The novelist does not agree with Darwin when he states that there is

⁶⁹Lombroso is mentioned by name in *The Secret Agent* ([1907; Oxford, 1989], pp. 47-9) and Conrad gives Ossipon the features of a philanderer and a swindler, according to Lombroso's classification. In relation to Lombroso's idea of atavism, I find Bertrand Russell's comment about *The Secret Agent* equally appropriate to *Victory*: "I felt . . . that [Conrad] thought of civilized and morally tolerable human life as a dangerous walk on a thin crust of barely cooked lava which at any moment might break and let the unwary sink into fiery depths" (*Portraits from Memory and Other Essays* [London, 1956], p. 82). On Samburan the trio tread too heavily and plunge all the European islanders into the fiery depths of a "savage" past.

⁷⁰Hans Kurella, *Cesare Lombroso: A Modern Man of Science*, (London, 1911), pp. 23-4.

⁷¹John Wylie Griffith points out that Lombroso was influenced by the Victorian biologist Rudolph Virchow who developed a theory of "organic regression", or "theromorphism", the idea that man could take on bodily peculiarities of lower animals. Lombroso felt that, at worst, criminals might represent a regression to cannibalism and he often used the image of an enlarged mouth and jaw as proof of primitive reversion (*Degeneration, Atavism, Regeneration and Survival: Anthropological and Zoological Doctrines and the Works of Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells and D. H. Lawrence* [D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford, 1991], p. 175). Conrad's evil trio are metaphorical examples of this strange concept.

weaker, ... that virtuous habits will grow

no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance. In this case the struggle between our higher and lower impulses will be less severe, and virtue will be triumphant.⁷²

The trio clearly represent a society in which instinct, as opposed to "social instincts", are waxing. These individuals are losing the moral sense of the highly evolved Western society which produced them; they are degenerating and exhibiting aspects of an earlier "rung" of evolution. Away from the harsh northern climes which produced the civilisation of their compatriots, the trio have, in a Lamarckian sense, acclimatised to the more "relaxed" lifestyle (and ethics) of the tropics, and prey off the weak during their nomadic forays. They have returned to a morality of each-man-for-himself: witness the brutal struggle for water when they first land. As Jones says, the way of the world is "gorge and disgorge!" (p. 384) and he has no moral scruples about committing murder. As card-players and gamblers they live by chance and luck, rolling the dice of evolution; and it is the wind and currents - chance elements in the evolution of island species - that bring the trio to Samburan.

As we saw in the Wells chapter, degeneration does not follow the same steps as evolution in reverse; it is not simply a rewinding of the tape. Thus quite unlike the relatively gradual rate of progression, leaps backward in evolutionary time are possible, and the kind of metaphors that are used in connection with the trio are certainly in accord with this idea.

Animal Allusions

From a Darwinian point of view the trio represent aspects of Heyst's biological inheritance: they are examples of levels of development (or degenerate versions thereof) that have gone into the making of this highly evolved gentleman. The animal allusions serve ^{to} metaphorically dislodge man from his supposed position at the top of the evolutionary "ladder". On Samburan there are no fixed biological co-ordinates: gentlemen can act like insects; the ape-like can be "delightfully natural" (p. 116). The hero has chosen to make his home in "an abandoned settlement invaded by the jungle" (p.

⁷²Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 125.

5) where civilisation has gained only a brief foothold and then retreated, and is consequently an appropriate setting for the interplay of different periods and products of evolution. Characters are frequently referred to as either "tame" or "wild"; for instance the trio pour scorn on Schomberg for being "perfectly tame" (p. 114) and Pedro has to be partially "tamed" before he can join Jones and Ricardo. At one point Heyst's house is referred to as a cage which traps them (p. 253) while the trio roam wild outside: the couple are tame birds in a cage.⁷³ The trio are like a new species which has colonised a desert island and, finding little competition from endemic or indigenous species, they are on the ascendancy. Heyst sums up what the trio represent for him:

Here they are, the envoys of the outer world. Here they are before you - evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back. (p. 329)

Jones is the evil brain behind their venture, Pedro represents savagery and Ricardo is "arm in arm" with both forces: his is the most dangerous (and most evolved?) form of evil.

Characters, the trio in particular, are consistently referred to in terms of their evolutionary past in a host of animal metaphors.⁷⁴ Ricardo is referred to as a cat, but according to his mood he varies from being a domestic tabby to a ferocious jaguar who threatens to devour humans. He has phosphorescent yellow eyes, "slightly pointed ears" (p. 286) and stresses that he is "a beast of prey" (p. 269); he walks in a manner that resembles "noiseless, feline, oblique prowling" (p. 162) and "purrs" when he is satisfied. Apart from metaphorical play, these allusions stress how Ricardo is at the mercy of his own instincts and sexual urges. "The morals of Mr. Ricardo seemed to be pretty much the morals of a cat" (p. 148) which is as good as saying he has no morality whatsoever. Thus

⁷³Darwin points out that animals on certain islands, unused to predators, become tame. He notes the case of St. Paul's island where the birds "are of a tame and stupid disposition, and are so unaccustomed to visitors, that [he] could have killed any number of them with [his] geological hammer" (*The Voyage of the "Beagle"* [1839; London, 1972], p. 9).

⁷⁴Darwin writes of reversion to a former state of existence, something which writers exploited hyperbolically:

If man is descended from some ape-like creature, no valid reason can be assigned why certain muscles should not suddenly reappear after an interval of many thousand generations, in the same manner as with horses, asses, and mules, dark-coloured stripes suddenly reappear on the legs, and shoulders, after an interval of hundreds, or more probably of thousands of generations. (*The Descent of Man*, [p. 43])

Ricardo feels severely constrained when his master forbids "the feral solution of a growl and a spring" (p. 284) and must fight to repress "gust[s] of savagery" (p. 239).

Mr Jones is a spectre which, apart from being a ghost-like apparition, is also any insect of the Phasmidae (stick-insects for example) and at one point the narrator speaks of "his frontal bone, his stalk-like neck, his razor jaws, his fleshless skin" (p. 382). Later he is again referred to in terms of an insect: "Only his thin, *waspish*, beautifully pencilled eyebrows, drawn together a little, suggested the will and the power to *sting* - something vicious, unconquerable, and deadly" (p. 384, italics mine). The servant Pedro is the tamed "ape" (or rather early hominid) of the three.⁷⁵ He has long arms, paws, fangs and a "low forehead" which "surmounts wildly hirsute cheeks and a flat nose with wide, baboon-like nostrils" (p. 99). Furthermore he is extremely hairy, a fact which adds to the Neanderthal or ape-like impression.⁷⁶ He is described as being "a simple, straightforward brute" who is "delightfully natural" (pp. 115-6) in comparison with the brooding evil of the other two (as such he is a Hobbesian descendant of Caliban). Pedro appears to be a character straight out of *Doctor Moreau*: when he acts as a servant "carrying a tray with the clumsiness of a creature caught in the woods and taught to walk on its hind legs" (p. 118) he looks just like M'ling. Indeed the similarities are unmistakable and I am convinced that Conrad had Wells' half-evolved man-beasts in mind with the creation of Pedro (he greatly admired Wells' scientific romances). Compare his arrival on the island:

⁷⁵In Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* (1874) the settlers trap a big ape (orang-utan) with the intention of making it into a servant. The "missing link" was thought to be located in Indonesia and in a Darwinian age this kind of blurring between man and higher apes was not seen as too far-fetched a literary convention.

⁷⁶ Associated with the idea of regression to an animal state is the interesting use of body hair as an evolutionary litmus test. Darwin sets the tone when he says that "there can be little doubt that the hairs thus scattered over the body are the rudiments of the uniform hairy coat of the lower animals" (Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 18). He postulates that man, like other animals, lost his hair through inhabiting some "tropical land", but qualifies this by suggesting that it is more probable "that man, or rather primarily woman, became divested of hair for ornamental purposes" (ibid., pp. 57-8). He goes on to point out that some races are more hairy than others and finds that the hairiness is due to "partial reversion" and uses the example of idiots who "are often very hairy", and are prone to revert "to a lower animal type" (ibid., p. 601).

Appropriately Schomberg is "hirsute" (p. 94): he "prowled round her, mute, hungry, portentous behind his great beard" (p. 79). The hairs of Ricardo's moustache are more like whiskers or feelers: "his moustaches stirred by themselves in an odd, feline manner" (p. 112); Pedro's face is covered with a "mass of hair" (p. 230). By contrast Wang, representative of an "advanced" civilisation, is relatively hairless: he has a "smooth stomach" and "shaven head" (p. 312). Similarly Heyst is balding and Jones remains clean-shaven. Lena, in accord with Darwin's ideas about sexual selection, ornamentation and hair on women, has "pearly white" (p. 288) arms and hands that tend to her thick, dark hair and tie ribbons therein acts that deeply arouse Ricardo.

Pedro scrambled up on the wharf, where he remained for some time on all fours, swinging to and fro his shaggy head tied up in white rags. Then he got up clumsily, like a bulky animal in the dusk, balancing itself on its hind legs (p. 240)

with Prendick's first impression of the islanders:

The three muffled men, with the clumsiest movements, scrambled out upon the sand. . . . I was struck especially with the curious movements of the legs of the three swathed and bandaged boatmen - not stiff they were, but distorted in some odd way, almost as if they were jointed in the wrong place. (*The Island of Doctor Moreau*, p. 40)

The animal appellations of *Victory* are by no means fixed. They are used in a manner best-suited to the situation, and at various times Ricardo is (appropriately) described as a "crawling-on-the-stomach" reptile (p. 300), a "viper in [Lena's] paradise" (p. 399), a squirrel (p. 281) or a wasp; Pedro is frequently a bear, a dog and other characters are similarly labelled. Heyst, the "skunk" (p. 340), considers eluding his enemies by hiding underground in the coal mine like a mole (p. 271) - an animal that has lost its eyesight through disuse.⁷⁷ Ricardo unknowingly alludes to the primordial mud from which land animals emerged millennia ago when he calls Schomberg a "mud-turtle" (p. 135). Lena is more in touch with her "animal" inheritance than Heyst and is better equipped to deal with the villains than he.

Thus the animal allusions and the primordial metaphors serve to disrupt the idea of a steady biological ascent and debunk the notion of a complete eradication of the "animal" within the unconscious of even the most refined gentleman (see below). Animal allusions also denote the precariousness of "positions" in the chain of evolution and hint at the path of regression open to all living creatures.

Phantasms of the Unconscious

O' Hanlon points out that Conrad's idea of the unconscious, the second self, owed something to literary tradition as well as to his reading of Schopenhauer. Although pre-Freudian, it is predicated "upon the same line of lonely search [as Freud] amongst the new sciences, part intuitive, perhaps, it is certainly in its successive shadowed shapes,

⁷⁷By contrast Ricardo has "excellent eyes" (p. 281). Darwin contends that Europeans lost the perfect eyesight of their progenitors through disuse: "The inferiority of Europeans, in comparison with savages, in eyesight and in the other senses, is no doubt the accumulated and transmitted effect of lessened use during many generations" (*The Descent of Man*, [p. 33]).

severely scientific - arduously imagined into life by the predictions and prejudices of orthodox biological beliefs."⁷⁸ Heyst and other characters experience the island as a dream; indeed his denial of the "animal" side of existence and his attempt to live in a philosophic realm lead to a loss of "reality" and an experiencing of the world in cerebral terms. Moreover in this section I would like to put forward that he experiences much of what happens on Samburan as an emanation of his unconscious and of his repressed will.

The trio are called "envoys of the outer world" (or waking world) and "fantasms from the sea - apparitions, chimæras!" (p. 329). Just as Prospero actively uses the power of his mind to wreck the duke of Milan's ship on his shore, so too does Heyst's unconscious mind draw the trio to Samburan.⁷⁹ In both cases the island represents a theatre of the mind in which a masque of reconciliation or retribution must be played out; as such the drama of confrontation is archetypal.⁸⁰ The ascetic island of Heyst's mind is broken into by creatures of his own unconscious who irrupt into his consciousness and reveal to him the need for some form of human solidarity as well as the danger of isolation and assumed detachment from the "mud" of existence; one of those creatures is the bearer of death (the imagery surrounding Mr Jones is related to corpses, graves and spectres). They are elements of evil *within* the protagonist and not simply an external threat (in the same way, perhaps, as the Teutonic evil that threatens to invade the British Isles is matched by, and a result of, the evil and decay within Edwardian society⁸¹). These emanations

⁷⁸O' Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, p. 26. Conrad's most focussed handling of the doppelganger idea is his short story "The Secret Sharer" (1912).

⁷⁹*The Tempest* is extremely influential: evil characters drift ashore just as the Duke of Milan's entourage does; Wang and Ariel are the trusted servants who appear and disappear at will; Pedro and Caliban are the animal-like menials. On one level the island is experienced as the main protagonists' dream, an emanation of his unconscious mind in which the surprising and magical seem possible. Heyst is a failed, post-Darwinian Prospero who does not have the power, he has lost the "artfulness" (p. 271), of his predecessor and does not have mastery over the dream.

⁸⁰Indeed their arrival is like "those myths, current in Polynesia, of amazing strangers, who arrive at an island, gods or demons, bringing good or evil to the innocence of the inhabitants - gifts of unknown things, words never heard before" (p. 228).

⁸¹ From an evolutionary perspective Darwin and Wallace showed that islands are by no means impregnable, that in time even the most isolated isles suffer invasion by organisms and creatures brought by wind and current (just as the trio are). They showed that when an insular island is thus invaded, the mechanism of survival of the fittest is at its starkest. So too the British Isles could not remain insular, static and inviolate forever. The invasion of Samburan by the trio has parallels with the pre-war invasion fears felt by many Britons.

Heyst on Samburan can be seen to represent an England (both are islands rich in coal vital to the Age of Steam) under enemy invasion. Appropriately it is the German Schomberg who sets the invaders upon Heyst's isle. In his "Note to the First Edition" Conrad makes his (Polish) "racist" opinion of Schomberg quite clear:

appropriately represent aspects of the protagonist's own psyche. Ricardo can be seen as standing for the lust Heyst feels, and suppresses, for Lena, while Pedro represents his primal origins (perhaps also the id) and the threat of degeneration. Jones is the refined gentleman aspect of Heyst gone badly wrong. Jones' misogyny and Ricardo's lust provide the two extremes of sexuality between which Heyst is torn.

Jones can be viewed as Heyst's doppelganger, or to use a Conradian term, his "secret sharer". The idea of doubling or duality is a prevailing device in *Victory*: Schwarz goes so far as to suggest that almost every character parallels Heyst in some important way, a device that emphasises the distant kinship we all share.⁸² The elder Heyst and Jones are both voices from beyond the grave that tug at Heyst's consciousness. Schomberg is a twin of Heyst in that his hotel is invaded by the trio and he also "dates too late", unable to attack or evict them. The idea of the evolutionary doppelganger, represented by Pedro ("that watchful monster behind [Heyst's] back" [p. 319]), we have already encountered in the works of Wells and in a character like Mr Hyde.

Jones' ennui, emotional detachment (particularly regarding women), his aristocratic aloofness, and his indifference to the world are very similar to those of Heyst. Heyst's belief in the transvaluation of values eliminates the moral divide that would have separated him from his villainous double; at one point the narrator even mentions their "spectral fellowship" (p. 393). On one occasion Jones says to Heyst explicitly: "you and I have much more in common than you think" (p. 321), and claims that they belong to "the same social sphere" (p. 378). Jones speaks to Heyst sounding distant, "as though he were speaking from the bottom of a well" (p. 377). On one level, as mind-forged doppelganger,

I don't pretend to say that this is the entire Teutonic psychology; but it is indubitably the psychology of a Teuton. My object in mentioning him here is to bring out the fact that, far from being the incarnation of recent animosities, he is the creature of my old, deep-seated and, as it were, impartial conviction. (p. xxxii)

He is described as a "Teutonic creature" who is a "good hater" (p. 26); his speech is crude and abusive; he is greedy, malicious and appropriately has a "formal military manner" (p. 103). Lena is an English damsel in distress, rescued from the clutches of two lecherous Germans, Schomberg and the disguised Zangiacomo. Just as the English fears of degeneration were transposed onto the "degenerate" Prussians, so too Heyst externalises his own psychological "degeneration" in the shape of the "mind-forged" trio. The English Channel served as a protection not only against an enemy invasion, but also against the intellectual thought and ideologies that were brewing in Europe around the turn of the century. The foe was not only military - it could also be a carrier of new and threatening ideas. Similarly the trio bring with them the threat of a Darwinian and Nietzschean morality, aberrant sexuality, a threat to the class structure and the avaricious face of capitalism.

⁸²Schwarz, *Conrad*, p. 70.

he talks to Heyst from the depths of the protagonist's own psyche, but the image of the well also suggests a temporal perspective: Jones speaks out of Heyst's biological past, taunting him back into the realm of action, the tide of evolution. Conrad would have agreed with Freud that the unconscious memory of humans contains the entire evolutionary past. Jones calls himself "a sort of fate" (p. 379) which, given the cosmology of *Victory*, must be read as a kind of "evolutionary fate", the Lamarckian roulette wheel that finally has Heyst's number on it.

SEX AND SEXUAL DEGENERACY

Lena

The presence of a lone white woman on a "desert" island is bound to bring out the sexual drive amongst the male European castaways. However Heyst, as we have already noted, has lost touch with his "instincts", not least his sex drive. Indeed, from an evolutionary perspective he is not really "fit" to propagate the "race" and as a white colonist on a native island, he is sure to let the settler line die out. He is a "biological sceptic": sexuality is a life-affirming drive that he condemns as bringing "out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations" (p. 174). Lena, by contrast, is more in touch with her biological past, her sexual and altruistic "instincts" (her blushing is a sign of her animal nature flushing involuntarily across her cheeks [p. 354]). She altruistically tries to save Heyst and in her confrontation with Ricardo's violent sexuality, she is able to use her (in Darwinian terms) "feminine instincts" to outwit the male (employing our earlier paradigm she represents the love instinct in Heyst's unconsciousness⁸³). It was felt that in primordial times woman's altruism ensured the survival of the species:

Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays these qualities towards her infants in an eminent degree; therefore it is likely that she would often extend them towards her fellow-creatures. Man is the rival of other men; he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition which passes too easily into selfishness. These latter qualities seem to be his natural and unfortunate birthright. It is

⁸³*Victory* is a tale in the tradition of treasure island adventures, however Samburan hides no loot; there is a vacuum at the kernel of the treasure island myth. When Ricardo contemplates digging in the forest for the treasure he is unconsciously alluding to a quest to plumb Heyst's psyche. The hidden treasure is Lena, or the love and altruism she represents within Heyst; but the questers find the husk kernel-less.

generally admitted that with woman the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man; but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation.⁸⁴

Where Heyst dates too late, Lena represents for him "something as old as the world" (p. 359): as a woman she belongs to a different evolutionary period, almost a different species (Lombroso claimed that because women were valued for their beauty, not their brains, sexual selection had resulted in women being "inferior" to men). And when threatened, Lena acts upon her "feminine nature":

With a woman's frank courage, as soon as she saw that opening she threw herself into it without reserve, with only one doubt - that of her own strength. She was appalled by the situation; but already all her aroused femininity, understanding that whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him, and feeling that she had brought this on his head, faced the danger with a passionate desire to defend her own. (p. 298)

Lena's existence on Samburan is entirely determined by a man. She is named by him and feels that if Heyst "were to stop thinking of [her she] shouldn't be in the world at all" (p. 187). "He gives the names, he owns the discourse: as male it is his prerogative and responsibility to establish her 'identity' in his 'world'."⁸⁵ Now this is not very different from a woman's traditional role in fiction. What makes things different on a twentieth-century, post-Darwinian island is that a woman's place is the centre of a more furious debate than ever before: this is no Miranda or Mrs Robinson. On the one hand we have scientific "proof" of woman's instinctive nature, her biological inferiority (the quote from Darwin above, for example) and on the other hand we have a strong and rising suffragette movement and rapidly changing social conditions for women in England at the time Conrad was writing. As I have shown in my introduction, Darwin could also be interpreted sympathetically by proto-feminists.

Stereotypically the cerebral male protagonist cannot read or decipher Lena: "It was impossible to read the thoughts veiled by her steady grey eyes, to penetrate the meaning of her silences, her words, and even her embraces" (p. 324). However, in renaming her Heyst gives her a new identity, relatively free of the traditional stereotypes open to women both in and out of fiction (she was formerly called either "Alma" - which means

⁸⁴Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, pp. 563-4.

⁸⁵Tanner, "Joseph Conrad and the last gentleman", p. 131.

"soul" or "spirit" in Italian - or "Magdalen", recalling the biblical prostitute⁸⁶: as Lena she escapes the angel/whore dichotomy). On the island she is freed from societal prescriptions and, like an exotic import on an under-stocked isle, she can make her mark; she can *act* for herself (just as new women were doing in a modern, twentieth-century world).

Conrad juggles Lena's instinct, vestige of traditional misogynist thought and dubious scientific rhetoric, with the concept of the "new woman", free of quasi-biological overdetermination. Certainly she *does* represent the physical, instinctive, natural and sexual to Heyst, but she also stands for the spiritual, altruistic, the self-sacrificial. This is an advance on many of Conrad's earlier women characters who tend to occupy one or other clichéd niche. Of course she, like so many of the novelist's women characters, hides things from men and is predictably used as a titillating sex object by Conrad.⁸⁷ There are also the misogynist assumptions uttered by the narrator, such as: "A woman that does not make a noise after an attempt of that kind [rape] has tacitly condoned the offence" (p. 294), and by Davidson: "Oh, the women, the women! You don't know what there may be in the quietest of them" (p. 56). But more important than these traditional stereotypes there is also space for her to take control (a space created by Heyst's cerebral inertia and by her island isolation): her role is both archetypal and real. She does battle with the trio and with Heyst Sr. in an attempt to wrest the son from the masculine (and misogynist) world of idea and restore him to the (sexual) world of engagement, a balanced realm somewhere between the poles of will and idea. Lena employs the Alma/soul aspect of herself to draw Heyst towards a loving relationship and the Magdalen/sensual aspect to awaken the sexual side of his nature. She is an intelligent and perceptive protagonist who realises that Heyst's "nirvana" is really a void, perhaps even a

⁸⁶Lombroso felt that prostitution was for women what crime was for men; and both types were evolutionary throw-backs in his eyes.

⁸⁷A description such as the following is clearly "exoticist", even Orientalist, in the sense that dressing a European woman in scanty "native" clothing would be viewed as mildly erotic by contemporary readers:

She had quickly learned to wind [the sarong] up under her armpits with a safe twist, as Malay girls do when going down to bathe in a river. Her shoulders and arms were bare; one of her tresses, hanging forward, looked almost black against the white skin. As she was taller than the average Malay woman, the sarong ended a good way above her ankles. . . . The fall of her lighted shoulders, the strong and fine modelling of her arms hanging down her sides, her immobility, too, had something statuesque, the charm of art tense with life. (p. 252)

tragic pose, and she determines to fill it with love. (She is also, in a sense, a shrewd and "instinctive" philosopher as her claim that Heyst's detachment is just a pose points to a valid criticism of Schopenhauer's world-as-idea: denial of action is an act in itself, as much an exercise of will as anything else.) Lena tries to draw Heyst back down the "ladder" to a less "evolved", and paradoxically less "degenerate", rung where altruism and engagement can still be meaningful.

I would like to take a moment to analyse the manner in which the wavering Heyst is drawn back into the world: the agent is Lena and the medium is "sound". Before Creation or the Big Bang (depending on one's theory of genesis) the "universe" rested in a state of silence. And life in all its forms is a struggle against inertia; death or extinction is a surrender to silence. Heyst tries to follow his father's death-in-life injunction, "Look on - make no sound" (p. 175) - here sound is almost an objective correlative for action and life - and drifts amongst islands where a nirvana-like silence reigns (from an ethical perspective, Heyst's inherited relativistic view of the world renders him silent when it comes to taking a moral stand). He realises that "sound" (in many of its forms) could draw him back into the realm of action and he is attracted to the silence of the archipelago:

Heyst . . . had a taste for *silence* which he had been able to gratify for years. The islands are very *quiet*. One sees them lying about, clothed in their dark garments of leaves, in a great *hush* of silver and azure, where the sea *without murmurs* meets the sky in a ring of magic *stillness*. (p. 66, italics mine)

Samburan is the perfect place for a final retreat: "The silence of his surroundings . . . favoured rather than hindered his solitary meditation" (p. 173). But a lack of sound - Heyst's "lifeless", cerebral silence - is ominous, even fatal: "A great silence brooded over Samburan - the silence of the great heat that seems pregnant with fatal issues, like the silence of ardent thought" (p. 218).

It is manifestations of sound that draw Heyst back into the world. The sound of the human voice is generally considered to be the origin of instrumental music. When talking of musical rhythms and tones on courtship amongst our half-human ancestors Darwin feels that "from the deeply-laid principle of inherited associations, musical tones . . . would be likely to call up vaguely and indefinitely the strong emotions of a long-past

age."⁸⁸ He goes on to state that "women are generally thought to possess sweeter voices than men, and as far as this serves as any guide, we may infer that they first acquired musical powers in order to attract the other sex."⁸⁹ Indeed it is the music of the woman's orchestra to which Lena is attached that draws Heyst reluctantly out of his silent world.

Consider:

He went out, his brain racked by the rhythm of some more or less Hungarian dance music. The forests inhabited by the New Guinea cannibals where he had encountered the most exciting of his earlier futile adventures were silent. . . . The distant sounds of the concert reached his ear, faint indeed but still disturbing. . . . Formerly, in solitude and in silence, he had been used to think clearly and sometimes even profoundly, seeing life outside the flattering optical delusions of everlasting hope. . . . But now he was troubled. (p. 82)

No wonder he is troubled; the music clearly represents the real, brutal, sexual world - the world of evolution. The music recital is described as "something cruel, sensual and repulsive" (p. 68), and yet he is drawn to it:

[Heyst] remained, astonished at himself for remaining, since nothing could have been more repulsive to his tastes, more painful to his senses, and, so to speak, more contrary to his genius, than this rude exhibition of vigour. The Zangiaco band was not making music; it was simply murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy. (p. 68)

When he finally takes Lena in an embrace, it is as though he cannot relinquish his cerebral realm of silence and fully admit the world of physical and emotional attachment, the world of "sound":

He put his arms around her, and only by the convulsive movements of her body became aware that she was sobbing without a sound. Sustaining her, he lost himself in the profound silence of the night. (p. 86)

But Lena does break the reign of silence, causing confusion in Heyst: "a light veil seemed to hang before his mental vision; the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman" (p. 82). The narrator uses the metaphor of a voice to convey the idea of the real, evolutionary world, the voice of the "original Adam" that Heyst's father is not able to silence entirely in his son:

The oldest voice in the world is just the one that never ceases to speak. If anybody could have silenced its imperative echoes, it should have been Heyst's father. (p. 173)

⁸⁸Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 572.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 573.

It is Lena's voice that fascinates and captivates Heyst more than any other feature: he finds that "the charm of her voice did not fail her even in whispering" (p. 80); that her voice has "all the charm of physical intimacy" (p. 221); he feels that she speaks in a "warm and wonderful voice which in itself comforted and fascinated one's heart, which made her lovable. . . . He thought that if she only could talk to him in some unknown tongue, she would enslave him altogether by the sheer beauty of the sound" (p. 209). It is not what she says but rather the musical, emotional effect of her voice that entrances him. It has a physical, even sexual, impact:

The rare timbre of her voice gave a special value to what she uttered. The indefinable emotions which certain intonations gave him, he was aware, was more physical than moral. (p. 188)

But once he has been won over to the world of sound, Heyst is still unfit for the battle with Ricardo over Lena. Darwin states: "with mammals the male appears to win the female much more through the law of battle than through the display of his charms"⁹⁰ and outlines the kind of weapons (horns, tusks) that animals employ in fighting over a mate. Drawing an analogy with humans he writes:

With savages, for instance the Australians, the women are the constant cause of war. . . . That excellent observer, Hearne, says [of the North American Indians]: - . . . "A weak man, unless he be a good hunter, and well-beloved, is seldom permitted to keep a wife that a stronger man thinks worth his notice."⁹¹

Heyst has lost his "weapons" - sexual, offensive and cerebral - with which to defend himself and Lena. At one point all he can muster is a round and blunt table knife (the phallic symbolism is unmistakable) with which to take on Ricardo's dagger and pistols.

Ultimately it is the power of love (Lena) and the power of carnal, sexual instinct (Ricardo) that prove the most potent, and leave the two ascetic gentlemen out in the cold. Ricardo represents pure lust: "Ravish or kill - it was all one to him, as long as by the act he liberated the suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long" (p. 288). And she defends herself with a clear picture of her love: "She defended herself in the full, clear knowledge of it, from the force of instinct which is the true source of every great display of energy" (p. 292). It is a struggle for the survival of the best (most moral, most loving,

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 500.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 561-2.

most "Christian") over the fittest (most adapted to the struggle for survival). And in the battle between love and egotistic lust it is Lena who wrests Ricardo's knife (a symbolic castration) and conceals it in her lap.

Sexual Degeneracy

The sexuality of *Victory* is not centred exclusively around Lena; indeed it is a theme that permeates much of the action. Gilman writes:

No realm of human experience is as closely tied to the concept of degeneration as that of sexuality. . . . The concepts of human sexuality and degeneracy are inseparable within nineteenth-century thought.⁹²

"Advanced" cultures, rather than "primitive", were seen as generators of degenerate sexuality and it was the city that was considered the site of decaying sexual mores. *Victory* is set on an idyllic, "Garden of Eden" island where nature rules and the "savages" practise, according to this line of thinking, a natural and "innocent" sexuality. Samburan is invaded by Europeans displaying a host of sexual "perversions": there is Heyst's asexuality, Jones' homosexuality, Lena's possible prostitution (Lombroso refers to prostitutes as inherently degenerate) and Ricardo's sadism and fetishism.

Ricardo is a voyeur, sado-masochist and fetishist who represents the perversion and sexual depravity of the city and of a degenerating age. He spies on Lena when she is doing her toilet and assaults her in an attempt to make her submit to him. He is a foot/shoe fetishist who says to Lena, "What you want is a man, a master that will let you put the heel of your shoe on his neck" (p. 397), and at one point he grasps her ankle, "press[ing] his lips time after time to the instep, muttering gasping words that were like sobs, making little noises that resembled the sounds of grief and distress" (p. 401). He talks of Lena dabbling her "white feet" in his "life-blood" (p. 396) and when she secures his phallic knife the narrator emphasises the point by saying: "The viper's head is all but lying under her heel" (p. 399). In Lamarckian terms, if the likes of Ricardo are allowed to breed profusely, the decline of *Homo sapiens* will be very rapid.

⁹²Sander L. Gilman, "Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration", p. 72.

Most critics agree that Jones displays homosexual characteristics, but few would go as far as Meyers' psychoanalytic reading in pursuit of the point.⁹³ Although his theories are at times tenuous indeed, Meyers' investigation into homosexuality in *Victory* does throw light on the aspect of degeneracy which interests us here. Whether or not Heyst is in fact a latent homosexual (and Meyers contends that his relationship with Morrison, his strange fellowship with Jones and sexual asceticism towards Lena suggest this), the crucial element for our evolutionary reading is that his "asexuality" or "impotence" can be seen as a manifestation of the kind of sexual degeneracy - a lack of virility amongst the elite - that was interpreted as symptomatic of the age.

Conrad presents Jones as a parody of what contemporary readers would have assumed a homosexual to be: he has feminine eyelashes and "beautifully pencilled eyebrows" (p. 384), a passionate hatred for women and is often seen attired in a blue silk dressing-gown. In the manuscript Conrad makes his homosexuality explicit when he associates Jones with Oscar Wilde. Jones says to Heyst:

Something has driven you out. The originality of your conduct perhaps. It was the case with me; only I wasn't going to go to prison for it and then weep publicly over my sins.⁹⁴

His misogyny can be read as a hatred of procreation, a hatred of the life force (although his murder of Lena is a mistake, it is consistent with his sentiments towards women): all the images of death that surround him are in accord with this interpretation.⁹⁵

Jones' perverse conception of women, his "life-denying" homosexuality and the imagery of death that surrounds him can be viewed in the light of what Freud calls the "death instinct". Freud explains it in evolutionary terms:

It must have been the evolution of our earth, and its relation to the sun, that has left its imprint on the development of organisms. The conservative organic instincts have absorbed everyone of these enforced alterations in the course of life

⁹³Jeffrey Meyers, *Homosexuality and Literature, 1890-1930* (London, 1977).

⁹⁴Manuscript of *Victory* quoted in Dwight H. Purdy, "The Manuscript of *Victory* and the Problem of Conrad's Intentions", *Journal of Modern Literature* 10, 1 (1983), p. 95.

⁹⁵Cedric Watts suggests that

Jones's melodramatic antipathy to women and Heyst's bitter misgivings about his alliance with Lena can both be related to Schopenhauer's philosophical misogyny. The philosopher argued that women serve the life-force of the species, the urge to procreate; for this purpose, they seek out their partners. The wise man, however, refuses to participate in the futile struggle of nature on this planet; he sees the whole process as pointless. (*The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots* [Brighton, 1984], p. 108)

and have stored them for repetition; they thus present the delusive appearance of forces striving after change and progress, while they are merely endeavouring to reach an old goal by ways both old and new.⁹⁶

And this goal, the instinctive goal of all life, is death, a return to the inanimate. Sexual instincts, by contrast are seen as the life instincts. In this, Freud admits, "we have steered unawares into the haven of Schopenhauer's philosophy for whom death is the 'real result' of life and therefore in so far its aim, while the sexual instinct is the incarnation of the will to live."⁹⁷ Both Conrad and Freud were Lamarckian in the sense that they believed that the "unconscious" held relics from a "primitive" past (as well as from infancy). The "death instinct" is thus a reversion to an earlier state, a regression into the past, into childhood and into the "infancy" of humankind. (The "death-instinct" is closely related to the "Nirvana-principle", the "struggle for reduction, keeping at a constant level, or removal of the inner stimulus tension";⁹⁸ and is this not the state Heyst strives to attain?)

At the end of the novel Jones, like Heyst, commits suicide and his body lies in a foetal position in the shallows.⁹⁹ He has returned to the watery element, to the womb: it is a reversion to the foetus¹⁰⁰ (we recall that Heyst Sr. also dies in a foetal position [p. 175]). It is also a symbolic return to an early stage of life on this planet: his body is committed to the sea from whence all life emerged. It must be remembered that the study of foetuses was popular in the late nineteenth century and many biologists believed that the human foetus passed through stages in the animal history of man during growth in the womb.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (London, 1922), pp. 46-7.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹⁹In *Body and Will* Maudsley remarks on the growing number of suicides in late Victorian society:

The multiplication of suicides from life-weariness or from impotence to face life's struggles: all these and the like maladies of self-consciousness, notably absent in the animal and uncivilised man . . . what are they but proofs that the highest achievements of thought sever the unity of man and nature and bring doubt and disillusion? (p. 327)

¹⁰⁰Jones' degeneration to "childhood" is suggested on a number of occasions, for example when his face takes on "an unpleasantly infantile expression" (p. 378); and Heyst even calls him and Ricardo "a pair of children" (p. 384).

¹⁰¹See Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, pp. 18-19. Ernst Haeckel, the nineteenth-century German zoologist, suggested that the tree of life might be discerned from the embryological development of higher forms. Thus the embryo supposedly passes through stages representing adult ancestral forms; for example, the human embryo displays evidence of gill slits and, at a later stage, a temporary reptilian or mammalian tail.

IMPERIAL SUBJECTS

The Oriental

I have already suggested that Lena strikes a balance between the physical and the cerebral and that she is in touch with her biological past. A woman on a man's island, she manages to find a place for herself, to effect change. Wang, the Chinese servant, is similarly marginalised, but he too finds a path of survival and formulates a way of life that shows up the deficiencies of his European counterparts. Ariel-like, Wang is, on one level, the perfect servant: he comes and goes in complete silence. Of course this can be read as an Orientalist stereotype; however Wang must also be considered the most perfectly evolved colonist on the island, the fittest to survive. His trick of materialising and disappearing, his ability to anticipate and avoid trouble, and the fact that he is the only settler remaining alive at the end of the novel place him very high on the "ladder" of evolution.¹⁰² This idea is reinforced in an image which shows the two extremes of human evolution: when the two servants, Wang and Pedro, work together, the Chinaman hands a kettle to his simian anti-type "as if across a chasm" (p. 244), a chasm of evolutionary time.

Like Heyst, Wang had been a drifter, a Chinese migrant labourer who has come to rest on Samburan, "like a swallow left behind at the migrating season of his tribe" (p. 178). But the Chinaman "acclimatises" and adapts to his surroundings quickly. Where Heyst refuses to consider crossing the barrier set up by the Alfuros, Wang does more than make contact with the native islanders; he marries one. On a metaphorical level he is opening up to the forest dwellers (the primal, the libidinal, the id) and from an evolutionary perspective he is acknowledging, and making peace with, his evolutionary past (his wife is a "primitive" and "wild creature" [p. 179]), and he is potentially

¹⁰²Early on in the novel, the narrator endorses the racist stereotype and establishes the "civilised" Chinese as fair-dealing and honourable. The Chinese owner of Davidson's ship has unlimited confidence in him and is concerned about Heyst's welfare on Samburan (p. 30). When Schomberg talks down to a Chinese servant in pidgin English, the dignity of the Chinaman is preserved at the expense of the European:

"Chinamen up the trees - Hey John! You climb tree to see the fight, eh?"

The boy, almond-eyed and impassive, emitted a scornful grunt, finished wiping the table, and withdrew. (p. 48)

promoting life on the island through miscegenation - he is the *only* settler who marries.¹⁰³ Darwin stresses the importance of cross-breeding for the propagation of a group of animals or humans:

It appears that a cross with civilised races at once gives to an aboriginal race an immunity from the evil consequences of changed conditions. Thus the crossed offspring from the Tahitians and English, when settled in Pitcairn Island, increased so rapidly that the island was soon overstocked.¹⁰⁴

Like a latter-day Robinson Crusoe, Wang sets about firing the indigenous undergrowth to make a clearing (of reason, sense, purpose), growing vegetables and building fences: he represents a kind of instinctive work-ethic and extends a disciplined mastery over his patch of island. "Heyst envied the Chinaman's obedience to his instincts, the powerful simplicity of purpose which made him appear almost automatic in the mysterious precision of its facts" (p. 181). His automatism indicates a more practical and "fitter" evolution. He is unhindered by Heyst's debilitating reflection and is free to think and act *automatically*. Thus Wang, member of an advanced and evolved civilisation, has found a way to retain the automatic, the instinctive, in his life, something that renders him better equipped for survival than the over-evolved Europeans.¹⁰⁵ He stakes a claim in the island and is prepared to defend that claim. Unlike Heyst he responds to his "simple feeling of self-preservation" (p. 307) when he senses that his position is threatened. He decides to steal Heyst's revolver and retreat to the Alfuro village there to defend himself against the invaders. At the climax of the novel Wang shoots Pedro, his evolutionary antagonist, and returns with his wife to the hut, sole survivor and, for all intents and purposes, Lord of Samburan, a Darwinian Crusoe.

¹⁰³During the Victorian and Edwardian eras miscegenation was considered a taboo, a manifestation of degeneration. In *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* and *Heart of Darkness* Conrad presents the "regression" into miscegenation of a white trader in the tropics. In *Outcast* people of mixed blood, like the de Souza family, are described as "degenerate descendants of Portuguese conquerors", "a half cast lazy lot . . . ragged, lean, unwashed, undersized men" (*An Outcast of the Islands* [1896; London, 1975], pp. 13-14). In *Victory*, Conrad has moved on from these stereotyped depictions and presents Wang's miscegenation as a life-affirming force.

¹⁰⁴Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁵Conrad takes Axël Auërsperg's statement about allowing the servants to do the living for them quite literally, thereby showing up the folly of such a stand-point.

The Alfuros

In *The Malay Archipelago* Wallace points out that there is an imaginary boundary line that runs through the region dividing the islands into two distinct racial groupings: the inhabitants of the west are of Malay origin and those in the east are Papuan. The Malay islands were influenced by Chinese, Arab, Hindu and European cultures while Wallace contends that the Papuans had made no advance towards "civilisation".¹⁰⁶ Samburan is a mythical island located just east of the Celebes, exactly on this biological "fault line", or "Wallace line" and Alfuros are a product of the mixing of these two "races", a "hybrid" belonging solely to a small number of "Wallace line" islands. The idea of such a biological fault line has built into it the conception of more and less civilised "races": in effect a "ladder" of anthropological progression. On Samburan all the characters are measured off on this scale, but the foreigners by no means hold a fixed position at the top of this projection of humanity.

Wallace warns that if the tide of colonisation were ever to reach New Guinea, the Papuan "race", "a warlike and energetic people, who will not submit to national slavery or to domestic servitude", would almost surely become extinct.¹⁰⁷ Darwin makes it clear that for an isolated island population, contact with a foreign civilisation can prove fatal. He mentions cultivation of the land, new diseases, vices and the introduction of alcohol:

It further appears that, mysterious as is the fact that the first meeting of distinct and separated people generates disease. Mr. Sproat, who in Vancouver Island closely attended to the subject of extinction, believed that changed habits of life, consequent on the advent of Europeans, induces much ill health.¹⁰⁸

Now the Alfuros, a group "quite distinct from the Malays, and almost equally so from the Papuans. . . . are an industrious and enterprising race"¹⁰⁹ who recognise the danger the foreigners pose and try to efface themselves, rather than resort to a suicidal confrontation with agents of Heyst's and Morrison's Tropical Belt Coal Company. They see the dangers and retreat from the invaders, vacating the land and trying to isolate themselves. Ironically these representatives of "old mankind", of a "prehistoric past" alive

¹⁰⁶ Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (1869; London, 1890), p. 450.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

¹⁰⁸ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 183.

¹⁰⁹ Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, p. 451.

in the present whom the whites consider to be "a mere play of shadows" (p. 167), are better suited to survival in a colonial environment, one in which the Europeans degenerate and become "extinct". They retreat behind a barrier of felled trees and Heyst explains that it is

a barrier against the march of civilisation. The poor folk over there did not like it, as it appeared to them in the shape of my company - a great step forward, as some people used to call it with mistaken confidence. The advanced foot has been drawn back, but the barricade remains. (p. 344)

Like the "black fellows" in the Africa of *Heart of Darkness* who "wanted no excuse for being there"¹¹⁰ the Alfuros are, stereotypically, in tune with their environment; they are represented as an organic part of nature. As Darwin says: "Ancient races stand somewhat nearer in the long line of descent to their remote animal-like progenitors"¹¹¹ and are thus, according to this logic, better adapted to the wild. When Lena and Heyst make a journey to the barricade, she is startled when she eventually notices that there are "several spear-blades protruding from the foliage" (p. 344). The bearers of these spears are never seen: it is as though the natives are a part of the vegetation. Of course Conrad is using the traditional myth that the "savage" is more in harmony with nature than the "fallen" white man, but it also suggests a Lamarckian adaptation to environment.¹¹²

Outpost of Empire

Social Darwinists were determined to derive moral prescriptions from the theory of evolution. The idea of progression through survival of the fittest and natural selection resulted in an irresponsible *laissez-faire* attitude to more than just economics. In the sphere of Empire it meant a justification for exploitation, expansionism and racist policies. In evolutionary terms, more advanced intruders arriving on a remote island (be they plant or animal) would usually have a distinct advantage over the relatively defenceless endemic population. On Samburan, however, foreign invaders (Wang,

¹¹⁰Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* in *Youth and Heart of Darkness*, p. 65.

¹¹¹Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 22.

¹¹²Edward Carpenter contended at the time that the harmonious "primitive tribe" derived strength by not being "divided into classes which prey upon each other; nor is it consumed by parasites", exactly the kind of descriptions that we can apply to the situation amongst the Europeans on Samburan (*Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure and Other Essays* [London, 1889], p. 9).

inverting Eurocentric terminology, calls the trio "strange barbarians" [p. 347]) who do not integrate themselves into their new environment - as the Chinaman does - are doomed to extinction (on the eve of a world war, which was in many respects a war about empire, it is significant that Conrad should write a novel in which the white population wipes itself out).

Conrad can be viewed as a cultural critic, a kind of armchair anthropologist, whose work is concerned with diverse cultures and the interaction between them. He was deeply critical of much of Europe's imperial exploits and novels such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo* are masterful illuminations of the social, political and psychological ramifications and ambiguities of the venture. He explored the idea that for colonists the "savages" posed the temptation of becoming "decivilised", of "going native" or returning to a "primitive" state (Almayer, Willems and Kurtz, for example). Moving away from the colder northern climes into the tropics was seen by some as fatal to European culture: degeneracy, miscegenation and perhaps even extinction would surely result from this displacement. Victorian ethnographic studies in "prehistoric" cultures led to Eurocentric and racist generalisations and stereotypes, and although Conrad's is a highly critical mind, the kind of primitivist language he uses in connection with the Alfuros must be seen in the light of the relatively naive anthropological discourse of the day. Although he deconstructs it, his writing is also partly a product of the imperial, anthropological and adventure writing of the time. These racist attitudes are seldom endorsed by the novelist, but they are everywhere apparent in the text: Morrison "refused to accept the racial whiteness of the Portuguese officials" (p. 13); the narrator talks of "common coolie[s]" (p. 178) and the "slanting eyes" (p. 290) of Chinese, and just as women are described as "incalculable quantities" (p. 275), Jones stereotypically calls the Chinaman "unfathomable" (268). The fact that the couple see themselves as "alone" on the island (Lena says: "There's no one here to think anything of us, good or bad" [p. 188], and Mr Jones also states that Heyst is "all alone here" [p. 265]) shows that they totally disregard the Chinaman and the natives. Jones puts his faith in European supremacy saying at one point:

Martin is much cleverer than a Chinaman. Do you believe in racial superiority, Mr. Heyst? I do, firmly. (p. 382)

Imperial claims were often predicated upon pseudo-anthropological assertions that "primitive" cultures were static and/or degenerate while European culture implied progress, a "correct" evolution. Thus the rape of an idyllic island by a coal company is not even questioned by the narrator: it is the march of progress, "a great stride forward for these regions" (p. 6) and therefore "good". However, particularly during the Edwardian era there was a growing concern about the imperial venture and the folding of the mine can be seen as a synecdoche for the decline of Empire and the decay of European civilisation:

That black jetty, sticking out of the jungle into the empty sea; these roof-ridges of deserted houses peeping dismally above the long grass! Ough! The gigantic and funeral blackboard sign of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, still emerging from a wild growth of bushes like an inscription stuck above a grave figured by the tall heap of unsold coal at the shore end of the wharf, added to the general desolation. (p. 42)

Words like "deserted", "dismally", "funereal" and "desolation" speak of the decline of Empire and in an age of steam, the image of a "heap of unsold coal" suggests waste and a lack of exploitation of resources. Later the narrator associates the demise of the commercial venture with the death of a living creature, noting "the decaying bones of that once sanguine enterprise" (p. 173); in the "company's clearing . . . the black stumps of trees stood charred, without shadows, miserable and sinister" (p. 217). Heyst is the tired inheritor of a long line of white empire builders and he is content to let it all slip into ruin while pursuing his own dreams - a decadent stance available only to the children of an established, over-ripe empire. He has lost that "daring and persistent energy" that is the hallmark of agents of the great colonising powers.¹¹³ So too Morrison whose philanthropic altruism and humanitarianism mean that his trading with natives leaves him permanently in debt.

For the white colonists, contact with "primitives" was seen as contact with our own biological past. This dreaded breaking down of barriers between cultures, between "civilised" and "savage" (something Conrad consistently achieves in his novels), can be

¹¹³ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 142.

linked to the breaking down of barriers within the self and between the subject and others. Heyst retreats into himself and refuses to cross boundaries; only when it is too late does he express a wish to be on the other side of the barriers he has created within himself and against the world (outwardly manifested in the Alfuros barricade):

"[The barrier] is a very ridiculous thing," Heyst went on; "but then it is the product of honest fear - fear of the unknown, of the incomprehensible. . . . And I heartily wish, Lena, that we were on the other side of it." (p. 344)

Although this is on one level a wish to be behind a wall again, by crossing into the symbolic enclosure of the Alfuros, Heyst would have to take cognisance (in Lamarckian terms) of the "primitive" within himself. For Heyst this is a step closer to rehabilitation.

THE END

Critics are divided in their interpretation of the ending of *Victory*: opinions vary between viewing it as an "affirmation" of life or seeing the tenor of the book as working against such a reading and arguing that the novel is rather a negative surrender to nihilism, to life-denying forces.¹¹⁴ Is the title ironic or is there still a victory to be won despite the universal pessimism, the degeneration and atavism of civilisation and the fear of the imminent end of the world?

Lena's acts of sacrifice are certainly "victories" for altruism and love; although Conrad did not wholly approve of the kind of total (Christian) self-abnegation and self-sacrifice that Lena finally resorts to - he saw a need for balance between altruism and egoism. Heyst's Schopenhauerian cerebration has led him deeper and deeper into the self while Lena has found a purpose to life. Her heart had "found its solution in a blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose" (p. 367) and she is "prompted, not by her will, but by a force that was outside of her and more worthy" (p. 394): the force of altruism and selfless love. But her actions fail to bring Heyst entirely out of his pensive shell and even on her death-bed he cannot find it in himself to reach out and touch her. It is only after her death, and largely because of it, that he fully understands the moral implications of his own reticence and withdrawal. His suicide through immolation - "fire purifies everything" (p. 410) -

¹¹⁴Baines, mistakenly I believe, calls Heyst's suicide "the conclusive act of renunciation of life", "an act of total despair" (*Joseph Conrad*, p. 476).

must be seen as an equivocal victory. On the other hand, coming at the end of a novel in which the protagonist has been unable break free of the world of idea, of being, this final act, albeit a renunciation of life, is in effect an affirmation of the qualities Lena sought to awaken in him. He refuses to go on living without her and makes the existential choice of love and action over nihilistic denial. "Humanity may be on the brink of evolutionary regression, the sun may be going out, but Heyst's three acts - the salvation of Morrison, the rescue of Alma/Lena, and his choice of final renunciation - are all affirmations of faith, energetic affronts to an uncaring fate."¹¹⁵ In his final dialogue he is forced to lament: "Woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love - and to put its trust in life" (p. 410). This is surely an admission of the failure of his father's philosophy and a tacit acceptance of the qualities of hope, love and trust in life.

But the victories are equivocal for the obvious reason that it takes a series of deaths to bring Heyst to his epiphany and that suicide is the only "positive" answer available to him. The "purification" of his self-immolation is a total refinement to being-in-itself, the Schopenhauerian "idea", and is the *outcome* of his inability to fully exercise his negation of the world.¹¹⁶ The novel's affirmation is also equivocal in the sense that Heyst's and Lena's "victories" occur within the setting of a decaying outpost of empire, and within the milieu of general European degeneration. The ending seems to be a willed and faint smile of fortune, on the part of Conrad, in the face of his profoundly sceptical *Weltanschauung*. The affirmation comes very late in a long novel in which the forces of evil, of evolution and of nihilism have held sway and is for these reasons unconvincing.

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Victory is an exploration of retreat from the evolutionary world-as-will, and the consequences of that withdrawal, and demonstrates how instincts - the irrational and the

¹¹⁵Spittles, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 159.

¹¹⁶From an evolutionary perspective the fact that Heyst is reduced to "embers" (finally he is one with his glowing volcanic twin) and then "ashes" (p. 410) is significant in relation to the imagery surrounding coal and diamonds with which the novel opens. Heyst reduces himself to the same chemical compound as these elements; he quite literally becomes an organic part of nature again.

biological - reassert themselves and reclaim the islanded self. It shows scepticism and nihilism to be the dry-rot of humanity. Over-refinement is depicted as bringing unhappiness while intuitive and instinctive feelings and actions are vindicated. It is a novel that endorses human solidarity in the face of whatever evolution has to throw at us. Heyst is granted certain existential choices in life and Conrad seems to be saying that these bring with them certain responsibilities: one remains accountable to oneself and to the community. If one ceases to act upon those responsibilities, a degeneration of one kind or another appears inevitable. In Heyst the novelist exposes the sceptical and pessimistic side of his own nature, tests it in the laboratory of an isolated island, and finds it wanting. Perhaps, from a different perspective, it is not a character or a moral code that is the final victor. Considering Conrad's extended Darwinian metaphor, it is rather Samburan that ends up the hero of *Victory*. Colonists come and go in biological and geological time, but the island remains, swallowing up generations of inhabitants as it does Heyst:

He marched into the long grass and vanished - all but the top of his white cork helmet, which seemed to swim in a green sea. Then that too disappeared, as if it had sunk into the living depths of the tropical vegetation. (p. 29)

4 *LORD OF THE FLIES*

INTRODUCTION

William Golding engineers the microcosmic island world of *Lord of the Flies* in such a way as to eliminate any distracting elements. The island setting allows him to implement his, almost allegorical, technique and reduce the number of optional readings of the text, making the meaning as transparent as possible. Early in his career he was adamantly against interpretations of his "fable" (he preferred to think of his writing rather as myth-making) that did not accord with his own intentions. Consequently, with reference to *Lord of the Flies*, he rejected Freudian interpretations and claimed vociferously that he had never read Frazer's *The Golden Bough* or Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

The boys were below the age of overt sex, for I did not want to complicate the issue with that relative triviality. They did not have to fight for survival, for I did not want a Marxist exegesis. If disaster came, it was not to come through the exploitation of one class by another. It was to rise, simply and solely out of the nature of the brute.¹

As much as he tried, like Prospero, to retain mastery over his island, critics have deconstructed his creation and found exactly the kind of readings he sought to exclude. It has been interpreted variously as a moral, social, political and religious fable and subjected to countless, often tenuous, readings. In time he came to acknowledge the autonomy of his texts and by 1970 he was to say to Jack Biles: "What is in a book is not what the author thought he put in, but what the reader gets out of it; so your guess is as good as mine."²

My project will be to trace the boys' regression from "civilised" to "primitive" and show how Golding implies both an evolutionary anthropological and a symbolic biological regression back to primordial, and even animal, stages in the development of our species. I will also consider the development of the concept of evil, demonstrating how at different times in the history of *Homo sapiens* man has identified the source of

¹William Golding, "Fable" in *The Hot Gates and other occasional pieces*, (London, 1984), p. 89.

²Quoted in Jack I. Biles, *Talk: Conversations with William Golding* (New York, 1970), p. 58.

evil variously as the father, as an animal, as Beelzebub, as Dionysis, as Satan, but very rarely as the self (something that comes largely with Darwin). At the same time I will explain why the author draws such close analogies between nature, the island setting and the human colonisers. In following such an approach it is important that one not lose sight of the text itself and Golding's aims, as I think Claire Rosenfield's narrow Freudian reading does (see below). His novels are complex, obscure and dense and to reduce them to any single formula would detract from the object of the structure: to throw light on the nature of man. It is imperative that one does not drown the author's voice with a bulldozing interpretation. Indeed, Golding has provocatively denounced Marx, Darwin and Freud as "the three most crashing bores of the Western world"³ and condemned them as being reductionist: "I had assiduously read some of the writings of all three. It came to this at last, that I left the procession and went looking for my own belief."⁴ More particularly he denounces the unthinking acceptance of their philosophies: "the simplistic popularization of their ideas has thrust our world into a mental straightjacket from which we can only escape by the most anarchic violence."⁵ However, this claim comes a considerable time after the publication of *Lord of the Flies* and it is unlikely that he did have a solid grounding in any of these. Had he read Darwin, I think Golding would have found his methodology and style most appealing. Nonetheless, we can safely assume that Golding had at least a working knowledge of these seminal thinkers: a twentieth-century writer simply cannot avoid them. Indeed, the fact that he calls them "crashing bores" is precisely because they are so ubiquitous, a part of the *Zeitgeist*. What he is fighting against is the reduction of his own work, and its explication (and reshaping) in terms of outside systems of thought; as Philip Redpath points out, there are parts of his novels that he wants to remain inexplicable.⁶ My anthropological, evolutionary and psychoanalytic approach takes these objections into account and is, of course, only one of a great number of possible readings, and not necessarily one intended by the author. However my

³Golding, "Belief and Creativity" in *A Moving Target* (London, 1982), pp. 186-7.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁶Philip Redpath, *William Golding: A Structural Reading of his Fiction* (London, 1986), p. 31.

approach does reinforce, often throw into greater relief, and in some cases shed new light on ideas that are central to an understanding of the text.

There are a number of factors that greatly influenced the creation of *Lord of the Flies* which are relevant to my reading of the novel that I would like to briefly discuss by way of introduction to my main argument. Firstly Golding's childhood fears of the "primitive" and of the darkness in man, his Christian education and his experience of World War II set the biographical tone for the book's meditation on evil. His knowledge of (pre-Darwinian) island stories, particularly the popular Victorian variety for boys, can be seen as an appropriate foil to his distinctly post-Darwinian tale. Similarly his reading of classical Greek literature furnish him with themes and structures which occur in *Lord of the Flies* and in much of his later fiction. The Greeks provide Golding with long-existing ideas concerning the nature of man which he interprets through post-Darwinian spectacles. The above areas of inquiry will serve as an important background to the body of the chapter which will deal with anthropological, psychoanalytic and biological interpretations of Darwin as they arise in the text.

Biographical

Golding's experience of World War II profoundly influenced the way he conceptualised human nature and society:

Before the second world war I believed in the perfectibility of social man; that a correct structure of society would produce goodwill, and that therefore you could remove all social ills by a reorganization of society. It is possible that today I believe something of the same again; but after the war I did not because I was unable to. I had discovered what one man could do to another. . . . I believed then, that man was sick - not exceptional man, but average man. I believed that the condition of man was to be a morally diseased creature and that the best job I could do at the time was to trace the connection between his diseased nature and the international mess he gets himself into.⁷

This chapter will illustrate how Golding uses evolutionary and anthropological ideas to illustrate that "sickness" in man. The war showed him the cruelties and darkness of which we are capable and he came to understand that it was wrong to isolate Nazism without recognising the potential for brutality in all humans. Relatedly the dropping of the atom

⁷Golding, "Fable", pp. 86-7.

bomb added an apocalyptic element to future warfare and Golding's post-nuclear pessimism, his consciousness of degeneration and even extinction, is apparent in *Lord of the Flies*.

Although he grew up in a household headed by an extremely rational father, from an early age there were stirrings in the young Golding's mind concerning the irrational, "the existence of primitive undercurrents in an otherwise enlightened and commonsensical world."⁸ As a child he would sit inviolate in a big chestnut tree in the garden and watch the world of adults unfurl beneath him.⁹ In *The Inheritors* there is a scene in which two Neanderthals hide unnoticed in a tree and watch the terrifying but compelling world of *Homo sapiens*. This connection between a "primitive" or "prehistoric" past and childhood was something that intrigued the novelist. In his essay "The Ladder and the Tree" he talks of "the darkness of the churchyard behind the house" and of his fascination for Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*.¹⁰ At Brasenose College, where he first studied science (and the experiment he conducts on the island recalls the laboratory of his student days) and then changed to literature, he revealed his scepticism regarding the "scientific humanism" and the rationalism with which he had been inculcated in a series of poems. In his satirical "Mr. Pope" the protagonist complains to God that "the stars are rather out of hand" and enjoins them to be "trim and neat".¹¹ His fascination for the irrational serves to highlight his mistrust of neo-classical reason, man's belief in an ordered universe. These structures (be they social, political, religious or moral) had, throughout history, failed to prevent the "beast" in man from raising its head. It is his intention to reveal to us what is basic to human nature, to show us man *sub specie aeternitatis*. As he suggested in an interview with Owen Webster, modern man had to learn "to live fearlessly with the natural chaos of existence, without forcing artificial

⁸Arnold Johnston, *Of Earth and Darkness: The Novels of William Golding* (Columbia, 1980), p. 2.

⁹Jeanne Delbaere suggests that Golding's lonely childhood influenced his nature: "On the whole Golding seems to have had a rather isolated childhood, which partly accounts for what might be called his 'island complex'" ("From the Cellar to the Rock: A Recurrent Pattern in William Golding's Novels" in Jeanne Delbaere (ed.) *William Golding: The Sound of Silence: A Belgian Tribute on his Eightieth Birthday* (Liège, 1991), p. 2.

¹⁰Golding, "The Ladder and the Tree" in *The Hot Gates*, p. 170.

¹¹Golding, *Poems* (London, 1934), p. 26.

patterns on it."¹² This is a tall order for a group of adolescent school boys who desperately cling to the societal structures they remember and, when these fail, there does not seem to be anything that will break their headlong fall to savagery.

Victorian Island Paradise for Boys

During the nineteenth century there arose a number of children's books which capitalised on the enduring popularity of *Robinson Crusoe* and it was the South Sea island that became firmly established as the perfect setting for the playing out of the castaway dream. Martin Green contends that by the middle of the nineteenth century fictions of this sort "were part, in some ideal sense, of a well-advertized best-education-for-boys. We stand on the verge of a global adventure ground, a tourist industry, of Fantasy Islands."¹³ Novels such as Wyss' *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812), Marryat's *Masterman Ready* (1841), Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858), Verne's *The Mysterious Island* (1875) and Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) became important "educational" texts in the imperial context. Many of these novels involve the maturation of children on an island, the creation of a "colony" and the gradual assimilation of adult, European values. In the case of *The Coral Island* the absence of any parental guidance makes the development of the three castaway boys into model empire builders all the more powerful. This chapter will show how Golding deconstructs the kind of Victorian assumptions and values that are enforced in a novel like Ballantyne's, focusing on the issues that distinguish a pre- and post-Darwinian fictional island. In *Lord of the Flies*, society has been unable to provide the foundation it did for the nineteenth-century schoolboys and Golding's children undergo an evolutionary regression, returning to a "savage" state of nature very different to the one envisioned by Ballantyne.

Much British children's literature of the last century unashamedly displayed colonialist ideology and tried to inculcate the idea of national harmony and supremacy. It represents an idealised account of the colonial and imperial enterprise: the appropriation of an uninhabited (thus removing the sticky issue of dispossession) paradise surrounded

¹²Golding quoted by James R. Baker, *William Golding: A Critical Study* (New York, 1965), p. 57.

¹³Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story* (Pennsylvania, 1990), p. 116.

by water (not hostile lands). Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* draws on the concept, which stretches back at least as far as Rousseau, that children are essentially good and if left alone, will recreate the civilised elements of their society.¹⁴ Due to their superior heritage and utilising their Victorian skills the boys soon dominate the environment. As Peterkin Gay says at the beginning of *The Coral Island*,

We've got an island to ourselves. We'll take possession in the name of the king; we'll go and enter the service of its black inhabitants. Of course we'll rise, naturally, to the top of affairs. White men always do in savage countries.¹⁵

This statement echoes Jack's arrogance soon after landing on the island: "After all we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything".¹⁶ Ballantyne's boys must assert their masculinity, moral-superiority and maturity in the face of the cannibalistic, virile and yet "child-like" other (Ballantyne's "savages" conform closely to the contemporary racist stereotypes concerning "primitive" cultures). Nowhere does he acknowledge the connection between the aggressive "manly" qualities he reifies and the boys' "savage" or animal origins. Through their missionary zeal they win a victory for both Christianity and "civilisation". Cannibalism, native atrocities and the contrast between the neat and attractive village of the Christian "savages" and the chaos of the idol-worshipping ones are cited as "proof" of the just cause of their mission. *The Coral Island* is a glorification of empire, of war and implicit is the notion of perfectibility and of the "innate" superiority of the Anglo-Saxon males. At no time does Ballantyne question the superiority of his heroes; however, as Golding was well aware, from a sophisticated post-Darwinian perspective, knowledge of our biological heritage casts doubt on any notion of a social or biological "ladder" and renders moral justification for the colonising mission untenable.

Brian Street points out that the antecedents of the concept of the "child-like primitive" lie in the English romantic writing where the "noble savage" is identified with the child in

¹⁴Thinkers like Rousseau felt that if man were cut off from Church and State, he would derive a better education from nature, and by suspending the rational he would intuitively begin to understand the unity of man and nature. Linked to this is the idea of the noble savage, living in harmony with his environment. In an industrialising Europe the dream of an escape to nature became a potent one, and where better than the hermetically sealed desert island?

¹⁵R. M. Ballantyne, *The Coral Island* (1858; Oxford, 1990), p. 16.

¹⁶Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (1954; London, 1979), p. 47.

a state of nature.¹⁷ During the course of the nineteenth century ethnographic accounts, in conjunction with an increasingly sophisticated understanding of Darwin, gradually dispelled these illusions, however the notion that "savages" represented a previous stage of European development temporarily rejuvenated the idea of the "primitive" as a "child" on the "ladder" of human evolution (Europeans naturally representing the adult). In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor explains the theory of animism using the analogy of our childhood attitude to inanimate objects. The fact that children imbue objects with a life force is compared to the notion that "primitives" see spirits everywhere, evidently not having developed beyond the child stage. Street goes on to point out that the theory of "survivals", for instance comparing "primitive" customs with children's games, was still supported well into the twentieth century:

Elements of activities, which were once serious and which still are for many primitive peoples, live on in fossilised form in the games of civilised children, whose play with bows and arrows, finger counting and so on, has outlived the serious practices that are being imitated. This was and often still is made to bear the further inference that savages are like children.¹⁸

Victorian writers were reluctant to turn this equation on its head and say, *ergo* children are like "savages", something that Golding eagerly takes up.

Throughout this chapter I will be making frequent reference to *The Coral Island*, the novel that is the acknowledged foil for Golding's story. However there are two texts, not remarked upon by critics, that the novelist must certainly have had in mind at the time of writing: E. R. Burroughs' two Tarzan books. These stories are the most famous of a number of similar (Lamarckian) tales in which European babies are reared in a "primitive" setting and yet somehow retain their "civilised" breeding. Tarzan, son of Lord Greystoke, is raised by apes in the West African jungle. He feels innately superior to both the apes and the native inhabitants he encounters. He takes cold baths and longs for clothes, houses and books: one generation of jungle living is not enough to erase his British aristocratic breeding. Golding had definitely read Burroughs¹⁹ and employs the same convention of placing young European children alone in an isolated natural

¹⁷Street, *The Savage in Literature*, p. 68.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁹See Bernard S. Oldsey and Stanley Weintraub, *The Art of William Golding* (New York, 1965), p. 6.

environment, but his intention is to lay bare the myth of innate civility (it is indeed ironic that his most aristocratic character, head boy and chapter chorister, Jack Merridew, should fall the lowest).

Golding challenges the Victorian assumptions inscribed in Ballantyne's paradise island (embodied in the gung-ho officer who appears at the end of *Lord of the Flies* and berates the boys for not having put up a better show) by using elements of the previous tale and twisting or inverting them to create an anti-utopia which refutes the morality of *The Coral Island*. A mid-Victorian, pre-Darwinian ethics that is racist, complacent and self-assured is replaced by a Darwinian morality of survival. He is writing in the disillusioned post-war period of withdrawal from empire. In the intervening century Darwin, Marx and Freud (and perhaps Hitler should be added to this list) have made the Ballantyne island scenario an impossibility. The breaking up of the British Empire led to the production of texts that captured the feeling of despair and disillusionment: an anti-adventure, anti-colonial - in effect an "anti-Robinson Crusoe" - mood of withdrawal had set in. It was easy to be rational and complacent while the sun never set on the Empire, but the light of British rule was dying all over the globe and Golding tapped into the unconscious fear that amidst this decay, a return to savagery was possible anywhere, even on this little British island (a feeling reinforced by his experience of war).

Golding uses the same tropical island setting as Ballantyne and his main characters have the same names, Ralph and Jack, while Peterkin is recast as Simon. Stranded on a desert island both sets of boys find it a fulfilment of their dreams and see the situation as a wonderful game: they build sand-castles, go exploring together and resolve to hunt pigs. Ballantyne evokes a pastoral scene, a pre-Darwinian idyll where nature is benign; whereas in *Lord of the Flies* nature is far less accommodating. The "littluns" suffer from diarrhoea caused by their diet of unripe fruit, the jungle is dense, hot and damp; the nights are dark and terrifying. The longer they remain on the island, the more they become aware of hostile elements. Ballantyne's children seem to be free of Original Sin - their island is a playground of fun. In Golding, however, the idea of Original Sin is again apparent: there has definitely been a fall. And in a post-Darwinian world that fall has

much in common with our evolutionary "descent". He examines his boys against a much altered moral landscape and allows his emissaries from civilisation to regress and behave like the cannibals and pirates of the former tale. Golding says of *The Coral Island* in connection with his own book: "As like as not they would find savages who were kindly and uncomplicated and that the devil would rise out of the intellectual complications of the three white men on the island itself."²⁰ He is questioning the idea of progress and perfectibility (of white European males in particular) implicit in so much Victorian fiction for and about children.

Thus Golding makes it his task to deconstruct the South Seas island myth and he takes as his starting point the discordant elements in the nineteenth-century novel that Ballantyne brushes over, the "fissures" in that particular text. The militarism of the boys, their virile masculinity and their quest for total domination of others are taken for granted as virtues. Similarly evil, in the shape of cannibals and pirates, is presented as something diametrically opposed to the boys' own nature. However there are moments in the text when even Ralph begins to wonder whether or not the scenes of blood-shed are having an effect on the trio, for instance when he witnesses Jack's rage, the rise of the "animal" within: "[The savages] were awe-struck at the sweeping fury of Jack, who seemed to have lost his senses altogether, and had no sooner shaken himself free of the chief's body than he rushed into the midst of them, and in three blows equalised our numbers."²¹ Similarly Peterkin kills a sow, useless for eating, in a most violent way:

Suddenly he levelled his spear, darted forward, and, with a yell that nearly froze the blood in my veins, stabbed the old sow to the heart. Nay, so rigorously was it done that the spear went in at one side and came out at the other!²²

But Ralph too is fascinated by violence: "I felt my heart grow sick at the sight of this bloody battle, and would fain have turned away, but a species of fascination seemed to hold me down and glue my eyes upon the combatants."²³ Similarly, although sexuality is never mentioned among these virile young men, the nakedness of wrestling "savages"

²⁰Golding interviewed by Frank Kermode, "The Meaning of it all", *Books and Bookmen* 5, 1 (October 1959), p. 10.

²¹Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, p. 179.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 127.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 173.

does draw their attention: Ralph is "struck with the beauty of many figures and designs that were tattooed on the persons of the chiefs and principal men."²⁴ Thus it seems as though the boys have begun to succumb to, or at least acknowledge, a certain kinship with the "savagery" and sexuality they see about them, but these suggestions of "atavism" are not followed up by the novelist. Golding, however, makes it his task to pursue them.

The Greeks

Golding was deeply influenced by the Greek dramatists, Euripides and *The Bacchae* in particular, and it proves fruitful to examine the debt the novelist owes to them in his representation of sacrifice and ritual. This discussion will also serve as an apt introduction to an anthropological discussion of the boys' society.

James Baker has always been a strong supporter of the influence of classical Greek literature on Golding, and particularly on *Lord of the Flies*, and he suggests that this text and *The Bacchae* have the same aims:

[*The Bacchae's*] aim is precisely what Golding has declared to be his own: "to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature," and so to account for the failure of rational man who invariably undertakes the blind ritual-hunt in which he seeks to kill the threatening "beast" within his own being.²⁵

In the play, which also takes place on an island, the god Dionysis leads the daughters of Cadmus against King Pentheus because he has denied the god recognition, and prohibits his worship. In a wild bacchanalian orgy the devotees destroy the kingdom and tear the king, whom they take to be a lion (or in Ovid's version, a boar), limb from limb (just as the hunters do Simon). Pentheus' head, impaled on the point of a thyrsus, is then paraded for all to see. Those who had denied the god are shown the folly of their ways and cast out of their homeland. E. R. Dodds contends that Dionysis was "the principle of animal life . . . the hunted and the hunter - the unrestrained potency which man envies in the beasts and seeks to assimilate." The bacchanal serves "to liberate the instinctive life in man from the bondage imposed upon it by reason and social custom."²⁶ Dionysis was worshipped in many animal incarnations (notably the boar) and the incarnation became

²⁴Ibid., p. 241.

²⁵Baker, *William Golding*, p. 7.

²⁶E. R. Dodds, *Euripides "Bacchae"* (1944; Oxford, 1960), p. xii.

symbolic of the impulses evoked in the worshippers. The punishment for resisting the elemental animal drive was the destruction of the civilisation. Piggy and Ralph attempt to impose reason and order on the island, but, like Pentheus, they neglect to take the "Dionysian" within them into account and suffer the consequences. Ralph, like Agave in *The Bacchae*, mistakenly takes part in a killing and must live with the guilt and with an understanding of man's capacity for savagery. At the end of the novel the ritual hunt for Ralph, the current incarnation of the beast, corresponds to the hunt for Pentheus: it is Ralph's head that is destined for Jack's "thyrsus".

In his introduction to *The Bacchae* G. S. Kirk has pointed to many forms of the Bacchanalian and of maenadism in diverse societies: the fascination for eating raw flesh, the balancing and falling to the ground amongst the Abyssinians, dervishes and Kwaitiutl Indians, for example.²⁷ Orgiastic rites, scapegoats and sacrificial victims, the incarnation of evil in a feared beast - these are elements that occur in "primitive" societies, just as they do in sophisticated classical Greece and, as Golding shows, they are present in the very fabric of our own society. In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer traces the "primitive" practice of killing an animal incarnation of the god, and points out that in the original myth of Dionysis, the god (in the shape of a bull) was himself ripped to pieces by the Titans.²⁸ Frazer also states that in some places a human incarnation, often a child, was torn apart instead of an animal.²⁹ In art, Dionysis is often represented as a head on top of a leafy upright post; similarly, the worship of the head of an animal that is considered a god occurs in many societies (as it does on the boys' island). Indeed some North American Indian tribes render ceremonies to the sacred animal, begging it to allow itself to be eaten.³⁰

If we consider the ego-id polarity with relation to Ralph and Jack (see below) and add a Nietzschean slant to Euripides, we find on the island a symbolic confrontation between the Dionysian and Apollonian aspects of the psyche. On one level the confrontation takes the form of a battle between Piggy's and Ralph's rational world and Jack's world of

²⁷G. S. Kirk in his introduction to Euripides, *The Bacchae* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 7.

²⁸J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* II (1890; London, 1900), p. 165.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 168.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 403.

hunting, but on another level it is an internal battle within the consciousness of each child (most graphically illustrated in Ralph's moments of abandon).

Hence Golding's knowledge of the Greeks compliments his familiarity with standard anthropological and archaeological (and thus evolutionary, as a knowledge of both anthropology and archaeology entails a course in basic Darwinian thought) concepts and systems of thought, manifestations of which are implicit in the text.

ANTHROPOLOGY

By the middle of the twentieth century Darwinian thought was *diffused* and *diluted* into many areas of intellectual enquiry and was available to thinkers in many different forms. A "tributary" of evolutionism had flowed into the "Victorian" science of anthropology and Golding would have acquired much of his Darwinism via his readings in archaeology and anthropology.³¹ In the following sections I will examine the social and religious structures of the boys' society from an anthropological perspective and show how it degenerates from a loose "parliamentary", class stratified and nominally Christian society to a despotic tribal and cannibalistic one that displays elements of a primordial, even pre-*Homo sapiens* "culture".

Democratic Society

In both *The Coral Island* and *Lord of the Flies* the boys annex the island (with the arrogance of the traditional British castaway Ralph claims possession of the island upon arrival: "This belongs to us" [p. 31]) and try to set up a microcosmic utopian society along the lines of the adult Britain they have left behind. In the case of Golding's boys they establish a rudimentary government and laws, shelters are constructed, plumbing arrangements are made and assemblies held to make decisions. In the Victorian era it was

³¹Baker reminds us that Golding had "a sound knowledge of recent archaeological and anthropological literature, but it is difficult to trace some of Golding's details to specific sources" (*William Golding*, p. 29). Golding had certainly done considerable reading in archaeology, as he admits to Biles in *Talk*, p. 106). R. A. Gekoski, Golding's bibliographer, corroborates this in a private correspondence with myself in which he states that "Golding was very well read in archaeology and, to a lesser extent I think, anthropology" (Faber advised me against disturbing the Golding family with a request to see the novelist's personal library).

believed that "primitive" societies represented immature political systems and that the Anglo-Saxon "race" displayed all the virtues of democracy:

Such specifically Anglo-Saxon attributes as reason, restraint, self-control, love of freedom and hatred of anarchy, respect for law and distrust of enthusiasm were actually transmissible from one generation of Anglo-Saxons to the next in a kind of biologically determined inheritance.³²

Initially the boys display the same assumptions.

Their society is centred around the precious conch they have found in the lagoon. It is used to call meetings and when a boy holds the shell in his hands he is given a chance to have his say. It becomes a symbol of democracy and freedom of speech, the mace of their society. Throughout the novel Jack stands in opposition to the power of the conch, trying to trivialise it - and the voices of dissent and debate that it condones - and establish his own dictatorship: "We don't need the conch any more. We know who ought to say things" (p. 111).

As time passes the conch, like their democracy, becomes faded, brittle and bleached white like a skull. Near the end of the story Piggy holds out the shell as a talisman of civilisation in the face of the tribe and challenges them to accept democracy and order, but by this stage the shell has lost all symbolic meaning for the boys. Moments later Piggy is killed, the conch explodes "into a thousand white fragments" (p. 200) and as Piggy's brains spill from his shattered skull we make the connection between the shell and the seat of consciousness (and their opposite: the pig's skull on a stake).

Roger and Maurice knock down the littluns' sand-castle and the "complex of marks, tracks, walls, railway lines" (p. 65) in a re-enactment of the destruction of civilisation happening in the adult world. And when Roger throws stones (aimed to miss) at Henry early on in the novel, "Roger's arm was conditioned by a civilization that knew nothing of him and was in ruins" (p. 67). Piggy thinks that life is "scientific", rational and logical and believes in government by persuasion and debate. But his faith in "grown-up" society is misplaced - it is, after all, adult politics of war that has stranded them on the island in the first instance. In this little society Piggy is the oracle of reason and it is to him that we

³²L. P. Curtis, *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridgeport, 1968), p. 8.

turn for the voice of civilisation. Golding thought of the boy as a scientist, a technocrat, and an agnostic who refused to believe in the presence of beasts and ghosts in the rational world.³³ Golding mocks Piggy in an attack on the (mid-Victorian) idea that science could be a substitute for a "religious" understanding of human nature and the "supernatural": for scientists of this persuasion the irrational and instinctive elements of human nature simply did not exist. Man is protected from his own nature by science and society, which cushion him from true self-knowledge. Golding demonstrates the inadequacies of Piggy's "scientific" vision, of his failure to acknowledge the natural and spiritual dimensions of life, symbolically in his literal and metaphorical short-sightedness. Piggy does not realise that the beast may be buried within the very rules and rationality he upholds.

Thus the veneer of civility soon begins to wear off and their position at the top of the social evolutionary "ladder" starts to look tenuous. They become dirty and scruffy, ablution arrangements go by the board, the shelters are rickety, the boys get distracted and allow the signal fire - their main hope of rescue - to go out. By the end of the novel fire rages across the island destroying the shelters and the platform where they had held their assemblies. And the naval officer who rescues them will only return the boys to a world where the breakdown of civilised debate has led to an atomic war, a replication of the disintegration of their island world on a grand scale. The novel demonstrates the inability of societal structures and conventional morality to control aggression. Ralph remarks at the beginning that the island is "roughly boat-shaped" (p. 31) and because of the prevailing current it felt as though "the boat was moving steadily astern" (p. 31); so too their little ship of state. Their assembly area is also in the shape of a boat. Ralph sits at the base of the rough triangle, that is the "stern", while no-one sits up at the "prow": "at the apex, the grass was thick again because no one sat there" (p. 84). The prow, position for the figure-head on a sailing ship, should be where Ralph takes up his seat of authority. The moral code of the sea, the utopian society of a ship's company that Conrad admired so much, will not be replicated here. Indeed the four assemblies (first neat rows, then

³³Biles, *Talk*, pp. 12-13.

increasingly ragged) trace a decline towards chaos and the forging of a tribal unit. In the chapter "Beast from Water" we see how their parliamentary system (hunters sit on the right, "liberals" on the left) crumbles in the face of superstition and fear, and how Jack's undemocratic alternative becomes the only effective form of government. All the victims can do is protest impotently "out of the heart of civilization" (p. 198).

But Golding does not want us to reify society and civilisation, believing that it will cure the innate ills of human nature.³⁴ Political organisations and social systems have never been able to stop man's cruelty and lust: it is only by recognising and coming to terms with the evil in man that a political system can attempt to control it. Ultimately a society depends on the ethical nature of the individual and not on external structures. Civilisation denies its own darkness, pretending it does not exist, or exists only in others. However Golding does see society as an important restraining mechanism and he does recognise a "savage state of nature" as potentially evil (in this respect he shares Ballantyne's basic assumption³⁵):

On the whole, the fall off the straight and narrow tends to be a fall into something worse than one would be otherwise. So that society, taken whole, is a good thing. It enables us to use our bright side. When we fall off, we fall off into our dark side.³⁶

In *Lord of the Flies* the thin veneer of societal ethics is peeled away and man is left with his innate being, forced to face his own darkness. Like the savagery at the heart of Kurtz's jungle in the Conrad tale, the boys go to ruin in the absence of the restraining hand of society. Just as the evil heart of Europe had been laid bare during the rule of Hitler and the Nazis, so Jack's reign of terror brings out the latent evil in all the boys.

Regarding the democratic society the boys try to forge it is interesting to observe how they retain their class prejudices in the island. In *Victory* we saw how the lower classes threatened the effete, upper class world of Heyst and Jones, however in the hot-house of

³⁴Golding reveals the irony of Ralph's complete faith in society, expressed in his longing for England:
His mind skated to a consideration of a tamed town where savagery could not set foot. What could be safer than the bus centre with its lamps and wheels? (p. 182)

³⁵Where Ballantyne's interpretation of savagery is along racist lines, Golding implies that the removal of societal and religious structures has the potential to bring out the latent savagery in everyone. The fact that Golding equates the return to evil and savagery with a return to a "primitive" state (equated with contemporary "savages") is perhaps less permissible and could be interpreted as being implicitly, if unwittingly, racist.

³⁶Biles, *Talk*, p. 43.

Golding's island it is the boys from privileged backgrounds who are in the majority and are thus the dominant endemic "breed". Under the leadership of Jack, public school hierarchies are recreated and we can see just how "tribal", how inherently xenophobic, racist and classist, those structures are. (We recall how Ballantyne celebrates the public school ethos, how the boys would rather go without their breakfast than their cold morning bath.) In an autobiographical essay Golding writes in strangely Lamarckian terms of his antipathy towards the class system: "the English scheme of things . . . so accepted social snobbery as to elevate it to an instinct".³⁷ And it is Piggy, an outsider largely by virtue of his working class or lower-middle class accent, that bears the brunt of it. Jack, aristocratic head-boy and leader of the choir, lover of "rugger" and corporal punishment, takes an immediate dislike to Piggy. It is also appropriate that he, perhaps with blood sports in his ancestry, should become the most ferocious hunter of the tribe. Apart from laying bare the reality of the English class structure, Golding reveals that the system is also a "beast" that requires propitiation in the form of the victimisation of Piggy. The class system is shown to be a manifestation of fear of the other, an anthropological "survival" from a tribal past (rather than a biological inheritance - as Darwin had ably demonstrated).

Arnold Johnston suggests that the early Golding novels make use of the Darwinian (Marxist and Freudian, one might add) notion that patterns of nature will get repeated in civilisation through sublimation and socio-economic pressure, that our instincts will be identifiable in the way society conducts itself.³⁸ Thus a morality of survival of the fittest and a Nietzschean will to power starts to assert itself on the island and takes the form of discrimination or persecution of anyone that is other, the most obvious victim being Piggy, a member of a different class.

Christian Isle

Lord of the Flies is full of biblical references and it is not surprising that there have been a number of Christian readings of the text. Hence Ralph, standing naked under the

³⁷Golding, "The Ladder and the Tree", p. 168.

³⁸Johnston, *Of Earth and Darkness*, p. 38.

palm trees at the beginning of the novel, is Adam; Jack, an ugly red head, is associated with Satan, Judas, and with idolatry³⁹; while the choir, whose "voices had been the song of angels" (p. 147), become Satan's henchmen; Simon is the Christ-figure who is sacrificed after discovering the truth on the mountain; the repeated images of falling (the parachutist from the sky, the conch and Piggy to his death, Ralph's "nightmares of falling" [p. 211]) allude to the Fall of mankind; beasts from air, water and land recall the *Book of Revelations* and the burning island at the end of the novel is similarly an apocalyptic image; while the "coming" of the naval officer holds no promise of a golden millennium.

Despite the fact that the novel is infused with religious allusions and a basic Christian morality, it seems to me that a narrow theological reading of the text as a parable about Original Sin and the Fall limits our full understanding and it is certainly not the novelist's intention to produce a religious text. For Golding, original sin divested of its original mythological meaning, becomes the first *knowing* submission of man to his own innate evil, a succumbing to the "animal" within. His idea of the biblical Fall incorporates evolutionary development. He suggests that the fall of man is not the result of a single rebellious act, but the inevitable concomitant of the ability to progress from acceptance to mastery, from an unreflective natural state to intelligent, self-conscious control. What is particularly significant with respect to my interpretation, is that these biblical allusions often double as anthropological observations and we begin to see the continuity between Christianity and "primitive", pre-Christian religions. In this light the slide from chapter chorister to chanting "savage" does not seem such a preposterous one. Indeed the work of anthropologists had introduced the idea of evolution into theology and had proved that many elements of Christianity were "survivals" - ones that would now be considered

³⁹The boys externalise their fears in the form of a "beast" for which they leave propitiatory offerings. This is in effect what the Bible would term "idolatry", which David Anderson succinctly defines as follows:

Men put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Idol worship thus comes to be associated with violent physical stimulus, sexual excess and perversion, cruelty, violence, human sacrifice, and so forth. All this is a product of the distorted psyche, but it is cast onto a demonic reality which makes it far more terrible and destructive. (David Anderson, "Is Golding's Theology Christian?" in Jack I. Biles and Robert O. Evans [eds.] *William Golding: Some Critical Considerations* [Lexington, 1978], p. 7)

The island's chief is described as just such a worshipped figure: "Jack, painted and garlanded, sat there like an idol" (p. 164).

heretical - of earlier religions. For instance the references to snakes (the snake-clasp on a school-boy belt, the snake-thing of their dreams and the writhing creepers going up in flames) obviously allude to the serpent on their Edenic island. But they also refer to the animal within the boys' own hearts and the return to savagery that takes place on the isle.⁴⁰ Thus the serpent comes to represent our distant animal past and the idea of the Fall suggests a metaphorical anthropological and evolutionary regression. Much of the remainder of this chapter will be investigating and accounting for this fall.

PATH OF REGRESSION

We have noted how Darwin stresses that evolution progresses in gradual steps, but tacitly admits that biological change "in reverse" may be very rapid. I will demonstrate exactly how the novelist uses this idea as an extended metaphor and show how the biblical Fall gains an added dimension as a fall backward in "anthropological" and even biological time. The action of the *Lord of the Flies* is structured in such a way that there is ever-increasing tension: the novel races towards its denouement. This has the effect of speeding up their regression; the atavistic fall gains momentum like a rolling rock.

Darwin devotes a chapter to the inhabitants of oceanic islands and although he confines his discussion to animals and trees, it is interesting to consider his findings in relation to the English schoolboys. He notes that an herbaceous plant that had no chance of successfully competing with the many fully developed trees on a continent, might, when established on an island, gain an advantage over other herbaceous plants by growing taller and overtopping them.⁴¹ The boys land on just such a desert island where the processes of natural selection and survival of the fittest can take place without any external influences from the continental or adult world. Here they will metaphorically re-enact stages in the history of the Earth from an anthropological and biological perspective.

⁴⁰On another level Dionysis was sometimes represented as a snake, and thus its presence on the island ushers in the Bacchanalian.

⁴¹Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 381.

The moral, psychological and temporal journey back into the heart of darkness begins when one of the little boys mentions the "snake-thing" of his nightmares. The intrusion of a snake triggers the fall from grace and the irrational fear that is "mankind's essential illness" (p. 97). An unconscious process is set in motion which admits evil into their paradise and the tide of primal darkness wells up to take possession of the boys. In this respect the conflict between Ralph, the far-sighted leader, and Jack, the self-appointed chief of the hunters corresponds to an ego-id polarity. Ralph is the level-headed and practical leader while Jack, representative of the id, soon reverts to savagery, dishonesty and violence.⁴² Thus beneath the surface appearance of an English Protestant choirboy lies hidden another biological inheritance which is quick to take possession of him. He uses the "beast" of fear and unreason as an enemy and employs his hunters to "protect" the others from it, thereby justifying his disregard for the rules of their society. What is more disturbing is Ralph's inability to make a strong enough stand for the principles of civilisation: we recall that he too is intoxicated by the thrill of the hunt, that he too has a hand in Simon's murder. His own regression is symbolised in his return to habits of his early childhood:

[His nails] were bitten down to the quick though he could not remember when he had restarted this habit nor any time when he indulged it.

"Be sucking my thumb next - " (p. 120)

Similarly there are those moments of blindness when a "shutter" clicks down over his rational mind and his intellect cannot make any headway.

When Ralph blows on the conch he sets an almost irreversible series of events in motion. The mournful, animal-like sound of the shell is like a call of the wild, reminiscent of the beat of drums in Conrad's Congolese jungle. It acts as a primordial call down the ages, so unmistakable that no boy fails to respond (in the Pacific basin the conch is one of the oldest means of long-distance communication and therefore metaphorically appropriate for the calling of the first assembly). The process of regression follows a number of stages and Golding employs certain images or ideas repeatedly throughout the novel to convey this idea. Each time they are used they gather

⁴²L. L. Dickson, *The Modern Allegories of William Golding* (Tampa, 1990), p. 24.

more significance and symbolic weight: for instance the use and abuse of fire, the throwing of stones, children's games, hunting, dancing and rituals (areas that are evidence of the novelist's archaeological and anthropological background). I will briefly trace the path of decent^s using these symbols as co-ordinates.

Fire has been an important tool and symbol for man since primordial times; it came to represent civilisation and reason, as well as the power of destruction and the flames of Hell. After arriving on the island the boys acknowledge the necessity of keeping a signal fire going if they want to be rescued. However the flames of the first fire get out of hand and the jungle is set alight, at least one of the boys perishing in the inferno. Golding's personification of the fire suggests that it is something powerful, evil and yet seductive: it has a primordial allure and it fascinates the boys. Wood "yields passionately" to the fire which thrusts out a "savage arm of heat" (p. 45). When the fire was still small the flames "crawled" and "scrambled up like a bright squirrel" (p. 48), something to delight the boys, but it soon grows into a "jaguar [that] creeps on its belly towards a line of birch-like saplings" (p. 48): the human saplings are overawed. The forest became "savage with smoke and flame" and the fire sounded like a "drum-roll" (p. 49) - an ominous proleptic allusion to the deaths to come. Ralph became "savage" at the sight of the power set free while Piggy "glanced nervously into hell" (p. 49). The writhing creepers look just like snakes to the littluns - where Eden is serpentless man will forge one with his imagination (alchemically in a hellfire of his own devising). The boys recognise their own capacity for destruction; it is a graphic warning of the will to power and of the savagery that the smallest flame can ignite.

Attempts to keep the signal fire alight (kindled each time with the help of Piggy's spectacles - both symbols of reason) fail dismally. The littluns are easily distracted and Jack's choir allows the fire to go out when they are off hunting. Even Ralph begins to lose sight of the importance of the fire and feels a yearning to throw in the towel of reason:

"Without the fire we can't be rescued. I'd like to put on war-paint and be a savage. But we must keep the fire burning. The fire's the most important thing on the island, because, because - "

He paused again and the silence became full of doubt and wonder. (p. 156)

When a "beast" in the form of a dead parachutist lands on the mountain where they have their signal fire, the flame of reason and rescue is extinguished permanently. Just as unreason replaces reason, the signal fire is replaced by a cooking fire on which to prepare the pigs that the tribe have killed. In a re-enactment of the primordial quest for fire, Jack first steals burning logs from Ralph's enclosure, but later his warriors come terrorising the camp at night and make off with Piggy's glasses: they have gained the "technology" of fire which, in evolutionary terms, was a considerable step forward for early hominids. When a storm threatens, the boys dance in a circle around the fire carrying burning faggots with which to ward off the danger. At the end of the novel the warriors try to smoke Ralph out of his hiding place, but again the flames get out of control and fire rages across the island. Tropical paradise turns into a charred, apocalyptic landscape in which ululating savages (one could almost call them cannibals here) try to roast their enemy alive. The fire destroys their shelters and the platform (locus of reason) where they had held their assemblies: "A flame, seemingly detached, swung like an acrobat and licked up the palm heads on the platform" (p. 221). Earlier we made the connection between saplings and boys: here the suggestion of palm heads being "licked" and eaten symbolically carries the image of the beheading of the sacrificial pig into the realm of the little boys (see "Cannibalism" below).

Boulders, rocks and stones are also employed as symbols of regression. On the one hand the rock is emblematic of reason: platform rock is the "foundation stone" of their tiny society. When Ralph tries to make the children understand the weight of his logic he realises that he must "drop words like heavy round stones" (p. 86). However stones become both a threat and a temptation. When a party go exploring for the first time they find a rock the size of a motor car poised on the edge of a cliff and cannot resist the temptation to push it over the edge (Ballantyne's boys witness the horrifying effect of a rock-fall, but never think of creating one themselves). They are delighted when it smashes into the canopy of trees "like a bomb" (p. 30). The reference to a bomb (and later a "tank" [p. 213]) is significant as it points to the destruction of the adult world which is here being replicated, in the form of play, on the island. When Roger picks up the first

stone and casts it at Henry it is the start of a pattern and a first step backwards. Although he aims to miss, the laws of a civilised world are rapidly fading and the temptation to inflict pain, to let the animal out, is palpably close: "a darker shadow crept beneath the swarthiness of his skin" (p. 68). Towards the end of the novel it is again Roger who, standing on top of Castle Rock (again rock is associated with military purposes), leans "with a sense of delirious abandonment" (p. 200) on the lever that sends a boulder crashing down and killing Piggy. The well-known children's rhyme "sticks and stones may break my bones . . ." has become a terrifying reality. Like a rock hurtling down a hill, their regression to savagery grows apace through the novel. The transition from little boys throwing stones at each other to big boys lobbing atom bombs seems an easy one.

During the course of their stay on the island "innocent" children's games turn nasty. They play at being settlers and empire builders like the boys in *The Coral Island* and they form themselves into gangs as children on a playground would do (one gang will be hunters). They play war games, pretend to be "savages" and take delight in putting on warrior paint. But before long games become reality: here there is no school bell to call them back into class before things get out of hand. I will trace one significant game, the hunt, and show how meaning gathers around it, how it turns into something deadly serious.

At the beginning of the novel Jack decides that his choir boys will be hunters, which initially sounds like a child's game of "pretend", just like Ralph machine-gunning Piggy from his imaginary fighter-plane (p. 12) or Roger kicking down sand-castles. Similarly, at first Jack finds himself unable to stab a trapped piglet during the hunt, unable to break the blood taboo. But as soon as the first pig is killed a divide appears between the hunters and the rest. When Jack accidentally "smudged [pig's] blood over his forehead" (p. 77) it is as though a baptism in blood or an initiation of some kind has been performed. Soon he posits the thrilling world of hunting as an alternative to rescue; the fulfilment of primal lusts over the boredom of tending a signal fire. Atavism proves very seductive to the children.

After they have eaten their first meat, they stage a re-enactment of the hunt:

Then Maurice pretended to be the pig and ran squealing into the centre, and the hunters, circling still, pretended to beat him. As they danced, they sang.

"Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Bash her in." (pp. 81-2)

Maurice, obviously well-versed in the kind of Victorian books for boys we have already mentioned, with their pseudo-anthropological observations about "primitives", suggests the form their ceremonies should take:

"You want a fire, I think, and a drum, and you keep time to the drum."

"You want a pig," said Roger, "like in a real hunt."

"Or someone to pretend," said Jack. "You could get someone to dress up as a pig and then he could act - you know, pretend to knock me over and all that - " (p. 127)

Of course the "and all that - " serves as an unspoken hiatus from whence stems all the tragedies that befall their society.

As the boys revert to savagery, the mock-hunt becomes a ritual. Intoxicated by their bloodlust, the temptation to inflict pain is overwhelming and the chant becomes more specific, changing to "*Cut his throat*" (emphasis mine).

The circle moved in and around. Robert squealed in mock terror, then in real pain. . . . All at once, Robert was screaming and struggling with the strength of frenzy. Jack had him by the hair and was brandishing his knife. (p. 126)

Even Ralph, who takes a stand against the atavism set in motion by the hunters, is thrilled by the game: "Ralph too was fighting to get near. . . . The desire to squeeze and hurt was over-mastering" (p. 126). And when it is over he tries to convince himself that it is all still a game:

"That was a good game."

"Just a game," said Ralph uneasily. "I got jolly badly hurt at rugger once." (p. 126)

But the demarcation line between play and reality has already become blurred. The hunts get more brutal and the ritual recapitulations more hypnotic. During a storm when they are dancing around the fire in a frenzy, it is one of their own, Simon, rather than a pig, who is sacrificed. In the storm they derive security from their ritual: "the complementary circles went round and round as though repetition would achieve safety of itself. There was the throb and stamp of a single organism" (p. 167). When the centre of the ring "yawned emptily" (p. 167) the ritual preordained that there should be a victim and if it was not recognisably a member of the inner circle, it would be treated as a pig. By the end of the novel there is no more pretence: a full scale manhunt is under way.

SOCIAL DEGENERATION

The concept of the mask releases the "savage" within and allows the boys to form a "primitive" society and religion, both of which I will examine in detail from an anthropological perspective. I will then demonstrate how Golding integrates his knowledge of "prehistory", primordial man, and cannibalism (derived from his interest in archaeology and anthropology) into *Lord of the Flies*.

Mask

Golding's use of the mask as a device behind which his characters hide their inhibitions could be derived from Greek theatre. However, in "primitive" society the mask fulfils a similar function and the Greek theatrical convention is certainly an adaptation of earlier forms of mask. Similarly warrior paint and camouflage, distortion and disguise have been a part of warfare from "prehistory" to the present. The mask grants the wearer greater self-confidence, releasing him from shame, and terrifies an enemy or victim. Jack tells Roger that camouflage will confuse the pigs, " - like moths on a tree trunk" (p. 68). This allusion recalls Darwin's explanation of mutation to facilitate the propagation of species: on Golding's island the "fittest" will be those with warrior paint on their bodies. When Jack stares at his reflection in the pool and begins to apply red and white clay and charcoal to his face, he re-enacts an archetypal depersonalising of the subject:

He looked in astonishment, no longer at himself but at an awesome stranger. . . . Beside the mere, his sinewy body held up a mask that drew their eyes and appalled them. He began to dance and his laughter became a bloodthirsty snarling. He capered towards Bill and the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness. (p. 69)

It is behind the mask of "savagery", symbolised in the war paint, that all the atrocities are committed. During the hunt and ritual dancing the boys become one with their mask: it liberates the boys from social taboos and "licences" inhuman conduct. It allows the subject to hide his own identity and reduce the "other" to an equally depersonalised state, that of an entity. Thus when Roger looks down from Castle Rock and is about to lever the boulder onto Piggy, "Ralph was a shock of hair and Piggy a bag of fat" (p. 199).

Indeed, things are not as they appear: nature has its own set of masks. Darkness has the effect of defamiliarising the jungle making it something "dim and strange as the bottom of the sea" (p. 62). Similarly the sunlight in the middle of the day creates mirages: "The glittering sea rose up, moved apart in planes of blatant impossibility" (p. 63). This imagery is carried into the human world and leads Ralph to speculate on the nature of identity. He considers how the late afternoon light changes things: "Their faces were lit upside down, like - thought Ralph, when you hold an electric torch in your hands", and thinks to himself: "If faces were different when lit from above or below - what was a face? What was anything?" (p. 85). Stripped of the everyday masks we wear, man's nature becomes defamiliarised and more easily decipherable, but remains opaque to Ralph. It will be up to Simon to discover the man behind the mask.

Tribal Society

With the help of the mask the "savage" within is released and Ralph's fragile democracy is gradually replaced by the kind of primitive, "pre-social" despotism to which Ballantyne's boys thought they were immune: Jack's social system resembles that of the warring, corrupt society of the Fijians in *The Coral Island*. (Street points out that Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau had accustomed Europeans to talk of a "pre-social" state to be found in the New World where "political institutions were racially inferior and historically prior to those of Europe."⁴³)

When the boys fail to attract the attention of a passing ship, they watch the "smoke of home" (p. 73) disappearing over the horizon. The phrase suggests that the atomic war has reduced their homeland to a smoking ruin. During the Cold War some were of the opinion that a nuclear conflict would bomb the world back into the stone age and, in a sense, that is what has happened in Golding's story. The traditional Victorian image of the "primitive", coloured by accounts of explorers in the Americas, Africa and the South Seas, was that of a band of naked or semi-naked "savages" covered in war paint standing

⁴³Street, *The Savage in Literature*, p. 130.

with spears on some deserted beach. And this is exactly the scenario the naval officer confronts when he lands on the island.

Gradually the boys divest themselves of clothing and begin to look like true "savages". They become badly sunburnt and then their bodies turn a dark brown, almost the colour of "primitives"; their hair grows long and matted with twigs and leaves. Jack says: "Bollocks to the rules" (p. 100), and he and his hunters secede to form a tribal society with rituals, totems and taboos, and do not flinch from killing those who threaten them (Simon, ritually as a sacrificial beast, and Piggy, a political enemy). They become like the Yahoos: filthy, quarrelsome and unable to maintain a rational, peaceful society, such as that of the Houyhnhnms.

Golding turns the idea that "savages" are immature, like European children, on its head and graphically demonstrates the innate savagery of children. He shows that aggression is latent in everyone and is instinctive, and where there are no restraints on violence, it grows exponentially. Jack manages to tap into, and exploit their fears to suit his own ends (as leaders have done throughout history), promising that he will kill the beast if there is one (we recall that even when Ballantyne's boys hear screaming in the night, they remain fearless). At one assembly Ralph can only look on "open-mouthed" as Jack actually insights fear among the littluns: "Serve you right if something did get you, you useless lot of cry-babies!" (p. 90). His band becomes structured along the lines of a stereotypical "primitive" tribe, geared towards defence against anything alien⁴⁴: they barricade themselves in a "castle", they dance in a circle, sacrifice pigs and leave propitiatory offerings for the "beast". As in some tribal societies, the hunt becomes a ritual test of strength amongst the braves. When Jack triumphantly hangs Piggy's spectacles on his belt, it is a scalp that signifies his defeat of "civilisation" (just like the notches representing each kill in the hilt of his knife). Now, when Jack speaks, warriors

⁴⁴Street points out that in many tribes aliens are considered as entirely other:

Among the Lugbara, strangers - people outside the boundaries of Lugbara society - are conceived of as representing the exact opposite, morally and physically, of the in-group. . . . Such stereotypes of "outsiders" are commonly based not only on lack of knowledge but on a positive desire to accentuate the unity of the in-group by emphasising the differences and particularly the vices of other groups. (Ibid., p. 49)

Of course this is exactly what happens to Ralph at the end of the novel when he is hunted as an "enemy".

on either side of him are compelled to chant: "The Chief has spoken" (p. 155). He has truly become one with the "monster" chief of *The Coral Island*. There are rituals, initiation ceremonies (the smearing of blood, the application of warrior paint, the beating into submission of new initiates such as "Samneric") and a form of "justice" in the tribe which includes corporal punishment (Roger fulfils the role of torturer and hangman). Rituals allow the boys to liberate themselves from their own inhibitions and it is through the structure of ritual surrounding the beast that the boys are able to express their fears.

Primitive Religion

Like their parliamentary system, Christianity also fails to prevent the growth of a tribal authoritarianism: the choir boys easily exchange their black cloaks and hats for warrior paint. They quickly cast off all vestiges of their Christian upbringing and do not bother to mention their religious background, or resort to prayer, again. In the Ballantyne novel we see how Ralph never omits to say his prayers and how Christianity triumphs and the idols of the Fijian "savages" burnt: "Fire was put to the pile, the roaring flames ascended, and amid the acclamations of the assembled thousands the false gods of Mango were reduced to ashes!"⁴⁵ Just as the transition from savagery and idol-worshipping chaos to orderly Christianised society appears a simple step for the Fijian "savages", the regression to a "primitive religion" based on fear and "false gods" is swift for Golding's boys.

Terrified of the dark jungle the boys conform to Aldous Huxley's description of such "savages": "The sparse inhabitants of the equatorial forest are all believers in devils."⁴⁶ Street suggests that the idea that "primitive" man's dreams are the origin of religion was given authority by Herbert Spencer, who proposed that when a dead person appeared in dreams (in "Clonk Clonk" the hominids are afraid of "the dreams that walked"⁴⁷), the "primitive" assumed that the deceased ancestor still existed in another life - such "ghost figures" were worshipped as "gods". (Tylor's theory is very similar, but places less

⁴⁵Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, p. 335.

⁴⁶Aldous Huxley, *Do What You Will* (London, 1929), p. 114.

⁴⁷William Golding, "Clonk Clonk" in *The Scorpion God* (London, 1971), p. 91.

emphasis on the ancestors.⁴⁸) "Primitives" pictured souls and spirits as very similar to humans and it was only in the course of a long development that they lost their material characteristics and become "spiritualised".⁴⁹ The boys have regressed to such a stage and the dead airman becomes for them just such a spirit.

In the Tarzan tales "primitive" religions are made fun of as superstitions while the boys on Golding's island forge a similar "religion", leaving propitiatory offerings for the "beast" just as the natives in the Tarzan stories. Where Tarzan begins to think about God (his religious development in effect traces the course of belief from "primitive" superstition to "civilised" religion), Golding's boys reject their Christianity and regress down the "ladder" of "spiritual" evolution (I use the Eurocentric, Christian conception of a theological "ladder").

Malinowski claimed that, in general, amongst "primitive" tribes we find magic "where the element of danger is conspicuous"⁵⁰ - hence the magic surrounding hunting and the "beast". Jack becomes religious leader as well as chief, and it is up to him to interpret the actions of the "beast", as for instance when Stanley wants to know whether it disguises itself:

"Perhaps," said the Chief. A theological speculation presented itself. "We'd better keep on the right side of him, anyhow. You can't tell what he might do." (p. 177)

As shaman/witch doctor figure Jack rules by manipulating their fears and superstitions, but he also needs to produce "results". "Evil" must be manufactured if it is not apparent: new incarnations need to be found in order to justify his position. We must assume that after Ralph has been sacrificed there would be a vacuum to fill - a new enemy would have to be found - and someone from within the tribe might well be chosen as the new threat.

⁴⁸Street, *The Savage in Literature*, p. 172.

⁴⁹Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, (1913; London, 1950), p. 76.

⁵⁰Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (1948; London, 1974), p. 140.

The Inheritors

It is clear that Golding was using models from "primitive" society in the creation of the tribal community of his island, but it is also evident, as I will demonstrate below, that he had primordial, even Neanderthal models in mind. The evolutionary regression I have already mentioned "reduces" the boys to the level of man's distant ancestors. I have established that Golding was well-read in archaeology and it is evident from the novel he published only a year after *Lord of the Flies*, *The Inheritors*, that he was fascinated by the creative possibilities a return to the primordial afforded.⁵¹ As Virginia Tiger says of Jack's tribe: "Anthropologically the society is a mirror of the first, primitive societies of prehistoric man; its progress illustrates a biological maxim now fairly well discredited: that the development of the individual recapitulates in capsule time the development of the species (ontology recapitulates phylogeny)."⁵²

In *The Inheritors* Golding challenges the Wellsian conception of *Homo neanderthalensis* as a cannibalistic ogre and presents him rather as a gentle creature in a prelapsarian state, while *Homo sapiens* is the animal who brings evil and immorality into the world. Golding turns Darwin's "descent of man" into a literal descent (as opposed to the implied ascent). A pre-self-conscious, pre-intellectual condition is depicted as being "innocent": accordingly the biological "ascent" is a "fall". When Golding's boys first arrive on the island their thoughts and behaviour appear similar to those of the Neanderthals before they encountered *Homo sapiens*. They inhabit Edenic surroundings and Golding describes them as "accepting the pleasures of the morning, the bright sun, the whelming sea and sweet air, as a time when play was good and life so full that hope was not necessary and therefore forgotten" (p. 63). This recalls his description of the Neanderthal's way of life: "Life was fulfilled, there was no need to look further for food, tomorrow was secure and the day after that so remote that no one would bother to think of it."⁵³ But the boys' biological inheritance places them in the camp of the New Men, the inheritors, and as a result evil - and guilt - rises naturally from within each of them

⁵¹Similarly in the short story "Clonk Clonk" Golding reveals to us the way of life of a small band of our ancestors more than 100 000 years ago.

⁵²Virginia Tiger, *William Golding: The Dark Fields of Discovery* (London, 1974), p. 43.

⁵³Golding, *The Inheritors* (London, 1955), p. 61.

("innocent" Johnny is said to have a "natural belligerence" [p. 65] while Ralph "might make a boxer" [p. 10] - they are built for the struggle to survive): it is a product of their ability to think and reason. As Golding says: "The quality of innocence in Neanderthal man is a very sad thing, inseparable from ignorance; whereas, perhaps, in boys intelligence and evil are not inseparable, but parallel things, as a matter of genetics."⁵⁴

The inheritors, like the boys, establish themselves on an island. No longer in touch with nature they are fearful of beasts, of the darkness and of each other. Their superior intellect allows them to make sophisticated technological advancements, but it also creates superstitions and irrational fears. These New Men, like the boys, build a stockade against the "enemy", post armed look-outs, fashion weapons (in "Clonk Clonk" the tribesmen carry fire-hardened spears just as Jack's hunters do). Marlan, like Jack, is both religious and political leader: he rules by fear, uses his magic to pronounce on religious matters and produces feasts to keep his followers content. The boys vacate the mountain when the parachutist lands there and the inheritors flee their island when they encounter "devils". When they decide to hunt and exterminate the "ogres", Pine-tree allows a finger to be cut off as an offering to the totem and a stag's haunch is left on a stake: the boys also leave part of the kill as propitiatory offering for their beast. The tribe, like the island children, ritually enact the "killing" of the stag before setting off on the hunt and in both stories it is an innocent who is made scapegoat and slaughtered. Golding shows us that man's essential nature has not changed in the thousands of years that separate the boys from the New People.

Another parallel between the inheritors and the boys on the island is the question of progress and, on a wider scale, evolutionary "ascent". In this respect the idea of the fall gains an added dimension. As Virginia Tiger points out,

the evolutionary life force drives the New People upwards - the word that always attends their description in the book - and forward, at a higher level of energy than that which the People possessed. Something thrusts the New People up the river, some pained need to widen the world, as well as manipulate it.⁵⁵

⁵⁴In Biles, *Talk*, p. 109.

⁵⁵Tiger, *William Golding*, p. 94.

One might add that Neanderthals are people of "the fall": their awakening self-consciousness - as a result of contact with *Homo sapiens* - is a fall from a primordial, undifferentiated consciousness. Some meet their deaths (after they encounter the fallen inheritors) by falling or by being swept *down* stream by the current that the New People are able to paddle against in their canoes. Concomitantly, the boys in *Lord of the Flies* are associated with an evolutionary "descent" (recall the symbolic fall of their aeroplane, of the parachutist, of Piggy and of the conch). Implicit in this notion is that twentieth-century man has over-reached himself and begun to tumble back down the "ladder" of social evolution that the New People had struggled to climb.⁵⁶

Cannibalism

In *The Inheritors* the New People murder and eat Liku in a drunken cannibalistic orgy (and we will recall that in *The Coral Island* most of the "savages" also practice anthropophagy). Marlan convinces his tribe that killing and consuming the child will serve both their religious needs and their hunger.⁵⁷ And it might be inferred that the same fate awaits Ralph when he runs from the manhunt. Here I will examine the anthropophagic elements in *Lord of the Flies*: the allusions to human/Neanderthal sacrifice, decapitation and the burning or consuming of human flesh.

When the boys first try to cook meat over the fire, the narrator notes that almost as much human flesh is roasted in the process (p. 80). Castle Rock is like a head that is separated from the island by a narrow "neck" (p. 193) of land (when chasing Ralph the hunters "swarm" like flies across the neck). The rock will, in a matter of centuries, become severed by the action of the sea (p. 115). When Roger peers down at the "enemy"

⁵⁶The ladder is an important image for Golding, encompassing the idea of ascent and fall. In his essay "The Ladder and the Tree" he writes of progress in terms that could as easily apply to a moral or evolutionary "ladder":

Rules, declensions, paradigms and vocabularies stretched before me. They were like a ladder which I knew now I should climb, rung after factual rung and Sir James Jeans and Professor Einstein were waiting at the top to sign me on. . . . But the ladder was so long. In this dreary mood of personal knowledge and prophecy I knew that I should climb it; knew too that the darkness was all around, inexplicable, unexorcised, haunted, a gulf across which the ladder lay without reaching to the light. (p. 174)

⁵⁷The sacrificial killing and eating of a human as a scapegoat has been noted in the ethnographic studies of many tribes throughout the world.

from Castle Rock he sees that "the boys on the neck stood in a pool of their own shadow, diminished to shaggy heads" (p. 194). This is clearly a proleptic image, particularly given Roger's murderous disposition, and we would be justified in reading into it: "pool of their own *blood*" and "*severed* heads". The image of flies buzzing around the pig's head "like a saw" (p. 152) reminds us of the animal's decapitation, and when the insects gather around Simon, we draw an analogy between the two (the flies also settle on the face of the dead airman). Furthermore, when Simon confronts the pig's head he imagines a symbolic act of cannibalism: "Simon was inside the mouth" (p. 159). The image is reinforced later when "the mouth of the new circle crunched" (p. 168) closed on Simon, and when sea creatures enact a symbolic decapitation: "The strange, attendant creatures, with their fiery eyes and trailing vapours, busied themselves round his head" (p. 170). (We remember that earlier on in the novel these creatures were described as being "like a myriad of tiny teeth in a saw" [p. 66].) His murder is also presented in "cannibalistic" terms:

At once the crowd surged after it, poured down the rock, leapt on to the beast, screamed, struck, *bit*, *tore*. There were no words, and no movements but the *tearing* of *teeth* and *claws*. (p. 168, emphasis mine)

These veiled allusions to decapitation⁵⁸ and anthropophagy are reinforced by Jack's and Roger's desire to impale Ralph's head on a stake which corresponds with a cannibalistic urge. Lévi-Strauss makes the connection between the two:

What we find is that the problematic of cannibalism and head-hunting is one and the same, and it is doubtful if we need to separate two customs that, moreover, often appear together. Whether in Indonesia among the Atoni . . . or in America among the Jivaro, the head-hunting ritual corresponds in all its details to the cannibalistic sacrifice.⁵⁹

I have already shown that evidence of cannibalism in contemporary society can be taken as a manifestation of degeneration and certainly in *Lord of the Flies* it is Golding's intention to insinuate a general, even evolutionary, regression with his allusions to head-hunting and anthropophagy.

⁵⁸Tiger suggests that when Piggy is killed the falling rock also decapitates him, but I can find no evidence for this in the text (*William Golding*, p. 57).

⁵⁹Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropology and Myth: Lectures 1951-1982* (1984; Oxford, 1987), p. 112.

FREUD

Introduction

My interpretation of *Lord of the Flies* in Freudian anthropological and psychoanalytic terms is associated primarily with late Darwinian (neo-Lamarckian) and social evolutionary concerns. Freud's theories were deeply influenced by Darwinian anthropology; as Lucille Ritvo writes:

Fossilized in the extensive corpus of Freud's writings is the evolutionary theory of Darwin's day, including aspects expunged by time. Freud's own theory became subject to surprisingly similar misinterpretations and assaults.⁶⁰

Freud considered a study of evolution essential for psychoanalysts and in his own writings we can see the close connection between natural and sexual selection and the often violent libidinal instincts. Both Freud and the later Darwin were inspired by Lamarck, particularly the notion of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. For instance in the Oedipus Complex Freud follows Darwin in assuming that an inherited characteristic has behind it the developmental or experiential history of the species: the experiential is displaced from the ontogenetic to the phylogenetic.⁶¹ In other words the Complex is the ontogenetic repetition of the phylogenetic experience of Darwin's "primal horde" killing the father. When powerful experiences are repeated often enough in successive generations, these are transformed into experiences of the id and are preserved hereditarily. Thus an inherited "memory" from countless egos can be harboured in the id.⁶² Ritvo identifies this "resurrection" as equivalent to the reversion or atavism in Darwin:

Darwin saw in reversion to old long-lost characters one of the sources he was seeking for variations from which man or nature selects; it was important enough to Darwin to warrant a whole chapter in the *Variation*. Reversion to or appearance of earlier characteristics was distinguished by Freud in man's psychosexual development and called regression.⁶³

Concerning a different area of Freud's theory it is significant for our purposes to note the similarity he saw between childhood and the primeval; indeed, he viewed childhood

⁶⁰Lucille B. Ritvo, *Darwin's Influence on Freud: A Tale of Two Sciences* (New Haven, 1990), p. 1.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶²E. L. Epstein contends that "the Devil is not present in any traditional religious sense; Golding's Beelzebub is the modern equivalent, the anarchic amoral, driving force that Freudians call the Id" (*Lord of the Flies* [New York, 1959], p. 190).

⁶³Ritvo, *Darwin's Influence on Freud*, p. 69.

as the "primeval period" in everyone's life. He held that dreams lead us back to both the individual's "prehistory", namely his childhood and, on a phylogenetic level, they lead back to the entire development of *Homo sapiens* which is recapitulated in an abbreviated form in each individual.

The following section will consider *Lord of the Flies* in the light of the "diluted" (late) Darwinism as it occurs in the anthropological and evolutionary psychoanalytic thinking of Freud. Claire Rosenfield suggests that Golding "consciously dramatises Freudian theory" in *Lord of the Flies*.⁶⁴ This is clearly too presumptuous a statement, particularly when considering an author who saw reductionism and pigeon-holing of this sort to be extremely counter-productive. However it would be false to claim that Golding was not well aware of at least the outline of Freud's theories; indeed we have noted that he claimed to have assiduously read some of Freud's writings. I would like to approach the text from a Freudian perspective that has not been remarked on before, but I am doing so in the knowledge that Golding was not *consciously* employing Freudian theory and that the hints of totemism and taboo⁶⁵ and childhood sexuality arise out of his dramatisation of a regression to a "primitive" state. My reading does, however, throw new light on the psychology of Golding's children.

Totem and Taboo

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud suggests that living "savages" grant us a well-preserved picture of an early stage in our development.⁶⁶ He examines, in a grossly over-simplified manner, the religious and social system of "totemism" amongst Australian aborigines. In this society each clan is named after its totem, that is an animal (more rarely a plant or

⁶⁴Claire Rosenfield, "'Men of Smaller Growth': A Psychological Analysis of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*", *Literature and Psychology* 11, 4 (Autumn 1961), p. 93.

⁶⁵Golding's specific use of the concept "taboo" in the novel points to his awareness of a whole body of cultural anthropological knowledge; indeed, he might well have had specific knowledge of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. "Taboo" refers to the enforced abstinence and prohibitions instituted by some tribes: certain persons and things are thought to be charged with a dangerous power and contact with them is forbidden. After the airman lands on the island in *Lord of the Flies* the mountain becomes taboo and the pig's head offering to the "beast" may not be eaten and is thus taboo. At the end of the novel Ralph is made taboo by Jack and even Samneric are scared to have contact with him. Similarly, as Jack's authority grows, his name becomes taboo and the tribe are compelled to call him "chief": "A taboo was forming around that word [Jack] too" (p. 154).

⁶⁶Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, pp. 1-4. Freud contends that totemism existed at one time in Europe and Asia and that it is probably a necessary phase of human development through which all "races" pass (ibid., p. 3).

natural phenomenon) which stands in a peculiar relation to the group. The totem has great significance: it is their common ancestor or guardian spirit. Freud reproduces Reinach's "*Code du totémisme*"⁶⁷ in which it is stated that clans or individuals are given the names of totem animals - and we think immediately of Piggy and the obvious totem of Jack's clan: the island's wild pigs. In the same set of codes it is held that occasionally the eating prohibition only applies to one particular part of the animal's body. In the case of *Lord the Flies* this is, of course, the pig's head which becomes part of a propitiatory ritual. Reinach further contends that the totem animal is an oracle that advises the clan and is able to foretell the future: we recall that the pig's head speaks to Simon, warning him that he will be killed if he persists with his course of action. At some festivals clansmen disguise themselves and imitate the motions and attributes of their totem in animistic dances; occasionally at such ceremonies the totem animal is ceremonially killed.⁶⁸ In these respects the ritual dances and mock pig hunts of Jack's tribe and the slaying of Simon by all the boys at one such ceremony immediately come to mind. Freud states that every participant at a sacrificial meal - the animal was considered a member of the clan - must eat a share of the raw flesh of the victim just as the execution of a "guilty" tribesman had to be carried out by the tribe as a whole.⁶⁹ The sacrifice and consuming of the totem animal (representative of their "god") renewed and assured their likeness to the "god". As we shall see later in this chapter, it is ironic and indeed appropriate that the island boys sacrifice a human beast/god, for it is only themselves (or rather the evil in themselves) whom they are worshipping.

Freud held that there is much resemblance between the relations of children and of "primitives" towards animals: "Children show no trace of the arrogance which urges adult civilized men to draw a hard-and-fast line between their nature and that of all other animals."⁷⁰ However there are instances when a rift occurs between the child, usually a

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 101-2.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 105.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 136.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp 126-7. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud claims that "primitives" do not display the arrogance of "civilised" man who denies animals the possession of reason and kinship with himself. This arrogance

is still foreign to children, just as it is to "primitive" and primaeval man. It is the result of the later, more pretentious stage of development. At the level of totemism "primitive" man had no

boy, and the animal, and Freud attributes this to fear of the father being displaced onto the animal. Similarly, amongst "savages" the totem animal is a substitute for the autocratic father, hence the forbidden nature of the sacrifice and the celebration and mourning of the act when it is committed. Taking Darwin's "primal horde" as a starting point, Freud describes the archetypal act of slaying (and, if a cannibalistic horde, of devouring) the violent, primal father - an "original sin", if you like - by a group of exiled sons living in enforced celibacy, and so ending the patriarchal reign.⁷¹ The totem meal is thus a symbolic sharing out of the father's strength.⁷² (This would be followed by a period in which the horde is torn apart by a struggle for power and for wives between the victorious sons.) The crime of parricide is repeated in the sacrifice of the totem animal, a commemoration of the triumph over the father. In ceremonial human sacrifice in religions all over the world the victim is representative of the deity - a sophisticated, spiritualised version of the father.

This mental inheritance of guilt ("located" in the id) is passed down in Lamarckian fashion from generation to generation. Just like neurotics today, "primitives" (and children) overvalued their psychical acts, and the hostile impulse or fantasy of killing and devouring the father would have been enough to produce the moral reaction that created totemism and taboo.⁷³ How does the above have application to our reading of the boy's condition on the island? If we take the slain totemic pig to be a representative of the father,⁷⁴ then this symbolic parricide releases them from the "civilisation" and restraint imposed on them as sons of the collective father (civilisation is only one aspect of the father and the sons choose to imitate the violent side of the patriarchy, the one that has

repugnance to tracing his descent from an animal ancestor. (Quoted in Ritvo, *Darwin's Influence on Freud*, p. 76)

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 141-3.

⁷²Garry Hogg notes the tradition of children in certain tribes eating part of the deceased father in order to possess some of his qualities (*Cannibalism and Human Sacrifice* [London, 1990], p. 19).

⁷³Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, pp. 157-60.

⁷⁴When the pig's head chastises Simon it does so in the voice of a teacher, surrogate father for boarding school boys. Similarly the dead airman is worshipped as a totem and offerings are left for the corpse, again a representative father-figure. When the parachute deposits the airman on the beach and drags him between the terrified boys, they run screaming from this second coming of the slain father. On another level we might consider Simon, Piggy and particularly Ralph as spokesmen for the patriarchy and thus a curb on the licence desired by the "sons". All three must be murdered: Simon in a totemic rite, Piggy on a red, table-shaped sacrificial rock and Ralph is hunted for his head.

produced an atomic war). The conditions of survival of the fittest and unleashed savagery are equivalent to the liberation of the id. The hunt for Ralph, which I have already suggested will end in literal or symbolic cannibalism, can be interpreted as Jack's attempt to acquire the power of the former chief/father-figure through the eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood (the narrator hints at this in the description of Jack's "bloodthirstiness" and satisfaction at killing the pig as "a long satisfying drink" [p. 76]).

Childhood Sexuality

Freud popularised the idea of infantile sexuality, overturning the Victorian myth of childhood sexual "innocence", and although Golding makes sure that the boys are "pre-sexual" and that there are no girls on the isle, in a post-Freudian world he cannot entirely banish sexuality from his text/island.⁷⁵ Suggestions of childhood sexuality are apparent throughout the text. Freud claimed that infancy progresses through libido phases (oral, anal, phallic, Oedipal) in which the id's forms and sources of sexual pleasure change. In this respect a tenuous reading might claim that the children's gorging of tropical fruit and subsequent diarrhoea, the boys sucking their thumbs and ass jokes, correspond to oral and anal phases.⁷⁶ The homosexual connotations and symbolic rape of the sow (examined below) loosely correspond to phallic and Oedipal stages. Although these suggestions are veiled, I feel that taken as a whole they do point to an unconscious sexualised interpretation of aspects of childhood.

The awakening of the boy's sexual instinct becomes synonymous with their degeneration (particularly in its perverted elements), the rise of their "animal" side - a further instance of their fall. Jack is presented as the one who metaphorically "awakens" their sexuality: he leads them on a path between "the suck and heave" of the sea and "the dark luxuriance of the forest" (p. 128) and along the "dark tunnel" of a pig-track (p. 130). The first sexual hints we get are of infantile homosexuality, and these are confused with

⁷⁵"I believe, then, that infantile amnesia . . . turns everyone's childhood into something like a prehistoric epoch and conceals from him the beginnings of his own sexual life" (Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, [1905; London, 1949], p. 54).

⁷⁶Similarly some Freudians claim that on one level cannibalism is a reversion to an infant state, that of "oral fixation", where all the infant's needs are satisfied via the mouth, so that aggression is expressed by biting and pleasure by sucking.

violence (in contrast with the "innocent" sex of the Neanderthals). There is intense excitement when Robert is held down during a ritual dance: Ralph could not wait to "get a handful of that brown, vulnerable flesh" (p. 126); Robert cried out: "Oh, my bum!" while "the heaving circle cheered and made pig-dying noises"; and when the "game" was over they all rolled over and lay "panting" in the grass.⁷⁷

We have noted that in *The Coral Island* there are hints of the boys' sexual awareness. When Peterkin brutally spears the old sow, he triumphantly announces that he has killed the great-great-grandmother of the other pigs.⁷⁸ It seems to me that Golding interprets this as a symbolic act of violence against the maternal line of descent and incorporates it into his own novel making the imagery more explicit. If we take it that the sacrificial pig is representative of the father, then a sow, particularly a sow suckling infants, can be viewed as a mother-figure. I will consider the scene.

The boys follow the bleeding sow, "wedded to her in lust", and when she falls, "the hunters hurled themselves at her":

Jack was on top of the sow, stabbing downward with his knife. Roger found a lodgement for his point and began to push till he was leaning with his whole weight. The spear moved forward inch by inch. . . . The sow collapsed under them and they were heavy and fulfilled upon her. . . . Roger began to withdraw his spear and the boys noticed it for the first time. Robert stabilized the thing in a phrase which was received uproariously.

"Right up her ass!" (pp. 149-50)⁷⁹

This is unmistakably a symbolic rape and if the sow is representative of the mother then the "sexual act" is an Oedipal one (Freud contended that male children passed through a stage in their development in which they desired incest with their mothers). What we have here is clearly not an instance of sanctioned licence, as occurred amongst "savages" on the Fijian Islands.⁸⁰ Rather this horrific act becomes symbolic of the disintegration of their society, the shattering of family ties and their headlong degeneration.

⁷⁷In this light the killing of Simon also has the connotation of a sex attack, particularly if we remember the very similar scene in "Clonk Clonk" where Chimp is subjected to a maenadic rape.

⁷⁸Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, p. 127.

⁷⁹The impaling of the head on a stick is also described in sexual terms:

Jack held up the head and jammed the soft throat down on the pointed end of the stick which pierced through into the mouth. He stood back and the head hung there, a little blood dribbling down the stick. (p. 151)

⁸⁰Freud holds that in all the examples of "primitive" culture he had studied, there were invariably severe penalties for incest. An exogamic law prevented persons of the same totem having sexual relations or marrying. Freud notes further that each year on the islands of Fiji, where these rules were particularly strict,

NATURE OF THE BEAST

The boys are terrified of a "beast", symbol of evil,⁸¹ that they suspect roams the island, but as Golding demonstrates, it is an emanation of the dark side of their own consciousness, a product of their fear.⁸² The boys see the "beast" everywhere they look: in the jungle, in the sea, falling from the sky, and mistake their fellow islanders for it (they even try to blame the isle itself: "As if it wasn't a good island" [p. 56]). Unlike Ballantyne's boys, who are "innately good" and for whom all evil is external, they objectivise and rationalise something that is subjective and irrational. Golding sees man's tendency to convert and reduce complexity into simplicity, to impose patterns on the world, as the root of evil. Thus it is the children's search for an external manifestation of what is really in themselves (just as the New People try to project the beast in their own hearts onto the Neanderthals and Ballantyne's boys see the natives as "monsters"⁸³) that releases sin.⁸⁴ For Golding it is the marriage of the savage, the animal, in man to his intellect, which produces evil. The evolution of intelligence has produced sin: "Perhaps, then, . . . the parallelism between intelligence and evil comes out in my books because it

there occurred sacred orgies in which incest was condoned; indeed it was actively sought (*Totem and Taboo*, p. 11). He contends further that a boy's earliest choice of objects for his love is incestuous - his mother and sister - and that when the child grows up he liberates himself from this attraction. Freud defines this incestuous attraction, later repressed and buried in the unconscious by the adult, as the "nuclear complex of neurosis" (ibid., p. 17). These incestuous wishes are still regarded by "savages" as immediate dangers, hence their elaborate set of incest taboos.

⁸¹It is important to clarify the use of animal imagery and the concept of the beast to connote evil. Golding makes uncritical use of this literary and linguistic convention, a convention that, Mary Midgley demonstrates, contains certain assumptions about the superiority of our species. She shows that the things we define as animal in our own nature, are not necessarily animal attributes (such as gratuitous murder or torture), but rather human emanations. Man has been unwilling to acknowledge his own ferocity and capacity for evil, and has often placed it on animals.

If the Beast within was capable of every iniquity, people reasoned, then beasts without probably were too. This notion made man anxious to exaggerate his difference from all other species and to ground all activities he valued in capacities unshared by the animals, whether the evidence warranted it or no. (Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* [Hassocks, Sussex, 1979], p. 40)

When someone is accused of behaving "inhumanely", like a "beast", the blame is being placed on creatures that are sufficiently "other". These beasts are scapegoats; they are an abstract, an artificial construct.

⁸²Freud makes the same claim:

Spirits and demons . . . are only projections of man's own emotional impulses. He turns his emotional cathexes into persons, he peoples the world with them and meets his internal mental processes again outside himself. (*Totem and Taboo*, p. 92)

If we agree with Freud that the "creation" of spirits and ghosts came about as a result of man's reflection of his relation to the dead (ibid., p. 93), then the boys' mention of ghosts (p. 98) is a tacit admission of death into their Eden.

⁸³Ralph says: "Altogether, with his yellow, turban-like hair, his Herculean black frame, his glittering eyes and white teeth, he seemed the most terrible monster I ever beheld" (Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, pp. 173-4).

⁸⁴Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor, *William Golding: A Critical Study* (1967; London, 1985), p. 21.

is our . . . particular sin - to explain away our own shortcomings rather than remedy them."⁸⁵ In this section I will first examine Golding's use of animal allusions demonstrating how they confront the reader, in Darwinian fashion, with man's ephemeral position, that of a bare forked animal, in the natural world. I will also show how these animal allusions convey the idea of a much greater *evolutionary* regression and degeneration. The concluding discussion will consider the various manifestations of the "beast" as they are perceived by the boys and consider the symbols that the narrator employs in order to convey the boy's innate evil.⁸⁶

Degeneration to Animality

At first the boys play at being pigs in their ritual dance, but as we have already seen, unrestrained games take on a reality of their own. At one point Ralph says: "If I blow the conch and they don't come back; then we've had it. . . . We'll be like animals" (p. 101). To which Piggy replies: "If you don't blow, we'll soon be animals anyway." And on a metaphorical level this is exactly what happens. Animal allusions occur throughout the novel: Ralph is "like a seal" (p. 71), the boys make the noise of sea-gulls (p. 201) and Piggy's hair is "like the velvet on a young stag's antlers" (p. 70). The "flies" of the story's title refer, on one level, to the boys as small, dirty flying insects.⁸⁷ Figures move "insect-like" (p. 31) along the beach and Piggy complains that the littluns are "running around like insects" (p. 50). Analogously Eric makes the association between "scurrying woodlice" (p. 106) and the children trying to avoid the flames of the forest fire.

When the boys first penetrate the darkness of the jungle and climb the mountain they follow the tracks and tunnels of animals through the tangled vegetation. Metaphorically these paths lead the boys back down the "ladder" to their instinctive, animal origins. When Jack goes on his first lonely hunt, creeping "dog-like, uncomfortably on all fours"

⁸⁵Golding quoted in Tiger, *William Golding*, p. 31.

⁸⁶Man has always located evil in the "other", often a threatening animal. But since Darwin has revealed the close relationship of man to animal (and the animal in man) evil has found a home in *Homo sapiens* and Freud's incorporation of evolutionary thought into psychoanalysis has developed this idea further. Golding's project of locating both the beast and the "beast" within the individual is a distinctly Darwinian one.

⁸⁷The idea of the boys as flies is reinforced when we recall Gloucester's lament: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, - / They kill us for their sport".

(p. 52)⁸⁸ through the undergrowth, he repeats an age-old act that brings him to the "abyss of ages" and he momentarily becomes one with his ape-like ancestors:

Only when Jack himself roused a gaudy bird from a primitive nest of sticks was the silence shattered and echoes set ringing by a harsh cry that seemed to come out of the abyss of ages. Jack himself shrank at this cry with a hiss of indrawn breath; and for a minute became less a hunter than a furtive thing, ape-like among the tangle of trees. (p. 53)

Significantly, during the hunt he is "bent double", "his nose only a few inches from the humid earth" as he tries to catch the scent of his prey with "flared nostrils" (p. 52). When they finally kill a pig, Jack's thoughts place the pig on the same level as himself and his hunters - it is a contest between animals: "They had outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken away its life like a long satisfying drink" (p. 76).

Man's closest surviving relative in the animal kingdom is the ape and Golding uses the image of the ape repeatedly to remind us of the closeness of that connection. When Jack asserts his power over the boys, "authority sat on his shoulder and chattered like an ape" (p. 165). Golding felt that the dead airman represented the spectre of history come to pay the boys a visit. However I would suggest that the airman also represents the *biological* history of this little tribe of *Homo sapiens*: "Before them, something like a great ape was sitting asleep with its head between its knees" (p. 136).

Piggy is repeatedly compared to a pig (that is, a tame, edible farm animal destined for the pot), and partly as a consequence this he is ridiculed and ostracised. He "grunts" (p. 10) and has a "button nose" (p. 11) and the fact that he is put in charge of the littluns links him, as a mother-figure, with the sow that is brutally slaughtered. When he is murdered his "arms and legs twitched a bit, like a pig's after it has killed" (p. 200). Ironically for this upholder of science and reason, it is his obvious "animal" attributes - his bad eyesight, fatness, asthma and the fact that he is associated with the island's pigs - that preclude him from being taken seriously. He is simply not one of the "fittest". It is also interesting to note that Piggy's asthma plagues him when he is frightened: his "animal"

⁸⁸The boys are often referred to as dogs: without his spectacles Piggy has "to be led like a dog" (p. 189); sometimes the children lie innocently, "grinning and panting at Ralph like dogs" (p. 20); but when they begin to hunt like a pack the metaphor takes on a sinister connotation and Ralph devours the pig meat "like a wolf" (p. 80). (Dickson notes that in *The Inheritors* the major recurring image associated with the predatory New People pertains to wolves [*The Modern Allegories of William Golding*, pp. 38-9].)

side takes over automatically in situations that are beyond his reasonable and rational control, thereby demonstrating symbolically how thin is the veneer of "civilisation". During one of the crucial debates in "Beast from Water" Piggy shouts in frustration at their superstitions: "What are we? Humans? Or animals? Or savages?"⁸⁹ to which Jack responds, "You shut up, you fat slug!" (p. 99). Here Jack unwittingly links Piggy to a shell-less, and therefore relatively defenceless, land-mollusc, a "primitive" and early life form. With this in mind we might view the conch, integrally linked to Piggy as icon of civilisation, as the dead frame of a "primitive" living organism, emblem of pre-rational millennia.

As things on the island degenerate, some of the boys feel that a kind of madness is creeping in. Indeed the rise of the animal within each boy can be seen as a form of insanity, as it was for Moreau's creations. Thus when Jack is hunting a pig his eyes "seemed bolting and nearly mad" (p. 52); boys are variously described as being "nuts" (p. 97) or "queer" (p. 59) or as having "cracked" (p. 146); Ralph thinks the hunters are "all off [their] rockers" (p. 199). We have mentioned the moments when Ralph loses his train of thought and it is interesting to note that the image used is that of a "bat's wing" (p. 118) flittering in front of his mind. When we recall that Simon is thought of as "batty" (p. 173), it becomes apparent that this night creature (surrounded by so much superstition in Western culture) is an appropriate vehicle to convey the resurgence of the animal within.

The return to the animal becomes most explicit towards the end of the novel. The biting and tearing of Simon's flesh is like the behaviour of predators; the fleeing Ralph certainly feels as though he is being hunted by a pack of wild animals: "Sooner or later he would have to sleep or eat - and then he would awaken with hands clawing at him" (p. 216). In fact by the end of the tale Ralph "[obeys] an instinct that he did not know he possessed" (p. 201) and has himself become an animal fleeing along the pig runs: he snarls and "show[s] his teeth" (p. 215) at the hunters; then, when he is cornered, he

⁸⁹In Victorian adventure tales the distinction between "savages" and animals is often blurred. Diana Loxley notes how on the island of the Swiss family Robinson for instance, there is "a close textual proximity between the discussion of savages and the massacre or hunting of wild beasts, a connection which finally establishes the firm equivalence between the killing of animals and the killing of savages" (*Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands* [Basingstoke, 1990], p. 120).

launches himself "like a cat". At one point, recognising the kinship between himself and other animal prey, "he wonder[s] if a pig would agree" (p. 217) with his choice of hide-out. When his screams become "continuous and foaming" (p. 220) Ralph is truly one with the "squealing" pigs, "screaming" birds and "shrieking" mice (p. 219) that flee the pack of stalking predators.

Externalisation of the Beast

The tribe impale the pig's head on a stick, feeling that somehow the evil they sense can be propitiated in this way (their ritual dance and re-enactment of the kill are attempts to do the same). In so doing their fears are externalised and reified. Simon recognises that the bloody head which threatens and taunts him is a symbol of the boys' "essential illness" (p. 97), but he is killed before he can make this knowledge known. Later Ralph smashes the "grinning" skull to the ground breaking it in two, "its grin now six feet across" (p. 204): violence only serves to increase evil. We recall that when a pig is killed early on in the novel, "the twins seemed to share one wide, ecstatic grin" (p. 75) - the grin of evil encompasses all the islanders.

The creature that descends from the sky is simply a dead parachutist, but the boys assume that it is the beast and vacate the mountain where the figure sits bowing (this is almost a religious image) like a marionette on its parachute lines. Ironically the airman *is*, in a sense, the beast (although not in the way the children think he is), for the beast is, after all, only an aspect of human nature. Morality is shown to be a matter of social conditioning, a veneer that can easily be peeled away. It is the evil in man that tugs at the strings and guides him into wrong-doing. Golding has stated that the dead airman stands for "off-campus history, the thing that threatens every child everywhere"⁹⁰ and he defines this history as "a failure of human sympathy, ignorance of facts, the objectivising of our own inadequacies so as to make a scapegoat."⁹¹ Man uses his intellect to fashion evil just as Jack uses Piggy's spectacles of reason and rationality to destroy the island. The head and brain, symbolic of the intellect, are fittingly corrupted by evil and savagery (Castle

⁹⁰Golding, "Fable", p. 95.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 94.

Rock, the island's head, is appropriated by Jack), while the "red stuff" of Piggy's "rational" head is split to release total unreason amongst the other island heads.

Beast from Ocean and Forest

Percival suggests that the beast comes out of the sea and the boys are terrified by this possibility: "The assembly looked with [Ralph]; considered the vast stretches of water, the high sea beyond, unknown indigo of infinite possibility; heard silently the sough and whisper from the reef" (p. 96). The adjectives "unknown" and "infinite" connote an analogy between the ocean and the unconscious while "sough and whisper" (one of the little boys mentions that there are giant squids in the ocean's depths) suggest a beast rising from the boy's minds. Beast-like, the breakers "roar" (p. 14) and thrust out "an arm of surf" and "fingers of spray" (p. 122). The sea imitates "the breathing of some stupendous creature": indeed, it is a "sleeping leviathan" (p. 115).⁹² When Piggy is killed the sea consumes his body like a monster: "Then the sea breathed again in a long slow sigh, the water boiled white and pink over the rock; and when it went, sucking back again, the body of Piggy was gone" (p. 200). At one point Ralph senses the threat of the sea in different terms: "faced by the brute obtuseness of the ocean, the miles of division, one was clamped down, one was helpless, one was condemned, one was -" (p. 122). Here he comes close to understanding the sea as more than just an evil leviathan, but as a natural force that has power over him: an aspect of a deterministic, evolutionary force.

For the Western mind the tropical jungle often held untold horrors, as is manifestly evident in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Golding uses this convention and makes the jungle of his island equally freighted with ominous foreboding. It is a place of death and rotting decay: a log is described as a "grotesque dead thing" and "most of the wood was so rotten that when they pulled it broke up into a shower of fragments and woodlice and decay" (p. 43). The jungle is a mirror of their own dark unconscious from whence the beast emerges. This idea of a "secret sharer", an unconscious Mr Hyde, Jack tries to

⁹²We are reminded of Hobbes' *Leviathan* and the rise and fall of the ocean becomes symbolic of the fluctuating fortunes of societies and civilisations throughout time (in his book Hobbes contends that in a society without an absolute monarch, life for its citizens will be "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short" - a condition the boys find themselves in.

express using the metaphor of hunting: "You can feel as if you're not hunting, but - being hunted; as if something's behind you all the time in the jungle" (p. 57). When the pig's head speaks like an internalised doppelganger, the jungle is equated with darkness and, in Simon's consciousness, appears to be in accord with the beast in deriding him: "The forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter" (p. 158). The unconscious is here an enemy that must be plumbed, tamed.

In *The Inheritors* Marlan tells the New People:

[The Neanderthals] keep to the mountains or the darkness under the trees. We will keep to the water and the plains. We shall be safe from the tree-darkness.⁹³

From an evolutionary perspective the term "tree-darkness" refers to man's ancestors who emerged from the trees and took up residence in the plains. In a sense it is a subjective, internal and atavistic darkness that Marlan warns against. This fear of the shadows of the forest and of the jungle has been inherited by the children on the island.

Beast Within

Like Piggy's asthma, Simon's epilepsy and Ralph's wounds, images of dirt, decay, blood, excrement and darkness serve to reinforce the idea of man's primal origins, of degeneration and regression to a savage or animal state. But, more importantly, these images, are symbolic of the "beastliness", the corruption of man. I will analyse the most important of these.

The boys get progressively dirty and grimy on the island until their bodies are finally described as "befouled" (p. 172). Their long, dirty hair grows over their eyes and obscures their vision: "With a convulsion of the mind, Ralph discovered dirt and decay; understood how much he disliked perpetually flicking the tangled hair out of his eyes" (p. 84). At one point Ralph finds it "strangely pleasing" (p. 15) to put on a grey school shirt again. Blood, like dirt, leaves brown smudges on the boys after they have killed (Ralph calls Jack a "beast and a swine and a bloody, bloody thief!" [p. 198]). Flies congregate around the bloody head of the pig and around the head of the dead airman (displaying all the "colours of corruption" [p. 161]) just as they do around dung. Dickson notes that

⁹³Golding, *The Inheritors*, p. 231.

Beelzebub, Hebrew for "the lord of the flies" (prince of the evil spirits), is sometimes translated as "lord of dung".⁹⁴

When Simon tries to describe the nature of the beast he searches for a metaphor and settles on the idea of excrement: "What's the dirtiest thing there is?" (p. 97). The connection is simple: they all excrete and hence all carry "dirtiness" within them.⁹⁵ And excrement is everywhere on the island. Jack uses the trails of warm droppings to track the pigs: "They were olive green, smooth, and they steamed a little" (p. 53). Castle Rock is an "island" of guano and rotten eggs which leads Ralph to exclaim: "This is a rotten place" (p. 116); but it proves to be one that suits the purposes of Jack. The boys live primarily on tropical fruit and this gives them chronic diarrhoea. They are often "taken short" and the ablution arrangements are not adhered to. Ralph berates them:

"If you're taken short you keep away from the fruit. That's dirty."
Laughter rose again. (p. 87)

The young boys find talk of excrement, something formerly forbidden, daring and exciting. As with the beast, they are fascinated, even attracted, and yet at the same time repelled by it, by their own capacity for brutality and evil.

Golding uses chiaroscuro imagery to suggest the moral and spiritual darkness of island society: blackness traditionally represents death, evil and ignorance and Golding employs the convention in the customary manner. Jack is "a stain in the darkness" (p. 133) and his choir is also described as a shadowy creature: "Then the creature stepped from mirage on to clear sand, and they saw that the darkness was not all shadow but mostly clothing" (p. 20). Darkness brings with it fear and nightmares and it is at night that the "beast" comes to haunt them: "The darkness was full of claws, full of unknown menace" (p. 108) - here the image of "claws" explicitly equates the darkness with evil (and perhaps there is also the hint of a Lamarckian memory). Man's fear of darkness, and

⁹⁴Dickson, *The Modern Allegories of William Golding*, p. 21. Oldsey and Weintraub contend that the Lord of the Flies is not only Beelzebub, but that Zeus, as he occurs in Sartre's *The Flies*, is described as "god of the flies and death", an image of "white eyes and blood-smeared cheeks". Zeus explains to Orestes that the carrion-attracted flies are symbolic of men, "all those creeping, half-human creatures" who have "guilty consciences" and are "afraid" (*The Art of William Golding*, p. 22).

⁹⁵Golding admired and was influenced by Aldous Huxley's writings and in his essay "Utopias and Antiutopias" he writes: "Huxley seems always to have had an equation in his mind between evil and dirt as if morality were at bottom a kind of asepsis" (in *A Moving Target*, p. 181).

by implication his own darkness, stretches back to the beginning of our species. In a discussion of *The Inheritors* Gabriel Josipovici talks about such imagery in Golding:

To be born a new man is to inherit a new consciousness, and that consciousness will always be aware dimly, of the darkness from which it springs, of the darkness beyond. But, being thus aware of it, man turns it into an enemy, into that which is evil.⁹⁶

We might speculate that one of the main attributes that distinguishes man from beast is self-consciousness and this awareness of the self as somehow different to everything else around it, has the effect of alienating or "enising" the subject: everything beyond the self or beyond the circle of the tribal dance - that upon which the light of understanding has not yet shone - becomes a threat from the darkness.

Golding writes of his own childhood fears:

What was the enemy? I cannot tell. He came with darkness and he reduced me to a shuddering terror that was incurable because it was indescribable. In daylight I thought of the Roman remains that had been dug up under the church as the oldest thing near, sane things from sane people like myself. But at night, the Norman door and pillar, even the flint wall of our cellar, were older, far older, were rooted in the darkness under the earth.⁹⁷

Of course, on one level the "darkness" is the fear of death, the grave "under the earth"; but fear is also the enemy within the self, a "secretion" of the unconscious. Interpretation of this fear from an evolutionary and psychoanalytic perspective brings clarity to the issue. The young Golding is here drawn to contemplating that which is beneath the earth, to journey back in time and to explore both the mysterious darkness of "evil" and primordial darkness. As Arnold Johnston writes, even in childhood Golding "was struck by the existence of primitive undercurrents in an otherwise enlightened and commonsensical world."⁹⁸ The steps down into the cellar are a journey into a "primitive"

⁹⁶Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (Stanford, 1971), p. 242.

⁹⁷Golding, "The Ladder and the Tree", p. 167.

⁹⁸Johnston, *Of Earth and Darkness*, p. 2.

and savage past.⁹⁹ The cellar is a womb image and the boy's contemplation of darkness are suggestive of an "archaeological", even atavistic urge.¹⁰⁰

RESCUE

Simon

Ralph's desperate attempts to be rescued take on an additional meaning as a desire to be "rescued" from the darkness within. What he does not realise (and Simon does) is that physical rescue is not the answer: an acknowledgement and understanding of "mankind's essential illness" (p. 97) is the means to "rescue". There are certain characters in Golding's fiction who recognise this necessity (Simon, Nat, Jocelin and Matty, for example), who are able to face their own darkness and the complexity of human nature, achieving harmony with the world.

Simon is a saint-figure and when he goes into the jungle, he communes with nature in his own leafy "chapel" adorned with candle-buds. When he contemplates the beast, "there [rises] before his inward sight the picture of a human at once heroic and sick" (p. 113). He realises that Ralph's and Piggy's faith in civilisation and reason is misplaced. When he tries to explain to an assembly that the beast is really within each of them: "What I mean is . . . maybe it's only us" (p. 97); they shout him down. Eventually he discovers the head on the stick and "his gaze [is] held by that ancient, inescapable recognition" (p. 152). He stares into the blackness of the pig's "vast mouth" (p. 159) and confronts his own guilt and capacity for evil. And his acceptance of this fact is symbolised by him being

⁹⁹The idea that *Homo sapiens* has produced evil "instinctively" (in "Fable" Golding writes that "man produces evil as a bee produces honey", p. 87) since the very beginning of our species, is something that fascinates him. In the essay "Digging for Pictures" he describes how he discovered the skeleton of an old woman in an archaeological dig and speculates whether she had been the victim of a "prehistoric murder" (in *The Hot Gates*, p. 70). In this respect the capacity for evil of the New People has already been noted; and in "Clonk Clonk" the character Chimp is ostracised from his band of fellow hunters and left alone to fend for himself on the wild plains.

¹⁰⁰The womb image is a recurring one in Golding: there is Simon's dark and leafy bower; the Neanderthals come from a cave by the sea and when they die they see themselves as being returned to Oa's belly; Pincher Martin recalls the dark cellar of his childhood; and in *Free Fall* Sammy's prison cell, in which he curls up in a foetal position, is a symbolic womb. Characters move up and away from the cell/cellar/womb. Delbaere notes that Sammy's prison also symbolises the organic cell: the origin of life; while Pincher Martin fears a slide back down the rock to the "non-comprehending" dark ("From the Cellar to the Rock", p. 7). From an evolutionary perspective the journey away from, and the fear of a return to, the cellar can be interpreted as a fear of degeneration and death.

"swallowed"¹⁰¹ by the mouth and by the movement of the flies from the pig's head to his own.¹⁰² Tiger succinctly describes the significance of Simon's and, by extension, the novelist's vision of human history:

Golding seems to be indicating that once atavistically in contact with this dark rhythm, at the centre of the self, man will no longer be, in Ralph's words, 'cramped into this bit of island, always on the lookout'. . . . If man is prepared to face his face, he may escape (in symbolic terms) the Island.¹⁰³

When he descends, Christ-like, from the mountain, he bears the understanding of man's evil and the potential liberation from fear. As in the anagnorisis of the sculptor, Tuami, at the end of *The Inheritors*, Simon comes to see the best and the worst in humans and still go on loving: his is a vision that takes into account the complexity of existence and brings about a marriage of reason and unreason, rational and irrational, good and evil. After all, he is himself a conjunction of animal (his nosebleed and epilepsy) and spiritual (his vision).

Simon's message is, in a sense, an existential one. Reaching a true understanding of the self and of the evil inherent in all of us is like the ascent of a mountain. Even when the others are terrified by the beast that sits on the summit, Simon insists: "I think we ought to climb the mountain" (p. 142). Like Sisyphus, he realises that there is no alternative but to roll the boulder (we recall their stone-rolling games) of understanding up the incline, no matter how many times it "falls": "What else is there to do?" (pp. 142 and 160). Simon comes to understand the true nature of the island society, and by extension, the world. Free of the romantic *Coral Island* blinkers he is able to conceive of the world in existential terms. This is a heavy burden to lay in the shoulders of a young boy, but I think Golding does mean Simon to be a kind of existential saint, a child who has uncannily understood the modern, post-Darwinian nature of existence and formulated a crude "spiritual" and philosophical response.

¹⁰¹ Rosenfield draws an interesting analogy between Simon and the hero/knight in the traditional quest who is swallowed by a dragon or serpent whose belly is the underworld. This symbolic death is necessary in order to gain the elixir, to revitalise the stricken society to which he eventually returns with his knowledge as a redeemer ("Men of Smaller Growth", p. 98).

¹⁰² This idea is beautifully portrayed in Harry Hook's film version of *Lord of the Flies* (1990) in a scene in which Simon lovingly takes a chameleon that has just killed a fly into his hand, thereby symbolically making peace with the dark side of nature, and of his own nature.

¹⁰³ Tiger, *William Golding*, p. 61.

Simon is a modern hero quite unlike Ballantyne's unreflective boy-heroes who conform to a strict Christianity-based morality: here the redemptive qualities are very different. Simon displays an existential freedom from mental constraints and a curiosity to try to understand the forces that he sees taking over the island. He is a lonely figure (the existential self is indeed an islanded one) who makes difficult choices and acts upon them without fear of the consequences. He has witnessed first hand the choices made by his fellow islanders, which plunge them from a world of childhood innocence into the existential world of becoming, the realm of choice, action and responsibility. In other words he has the freedom to "fall" or to "rescue" himself.

Where earlier "Darwinian" island texts have taken evolution as a broad, over-arching determinant, Golding tries to chart a course through the waters of biological determinism, to find ways to circumvent some of the mechanisms of evolution. T. H. Huxley's "ethical process" is clearly not a complete cure. Golding wants to show that there are ways of thinking and acting that "transcend" the forces of evolution. Simon stands in opposition to Piggy whose Victorian and Wellsian faith in science fails to prevent the "amoral" forces of biological and anthropological d/evolution taking hold on the island.

The modern condition is a lonely quest and it is one that requires the courage to acknowledge both the biological and intellectual "savagery" within each individual, and to strive to climb the mountain of progress using the tools of an existential and (implicitly Christian) spiritual understanding of man. The quest also requires courage because it does not permit the use of the crutches of intellectual patterning, control and reductionism that society encourages and imposes. Difficult choices produce difficult actions, but these are necessary to assert one's freedom and are part of the "ascent": after his epiphanic fit and conversation with the pig's head, Simon knows that he has to *do* something. By contrast, the easy choice is the one most members of the society make with their freedom: a "liberation into savagery" (p. 191). In a figure like Simon the quest moves beyond existentialism into the spiritual and the boy immerses his soul in the darkness, is "swallowed" by it in an extinction and transcendence of the self. For Ralph and Everyman, Simon is a trail finder illuminating the world of becoming, the path of choices

and actions. Neither biological nor social evolution have provided man with an innate ethical sensibility: it is up to the individual to realise his moral, existential and spiritual potential for self-knowledge.

Harmony with Nature

Related to Golding's notion of an existential and spiritual "rescue" of man from "evolutionary" determinism is his belief in the sanctity of the natural world. He believes in a search for harmony with nature (a state he accords the Neanderthals in *The Inheritors*). This section will examine the split man has forged between himself and the planet and show the narrator's celebration of nature. I will consider how the figure of Simon provides an example of the reunion of man and nature, a nature not of the pre-Darwinian mould, but an evolving nature. I will show further that the island, like the planet, can be interpreted as a complex, evolving cybernetic organism.

When the boys first arrive on the isle it appears as though an idyllic return to nature has taken place and the children will live like latter-day "noble savages" in a South Sea Eden. This illusion is quickly shattered. Like the inheritors, they do not respect and are no longer in touch with their environment; consequently they fear the natural world and make an enemy out of it. When Ralph first sounds the conch he upsets the natural order and strikes terror into the hearts of the island's indigenous inhabitants:

A deep harsh note boomed under the palms, spread through the intricacies of the forest and echoed back from the pink granite of the mountain. Clouds of birds rose from the tree-tops, and something squealed and ran in the undergrowth. (p. 18)

Unlike *The Coral Island*, where the natural environment is described almost as though it were an English country garden, nature shows its teeth in *Lord of the Flies*: we see the "evil", predatory side of life as well as butterflies dancing in sunny glades. If the boys are oblivious to the natural order, the narrator is certainly not and he keeps us reminded throughout the novel of a wider, natural, biological and evolutionary picture. Man's place is put firmly in perspective against the cosmic backdrop of the "steadfast

constellations" and Gaia, the "earth planet" with its "solid core" and bulging "film of water" (p. 170).¹⁰⁴

The novel constantly reminds us of a larger force that continues unhindered by the actions of humans. On one level this is, of course, nature, but it is also the force of evolution. The narrator calls a piece of wood on the shore "wave-worn and whitened and a vagrant" (p. 66); some of the stones "had lain on the sands of another shore" (p. 67). These elements are, like the boys, colonisers of this desert island; they are all natural components brought to the isle by air and sea. For the newcomers in the artificial "laboratory" of an island, competition will take place to determine the hierarchies amongst all the inhabitants. At the time of the boys' arrival it is the pigs that are the "lions" of this world, but the process does not stop with the coming of man. The mechanisms of survival of the fittest and natural selection continue unabated; indeed, Jack feels that he too is being hunted in the jungle.

"Some unknown force" (p. 28) has split open and shattered the rocks. We recall that Wells created the image of a bungling evolutionary god making experiments with the stuff of life, often botching things. And something similar is hinted at in the Golding novel: at one point the evolutionary force is personified in the shape of an all-too-human schoolmaster-god: "The coral was scribbled in the sea as though a giant had bent down to reproduce the shape of the island in a flowing chalk line but tired before he had finished" (p. 31). Even the novel's title, bearing in mind the "flies to wanton boys" quote mentioned earlier, suggests that there is a dispassionate force at work.

Simon is the only character who embraces his natural environment and is in harmony with it: through him Golding celebrates Gaia. Simon trusts nature entirely and is not

¹⁰⁴In this respect it is worthy to note how Golding evokes a wider time frame. Nature imposes its time scale on the boys as soon as they arrive. Clock time is of no importance and they take their rhythm from the sun and moon, the ebb and flow of the tide: we are given no hint as to how many weeks or months pass. There are no set mealtimes (except for a pig feast) and the boys forage and eat continuously (p. 64). Piggy suggests that they make a clock, a "sundial": "We could put a stick in the sand, and then -" (p. 70), but he cannot express the mathematical processes. Instead what happens is clock time goes by the board and is replaced by "tribal" time (determined by hunts and feasts); ironically the stick in the sand gets an alternative use. When the pig first squeals in the undergrowth we are reminded that earlier generations of man must have come and gone with the tide (pigs are obviously not indigenous), just as these boy-colonists will soon disappear. At one point the narrator describes a stone as "a token of preposterous time" (p. 67); an allusion to geological time such as this puts the activities of the boys in perspective (in his poem "The Lonely Isle" Golding similarly tries to evoke evolutionary and geophysical time [in *Poems*, p. 28]).

afraid to be alone in the forest at night. After his death he is "beatified" and repossessed by Oa, Earth goddess:

The water rose further and dressed Simon's coarse hair with brightness. . . . The strange, attendant creatures, with their fiery eyes and trailing vapours, busied themselves round his head. The body lifted a fraction of an inch from the sand and a bubble of air escaped from the mouth with a wet plop. Then it turned gently in the water. (pp. 169-70)

In accord with his holistic vision, the description of his "ascension" incorporates beauty (the halo of phosphorescence¹⁰⁵) as well as ugliness (the "wet plop"), good and evil. Calm settles over the island after Simon has died as if, through his intercession, the natural forces have granted the boys absolution, or rather a reprieve. This is in contrast with the brutal, purely physical, description of the death of Piggy (who, as a "scientist" and a "rationalist", has stood in opposition to nature throughout) in which his skull splits open, the "stuff" of his brain spills out and in the next instant a wave consumes him (p. 200).

Delbaere-Garant states that by introducing correspondences between character and setting,

Golding intimates that the same law governs the geophysical world and the world of man. Human nature is an aspect of nature at large.¹⁰⁶

No longer in harmony or able to read nature's signs the boys come up against the force of nature in a situation of conflict. The sky sits on the land, the heat becomes "a blow that they [duck]" (p. 63) and the "angry eye" (p. 63) of the sun "emptie[s] down invisible arrows" (p. 64) that leave them sunburnt. The wind dangerously looses coconuts around Roger (p. 67) while tangled creepers scratch the boys and hinder their progress through the undergrowth. Ironically they decide to hold assemblies in a place of premature death: "There was not enough soil for [the palms] to grow to any height and when they reached perhaps twenty feet they fell and dried, forming a criss-cross pattern of trunks, very convenient to sit on" (p. 12). Golding is fond of the Shakespearean convention of

¹⁰⁵Stephen S. Boyd writes of the phosphorescent transparencies:

The creatures are simply the lowest point in the ugly world of living nature, vile scavengers as coldly destructive as sawteeth. It is Simon's self-sacrifice that transforms them to beauty, goes some way towards redeeming the world of nature and re-establishing its beauty and harmony. (*The Novels of William Golding* [Brighton, 1988], p. 19)

¹⁰⁶Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Rhythm and Expansion in *Lord of the Flies*" in Biles and Evans (eds.) *William Golding*, p. 76.

allowing nature to imitate man (I am thinking particularly of the storm scenes in *King Lear* and *The Tempest*). It is a *Tempest*-like storm that brings them to the island in the first place. And, as if in sympathy with the situation on the island, storm clouds, like the mushroom of an atom bomb, gather above it just before Simon's murder.

The boys do not recognise how close their relationship is with the processes of nature and with the island "body". The good/evil, rational/irrational dichotomy that tugs at them is reflected in the symbolic juxtaposition of day and night; "steadfast constellations" and ocean; mountain and jungle. The rise and fall of the tide echoes the tide of good and evil that encroaches and recedes rhythmically within each of them and throughout the social evolution of *Homo sapiens*, like the rising and bowing of the parachutist. At the end of the novel there is a moment when Ralph senses this rhythm: he puts his head to the ground and "under the thicket, the earth was vibrating very slightly" (p. 62) - the isle is also a living organism.

The boys damage and scar the island, paying no heed to anything other than their own predicament: Jack needlessly hacks at vegetation (p. 33), they scar the canopy of the forest with dislodged boulders (their crashed aircraft has also left a deep scar) and twice they burn the island, once accidentally, but the second time in an act of gratuitous violence. Delbaere-Garant makes the connection between man and nature: "At the end of the novel Ralph, with his bruised [and singed] flesh and a 'swollen and bloody scar where the spear had hit him' is identified with the island".¹⁰⁷ The isle is repeatedly personified. The stars that "pricked round the head of the mountain" (p. 131) echo Simon's halo of flies, and later of phosphorescence. The adjective "pink" is used repeatedly in connection with the mountain, cliffs and rocks: they are flesh-coloured while the island is said to have a "backbone" (p. 161). The rhythm of the waves against the shore sounds like blood pumping through the human body: "The deep sea breaking miles away on the reef made an undertone less perceptible than the susurrations of the blood" (p. 62).

But the analogies between man and island run deeper than the physical. In *Pincher Martin* the action is said to be taking place in the "globe" of Martin's skull - his island is a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

mind-forged world of its own, a product of his physical condition and of his psyche. Similarly the boys' island mirrors a psychological landscape. The jungle, where they hunt, "rape", kill and the locus of their nightmares, can be viewed as representative of the id while the bare mountain, where they try to keep the flame of reason and civilisation alive, is the super-ego. Self-consciousness isolates the ego, turns the self into a vulnerable "island" where anything unfamiliar is a threat. The island consciousness is threatened by the dark ocean of the unknown (we have noted that for the boys it is a breathing, surging monster filled with snapping sharks and giant squid). Castle Rock is the head of the isle, the seat of consciousness, but it is invaded by swarming savages from out of the jungle (and there is the certainty that sometime in the distant future the ocean's action will sever it from the island body). In the light of these analogies, setting fire to the isle at the end of the novel can be viewed as a symbolic act of self-immolation, manifestation of a death instinct, on the part of the boys: the new (post-Darwinian and post-atomic) species of colonisers on this island are shown to be degenerate. By burning their little oceanic planet they are destroying themselves.

* * *

The *deus ex machina* device at the end of the novel dramatically changes our perspective. In *The Inheritors* a similar switch at the end has the effect of reducing the Neanderthals to something more animal-like, and consequently more pathetic. The same is the case in *Lord of the Flies* where the boys appear as a band of "savages", or a pack of animals (just as the "savages" looked to Darwin when he first stepped ashore on Tierra del Fuego). What the Ballantynesque naval officer does not see is that the boys *are* us. We are tempted to take a further step back and see the adult on the beach as merely an older "savage" in a strange warrior costume, the cruiser just an extension of his spear.

Golding's story is not a simple allegorical reworking of Ballantyne. Even if Golding were as optimistic regarding human nature, he would find it difficult to write a *Coral Island* tale in a mid-twentieth century world. Darwin, Freud and Hitler have made the

"innocent", boy's-own island scenario a romantic impossibility. On a small, microcosmic island the novelist grapples with the question of the nature of man (rather than the development of character or relationships - this is true of much of Golding's *oeuvre*). Using anthropological and evolutionary allusions he shows the paths of "ascent" and degeneration open to our species: so much depends on whether we are prepared to face the darkness, the savage and "animal" inheritance, of our own nature. Man's consciousness is a tool for creation and progress as much as for destruction - it produces both good and evil. Anthropological, biological, evolutionary and geophysical elements in the text throw man's predicament into greater relief and show him that he is only a tiny organism, integrally related to every other living thing, on a small celestial island.

In the novel there is an incident that perhaps sums up man's position: it is the image of Henry standing in the last fling of the tide examining the detritus of landward life and the scavenging sea creatures. Golding's essay "In My Ark" has just such a scene, yet there he explains the symbolism. He begins with a quote from Gavin Maxwell's *Ring of Bright Water*:

"There is perpetual mystery and excitement in living on the seashore, which is in part a return to childhood and in part because for all of us the sea's edge remains the edge of the unknown; the child sees bright shells, the vivid weeds and red sea-anemones of the rock pools with wonder and with a child's eye for minutiae; the adult who retains wonder brings to his gaze some partial knowledge which can but increase it, and he brings, too, the eye of association and of symbolism, so that at the edge of the ocean he stands at the brink of his own unconscious."

We stand, then, on the shore, not as our Victorian fathers stood, lassoing phenomena with Latin names, listing, docketing and systematising. Belsen and Hiroshima have gone some way towards teaching us humility. We would take help and a clue from anywhere we could. It is not the complete specimen for the collector's cabinet that excites us. It is the fragment, the hint. For the universe has blown wide open, is a door from which man does not know whether blessing or menace will come. We pore, therefore, over the natural language of nature. . . . We walk among the layers of disintegrating coral, along the straggling line of "brown sea-wrack, dizzy with jumping sand-hoppers". We stand among the flotsam. . . . We know nothing. We look daily at the appalling mystery of plain stuff. We stand where any upright food-gatherer has stood, on the edge of our own unconscious, and hope, perhaps, for the terror of the print of a single foot.¹⁰⁸

Scientific knowledge¹⁰⁹ is shunned in place of a deeper understanding of nature and of life; we must have an ear for what our unconscious tells us, and the approach of the

¹⁰⁸Golding, "In My Ark" in *The Hot Gates*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁹Piggy represents the Latin-naming Victorians (he is almost a Darwin disciple) and examines the contents of his rock-pool "aquarium" with scientific eyes.

"unknown" (even if it is the darker other that arises "naturally" from within), although terrifying, must be accepted and embraced with hope and with a willingness to try to understand. In *Lord of the Flies* Henry also stands "where any upright food-gatherer has stood" and examines the "creatures that lived in this last fling of the sea, tiny transparencies that came questing in with the water over the hot, dry sand" (p. 66). He likes to play with them and is thrilled by "exercising control over things". Just as the scene in which Pedro and Wang confront each other over the cooking fire, this is also a Darwinian image, here depicting the most "primitive" and the most "advanced" forms of life spilled up on a desert island beach, two opposite ends of the evolutionary scale juxtaposed with one another. It is the combined processes of natural and sexual selection and survival of the fittest that have, over millions of years, brought *Homo sapiens* to this point. In this light Percival's statement that the beast comes from the water is not so far-fetched. He is unconsciously alluding to the watery base of the "abyss of ages", to a time when our progenitors emerged from the swamps, gradually lost their aquatic breathing apparatus, and took up residence on the land.

CONTEMPORARY ISLANDS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

DISSIPATING DARWIN

In the decades following the publication of the *Origin*, Darwinism was at its most controversial and influential. Evolution was the theory of the age and writers responded in diverse ways to the ideas spawned by Darwin, Wallace, Huxley, Spencer and other pioneers in the field. As the theory became more refined it spread and developed into related areas (degeneration, thermodynamics, eugenics and various aspects of social Darwinism) and writers of fiction were quick to respond to these developments. The island became a particularly popular setting for authors to play the evolution game, tampering with its mechanisms and creating weird and wonderful scenarios. In the early years, writers took their Darwin neat, so to speak. This was the period of the scientific and anthropological romances, of which *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is one of the most engaging and sophisticated.

By the early part of the twentieth century, traditional Darwinian thought was no longer at the cutting edge of science and had been incorporated into the general body of knowledge. Mendel's work on genetics had paved the way for a new, more rigorous approach to studying the mechanisms of chance variation and heredity. The initial momentous implications of Darwin's theory had been worked through and writers had all but exhausted the range of ape-man/missing link plots. Serious authors developed modern, sophisticated responses to Darwin, bearing upon the emotional and psychological affects of evolution on ordinary people and on society as a whole. The theory was used as an effective weapon in the burning debates of the day concerning Empire, "race", class and women. Darwinian ideas are woven into the metaphorical fabric of so many texts of this period, and in Conrad novels in particular we find a sustained fascination for the implications of Darwinism, especially in his two great island texts, *Lord Jim* and *Victory*.

By mid-century, a hundred years after the publication of the *Origin*, and in the aftermath of two catastrophic world wars, evolution no longer occurs in literature as a

prominent issue in itself. By this time the theory had become a part of human thought, an assumption embedded in the base of our conception of ourselves. Darwin was now coming to us diluted in so many different areas of enquiry - psychology, sociology, biology, anthropology, archaeology - that it was almost impossible not to be aware of it. Thus we find that when Golding isolates his children on an island conducting an experiment in child psychology, in children's responses to religion and Empire, and in their internalisation of the war and class system, his knowledge of evolution manifests itself unconsciously as part of his intellectual make-up. The model of progress ("ladders" of development in man, society, religion and political structures) that Golding undercuts is derived from a particular reading of Darwin's blueprint. Indeed, I would suggest that post-Darwinian island settings, given that islands are naturally the most dramatic evolutionary laboratories in nature, almost demand some kind of "Darwinian" handling.

DARWINIAN ISLANDS TODAY?

With today's postmodern and poststructuralist suspicion of all totalising theories, a Darwinian island in the traditional sense cannot easily be written; certainly not one at the leading edge of contemporary fashions in literature. However, it is interesting to conjecture about the further "evolution" of island fiction, particularly the "pure" Darwinian variety.¹ Theories of evolution have come a long way since the nineteenth century: neo-Darwinians and their critics are concerned with ecology, Green issues and genetic engineering and these areas of science have opened up new possibilities for islands of the imagination. Ecological arguments have been used to re-examine the theory of evolution² and Darwin has come under attack by critics who see the earth as a single, self-regulating system, *the* unit of evolution. Gaia is thought of as a cybernetic

¹Of course in science fiction, particularly in texts where other planets are visited, the traditional Darwinian (celestial) island novel is still being written; however in this chapter I am more interested in serious contemporary island fiction.

²Aldous Huxley, in his novel *Island* (1962), fashions an "ecotopia" in which islanders create, through mystical religion, sensitive education and the intelligent use of drugs, a Utopian/Arcadian environment set up as a counter to the sinful modern world bent on self-destruction. The inhabitants are ecologically conscious and have only adopted the most necessary elements of the industrially advanced world.

"organism" capable of monitoring its responses, maintaining stability and directing itself towards a goal:

Gaia must be seen, as Lovelock sees her, as a vast co-operative enterprise geared to the maintenance of its overall structure in the face of change. Clearly competition occurs: but it is not the most fundamental relationship between living things.³

Darwin's emphasis on competition, struggle and natural selection are criticised and a model of *co-operation* as the true evolutionary strategy is put forward. Indeed, some scientists do not view evolution as random, preferring to see Gaia as able to maintain its homeostasis, even regulating genetic and chemical processes. There have even been claims recently that cells may have mechanisms for choosing which mutations will occur. This, almost "creationist" approach, is geared towards reintroducing order into a blind and random universe. Given these attacks on traditional Darwinian thought, an "evolutionary" fictional island of today might well be considerably different to its predecessors.

Connected to the idea of a Green earth, or ecotopia, is the struggle for animal rights. Recent genetic research has shown us just how close we are to the animal kingdom and one can imagine a Wellsian science fiction response to these discoveries.

Chimpanzees and we share more than 99 per cent of our genes. If, in various forgotten islands around the world, survivors of all intermediates back to the chimp/human common ancestor were discovered, who can doubt that our laws and our moral conventions would be profoundly affected, especially as there would presumably be some interbreeding along the spectrum?⁴

Genetic engineering has again opened neo-Darwinian (that is Darwinism with a post-Mendelian view of heredity) discussion on the possibility of manufacturing tailored creatures, making the Frankenstein nightmare a real possibility. A new Doctor Moreau would have all the necessary know-how to tamper with the mechanisms of life, and this time he would succeed. Genetics is based on the premise of self replication (achieved by the DNA and RNA in of our genetic make-up); it is, however, conceivable that humans are only a brief stage in the process of evolution and it could be silicon-based computers that a new Doctor Moreau would fashion as the future replicators . . .

³Edward Goldsmith, "Gaia and Evolution" in Charles Jencks (ed.) *The Post-Modern Reader* (London, 1992), p. 407.

⁴Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986; London, 1988), p. 263.

In the late twentieth century serious island fiction is, however, not concerned with this kind of Darwinian island and the remainder of this chapter will analyse current trends in the genre as well as consider vestiges of the Darwinian element in contemporary island fiction.

CONTEMPORARY ISLAND LITERATURE

Introduction

Diluted Darwinian ideas can still be discerned in contemporary island literature, but in our late twentieth-century, postmodern age there have been an injection of new concerns into the genre. Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, ecological and other political interests are apparent in modern fictional islands, as well as in the criticism of old ones (in this sense islands are still fulfilling their role in fiction as sites for the testing of contemporary thought systems). These issues, often influenced by developments in critical theory, crowd in on the small desert island, like newly-arrived, upstart castaways demanding to make themselves heard. It is with regard to the formerly oppressed - women and blacks - that island fiction has been particularly concerned and these feminist and postcolonial issues can be partly traced back to Darwin.

Darwin's theory had a profound impact on the position of women and of "non-European races" in society. Evolutionary ideas about sexual selection and the role of women in the animal kingdom, transformed human perceptions regarding the "second sex". Certainly Darwin could be used by "reactionaries" to show that women were just breeders and that natural and sexual selection had fashioned men into creatures who were bigger, stronger, fitter, more courageous, cleverer and thus better than women. But, more importantly, Darwinian science had shown that a woman's womb was not just a receptacle for an already formed child, encapsulated in the male sperm, requiring nothing but the right environment to germinate. His hesitant Lamarckian ideas about genetics (what he called his hypothesis of pangenesis) showed that creatures inherited characteristics via "gemmules" (his conception of genes) from *both* parent genetic lineages. He showed that in the animal kingdom females were sometimes larger and

stronger than males; anthropologists had found tribes where the women did most of the manual labour; and a fact such as our descent from hermaphrodites also put sexual differentiation into perspective. Proving that women's bodies and particularly reproduction were wholly "animal" served to "free women's bodies from the stigma of clerical prejudice and centuries of popular superstition and, in the process to substitute the physician for the priest as the moral preceptor of society."⁵ These ideas all helped to destabilise Victorian man's perception of himself as innately superior to women.

Similarly Darwin's findings with regard to race were sometimes distorted and used to justify discrimination and imperial "acquisitions" (the idea that "primitives" were lower down the "ladder" of civilisation). However he proved scientifically that people of different "races" do not belong to separate species and that miscegenation actually improves the stock. He showed that all "races" are derived from a common "homo" progenitor and he explained the differences in skin colour and physical features in terms of sexual selection, thereby dispelling the myth that blacks were closer to the apes than Europeans.

Since Darwin's time the arguments about women and race have matured into the sophisticated feminist and postcolonial modes of creative and critical thought. And in contemporary island writing these two areas, dressed in current political and theoretical clothing, are receiving the most attention. Indeed there is the sense that the white, male castaway/isolato tradition is under sustained attack and is being appropriated and rewritten.⁶ It is on these areas that I would like to concentrate in this chapter, showing how far along the road these "Darwinian" ideas have come. It is also one of my projects to ascertain whether the postmodern island succeeds according to the generic blueprint I have sketched in this thesis.

⁵Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur, *The Making of the Modern Body* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 29.

⁶In non-fiction this is also the case: a text such as Lucy Irvine's *Castaway* is a re-enactment of the Robinson Crusoe story told by a resourceful and willing woman castaway (1983; London, 1984).

Postmodern, Poststructuralist, Postcolonial and Feminist Islands

Since the 1960's innovative island fiction has engaged with contemporary literary and critical theory and is distinctly postmodern. The postmodern project encourages a revisiting of past islands and a rewriting of those experiences in a generically irreverent, self-reflexive, parodic and often ironic manner with the aim of commenting on past islands in relation to present islands. It often entails a rethinking and reworking of the form and content of works in the island "canon". The postmodern island places the canonical island in inverted commas, so to speak, thereby drawing attention to the contradictions and trying to subvert the ideological assumptions. Today's authors are conscious of their inability to create mimesis and seem constantly aware of their forebears' voices; their texts become self-consciously intertextual (in effect a "cannibalisation" of previous island texts and genres takes place).

In postmodernism/poststructuralism, authority, closure and narrative continuity are questioned. The centre no longer holds. Postmodernism interrogates centralised, hierarchised, closed systems; it resists totalisation itself and yet assimilates voraciously.⁷ The decentred perspective (what Linda Hutcheon calls the "ex-centric"⁸) comes into its own, be it that of a different class, creed, sexual orientation, race or gender. However these do not become new "centres", replacing a former "truth"; rather all universalising pretensions are scrutinised and the close relation between "truth", power and authority laid bare. Because the center is now seen as a construct, a fiction, the old binary oppositions for which the center provided a pivot and always privileged one half - white/black, male/female, self/other, object/subject, intellect/body, text/meaning, First World/Third World - are broken down using deconstructive methods.

Postmodernism can easily fall into the trap of being associated with that which it seeks to criticise: its commitment to doubleness (or "duplicity") and to self-conscious criticism, often in the form of parody, make this almost inevitable. Postmodernism both uses and abuses general conventions, grand totalising narratives and forms of representation in an attempt to make them more transparent and to "de-doxify" them,

⁷Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988; London, 1989), pp. 41-2.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 12.

resisting the traditional narrative impulse to supposedly dissolve difference and contradiction: there is a fine line to walk here between complicity and critique. Many have interpreted this seemingly equivocal political voice in negative, even implicitly conservative terms; indeed the project of deconstruction (central to postmodern method) can, on one level, be viewed as a nihilistic exposition of the increasing distance between discourse and the real, emptying it of political power. There is now no recourse to a singular "dominant" history (of colonialism, racism, gender struggle) and no dominant formula (Darwinism, Marxism, Freudianism) to provide the master narrative. Nonetheless there *is* a radical political potential in postmodern methodology and I find, as I will demonstrate below, that J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* is relatively successful in exploiting this potential.

Like metropolitan postmodernism, postcolonialism is also involved in scrutinising dominant, imperial forms of textuality; however postcolonialism remains basically oppositional and retains a "referential" relationship to regional or national issues.⁹ The concern of postmodernist and feminist writers and critics to dismantle assumptions about language, textuality and power and to stress the importance of ideological construction in social-textual relations finds echoes in postcolonial texts.¹⁰ By pushing the colonial world to the periphery of experience, the "centre" extended consciousness beyond the point at which monocentrism in all spheres of thought could be unquestioningly accepted and multifariousness, pluralism and marginality became major sources of creative energy.¹¹

Given that so much island fiction has been linked to the imperial project, it is not surprising that postcolonial writing and criticism has become a part of much contemporary island fiction. The islands I wish to look at briefly in this conclusion accord with Derrida's definition of deconstruction, that is the decolonisation and decentralisation of European thought insofar as it is "incapable of respecting the Being and meaning of the other", and to the extent that its philosophical tradition makes "common cause with

⁹Stephen Slemon, "Modernism's Last Post", *Ariel* 20, 4 (October 1989), pp. 7-9.

¹⁰Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1988; London, 1989), p. 165.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 12.

oppression and with the totalitarianism of the same".¹² Derrida's attempt to decolonise Western thought is a postmodern project, an awareness of cultural relativity. Postcolonial theory has become increasingly important through the 1980's and writers have been "writing back" from the "periphery" to the metropolitan, ex-colonial centre in a most challenging and exciting manner. Island novels have been "colonised" by this postcolonial critical mode.

Feminist theory (and I employ the term in a traditional, Anglo-American sense) has also developed the "periphery" as a way out of the domination of the centre. Women have been "colonised" in a similar way to Third World populations and have also been forced to use the oppressor's language in order to give expression to their marginalisation.¹³ Feminism (I use the term very generally here, resisting an attempt to explain the many different "feminisms") has much in common with the postmodern and postcolonial projects, but has combated incorporation into either of these camps at the risk of being subsumed. Feminism works towards an awareness of our social and cultural positioning, however it is an act designed to *transform* "political" systems. Where feminism focuses on patriarchal ideology as the centre of oppression, postmodern and postcolonial theories look to other causes, particularly the West's reliance on ideologies which are rooted in certain "universal truths", for example humanism, history, religion and progress. Feminists take an ideological stand in opposition to the patriarchy, a position of "truth" from which to understand and assail aesthetic and social practices, while postmodernism rejects a privileged position, resulting in its often confusing double encoding as both

¹²Quoted in Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990; London, 1993), p. 18.

¹³As we shall see in the novels I discuss below, there is a great deal of overlap in the agendas of feminist and postcolonial projects. For instance feminist critics have used Frantz Fanon's model of colonialism as one between the male (parent) culture and the female (colonised) literature (Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* [1979; New Haven, 1984], p. 74). Gender is a category that helps to displace the binarisms of coloniser/colonised, self/other, oppressor/oppressed and First World/Third World; but unless we grasp that gender is overdetermined by other relations, we risk reducing colonialism to a narrative of sexual difference (Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* [Minneapolis, 1993], p. 11). Race and gender are not interchangeable functions:

Presuming a shared identity between European women and the colonized, Euro-American feminism reduces the overdetermined contradictions of colonialism to its patriarchal structures alone. In this manner, the Western sexed subject serves as a privileged signifier of Otherness. . . . The contradictions to white femininity are more evident in a colonial context where the middle-class English woman, oscillating between a dominant position of race and a subordinate one of gender, has a restricted access to colonial authority. (Ibid., pp. 11-12)

complicity and critique.¹⁴ Feminists use postmodern parody and subversion in order to deconstruct patriarchal practices, but they go further than this, developing strategies of resistance that are lacking in postmodernism.

I would now like to consider the state of the contemporary island text by looking at two of the most sophisticated recent *postmodern* island fictions - Marianne Wiggins' *John Dollar* (1989) and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) - and assessing their success in terms of the genre. I will show how these postmodern revisits to Golding's and Defoe's islands engage with postcolonial and feminist debates and how the Darwinian plot, although greatly diluted, can still be discerned in today's serious island fiction. I upset the chronology because the Wiggins novel uses the island as a test-bed/microcosm in the traditional way (albeit from a postmodern perspective) while *Foe* breaks radically with the generic convention and deals with contemporary critical and theoretical concerns regarding language and narration.

JOHN DOLLAR

Marianne Wiggins' second novel, *John Dollar*, is a highly eclectic postmodern rewriting of *Lord of the Flies*, this time using little girls as the castaways on an island in the Bay of Bengal in 1919. It is the story of a group of English schoolgirls from Rangoon who are marooned (by a tidal wave and the massacre of their parents) on an Andaman Island and have to come to terms with their isolation, with the presence of a paralysed man and with horrific scenes of cannibalism committed by the natives (and finally by themselves). I am particularly concerned with tracing the feminist and postcolonial elements, but there are a number of other Darwinian features (which arise largely as a result of Wiggins' reworking of *Lord of the Flies*), pertaining to religion, law, degeneration and cannibalism, which are pertinent. Wiggins' text engages with the island in a way we are familiar with: creating an isolated microcosm in which to examine

¹⁴Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989; London, 1991), p. 153.

aspects of society; however her postmodern technique brings with it certain problems that undermine her project.

Feminism

Charlotte Lewes is a young woman who loses her husband in the battle of the Somme and finds that she is unable to cope with life in grey, war-time, repressed London society. Her life has become sterile and devoid of passion: "In her mind she saw her own heat dying."¹⁵ In a desperate attempt to take control of her life again she enrolls for a post as a primary school teacher in Burma. Charlotte also begins reading alternative authors - James, Pound and Joyce - and is drawn to myths as an escape from her drab existence. Indeed it is as though she wants to weave a new myth for herself and she is fortunate to find herself alive at a moment in history, during the first great wave of woman's liberation, when she is able to carry out this dream. Her period in the Empire will bring her face to face with "the primeval", but in a way she least expects and from which she will never recover. On an island setting she will be made aware of a Darwinian world, however in a postmodern novel such as this we will see how Darwinian elements are used arbitrarily, often with sensationalist intentions, and are not rooted in any new or profound observations concerning the nature of man or society (other than what it picks up by reflection from the classic island novels it "colonises").

Charlotte takes to her new home in Rangoon and delights in the new sights, sounds and smells. Soon she is talking and dressing like the natives; she smokes local tobacco and is tempted by Burmese men and by opium. As a female coloniser disinterested in the ideology of empire she feels herself outside the main stream, more receptive to the new country and culture. Her "marginal" position is nevertheless one of power. The Chinese, Indians and Burmese are suspicious of Charlotte (her different coloured eyes lead the locals to believe she is "half-man half-woman" [p. 26] and in a sense they are correct as her conduct and independence do blur the traditional sex roles), while the British colonials try to bring her back into the fold. Having won her freedom, she is unwilling to

¹⁵Marianne Wiggins, *John Dollar* (London, 1989), p. 12.

relinquish it and be drawn into the self-important colonial world of privilege. She learns that the chauvinist attitude of suitors like Mister Macgregor's

was the attitude in force in Burma about everything, as if the English there weren't conscious of the current century. . . . The British who were out in Burma were not engaged by *new* ideas, *new* books nor *new* ways of being men and women. (pp. 27-8)

The First World War had not had the effect of blowing these outposts of Empire into the twentieth century, as had happened in Europe. What Wiggins does is to create a scenario in which precisely this shattering of society takes place, and she chooses a remote island on which to detonate her explosion.

Charlotte's sexual liberation is echoed in the confused, pre-pubescent sexual awakenings of her pupils and many of the girls' imaginings, the conversations they overhear and the events they witness, leave them with a scarred perception of sexuality and motherhood. For instance six year old Oopi sees the stained bed sheets after her sister's first period (Sloan talks of the start of menstruation as the time when "the snake has bitten" [p. 114]). Oopi's nightmare on the eve of their departure to the island is charged with sexual imagery: she dreams of a rapacious snake with a heron's egg in its mouth smiling at her: "Its smile was meant to let her know that it could slither in and *eat her* inside-out" (p. 45). The twins are told that their mother is baking them a new sister, while Monkey is aware that her white father has had many women other than her Burmese mother. Jane is treated by her grieving father as though she was the son he lost in the war. As if this were not enough, the girls spy on their teacher having sex with her lover, John Dollar, and interpret the act as being one of pain and violence. Thus for all the girls the journey to "The Island of Our Outlawed Dreams", on one level a terrifying journey into the unconscious, will challenge and exacerbate their ill-formed sexual assumptions.

On the isle the girls collect sea-eggs (Oopi assumes that they really are eggs) while the laying of eggs by a group of turtles creates consternation amongst the "colonists". The parents wonder whether they should prohibit the children from witnessing this act. The sight of the turtles dragging themselves up the beach and knocking over anything in their path (including their cutlery and crockery, thereby disrupting this "civilised" scene), with

the single objective of getting their eggs safely buried, is a powerful Darwinian image of the mothering instinct in Nature. However the beautiful event is interrupted first by their spaniel, which attacks the turtles, then by monitor dragons that emerge from the jungle to steal the eggs, and finally by the carnage that follows the colonists' desire for turtle soup and omelette. Before the girls' eyes an act of procreation is transformed into a naked display of survival of the fittest,¹⁶ the stealing of unhatched young from mothers who are then massacred.

When the white, male world is destroyed by an earthquake and tidal wave, and the girls have to start afresh, they begin the project of refashioning some sort of existence with a skewed and "perverted" sense of sexuality, violence and what it is to be female. The girls treat the new Adam, a paralysed Dollar, as though he were an alien who has fallen from the sky (p. 154). In this brave new world inhabited by women alone, the presence of a single man, makes him the centre of their attention, of their myths. At first he is put through the humiliation of having an ejaculation with the children standing around, fascinated by his "serpent" (p. 168). The war (symbolised by the carnage surrounding the earthquake) has left women in a position of power over the surviving men who no longer have control over their own sexuality. This is graphically manifested in a scene that resembles a maenadic rape where the girls pierce his thigh and groin with a needle in order to find out the extent of his paralysis.

When Dollar regains consciousness he tries to restore order in their little community, but, unable to move, he has no way of enforcing his authority. Why hadn't they built shelters, searched for water, gathered food (like boy-scouts or the children of Golding's novel would have done), he rages?¹⁷ As Gail Dohrmann notes, the girls' education has not conditioned them for this: "Women who have been placed on a pedestal by a sexist society are not well-prepared for survival tasks."¹⁸ They paint and adorn their bodies,

¹⁶From a Darwinian perspective it is noteworthy that John calls the Andamans "still evolving islands" (p. 63) and consequently appropriate for displaying the mechanisms of evolution.

¹⁷Brought up on stories for little girls, these children are uninterested in the castaway blueprint as laid down in *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Coral Island*, *Masterman Ready*, *Treasure Island* and other "boy's own" adventures.

¹⁸Gail V. Dohrmann, "John Dollar: Marianne Wiggins' Anti-Utopian Novel", *The English Journal* 80, 4 (April 1991), pp. 70-71.

gather trinkets and build an umbrella (ironically recalling the symbol of Crusoe's civility) instead of a hut. Dollar realises that he is totally dependent on the girls and he begins living the nightmare of trying to manipulate their minds which become increasingly unhinged and hysterical.

Postcolonialism

Charlotte has been sent to Burma "to foster and preserve the standards of the Empire in English children" (p. 11) and upon arrival she is made aware of the attitude of the ruling elite. The little girls are brought up in a society that is conscious of its own superiority; as Oopi's father tells her in Lamarckian fashion: "A girl must call upon her inbred nation if she's to hold her own against the vagaries of nature" (p. 46). But on the island it becomes immediately apparent that their "inbred nation" is unable to provide them with a workable paradigm to counter their nightmare experience of nature in the raw.

The parents of most of the children are stereotypical English colonials dreaming of home and whiling away their time in meaningless or self-destructive pursuits: the twins' mother is an opium addict who neglects them, Jane's mother has committed suicide and her father has ignored her since the death of her eldest brother. They are all extremely racist and Monkey, the only half-caste in the class, is victimised and even called: "*our* slave-y" (p. 192). "Monkey's race nullifies privilege in [the girls'] view" (p. 132). The racism of their parents comes out in talk of the "jollies" (p. 65), "nig-nogs" (p. 36) and in their racist humour (for instance the joke about naked pygmies, one which rebounds in the most horrific way when real life pygmies come to take revenge on the colonisers).

In a flurry of patriotism following the winning of the war the colonials decide that, to celebrate the king's birthday in 1919, they will plant the flag on an atoll in the Andaman chain¹⁹ and rename it King George's Island. They set off on an expedition to last no

¹⁹Reflecting the imperial *Zeitgeist*, the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1910-11) says of the Andaman Islands: "the abode of savages as low in civilization as almost any known on earth," a people so primitive that they do not know how to renew a spent fire, whose adults have the intelligence of "the civilized child of ten or twelve" and of about the same weight as well (cited in Michael Gorra, "Washed Ashore Without Parents", *The New York Times Book Review* [19 February 1989], p. 3).

longer than four or five days as though they were going to establish a new colony. The provisions, guns, harpoons, military uniforms, ammunition, pigs, silver cutlery, china et cetera are loaded onto three vessels by servants and they embark with much pretentious religious self-importance, pomp and ceremony. It is a boy-scout, *Coral Island* adventure for the males of the party, a re-enactment of the days of imperial expansion and mission. On the island the men are interested in hunting and arrange exploring and shooting parties. All have read or heard of *Robinson Crusoe* and one of the servants is appropriately named Friday. None realise that in the aftermath of the war, the structures and ideology that held the Empire together have been dealt a mortal blow and that there is really nothing to celebrate. The hypocrisy and bloodthirstiness of the Europeans, laid bare in the trenches of the Somme and Verdun, have repercussions for everyone. When Dollar finds that *The Ruby Girl* has been turned into a ghost ship, her hold splattered with the blood of all her male crew members, it is as though the end of the world has come. The ghost ship stands for the catastrophic war and its aftermath: the dissolution of empire, the threat of degeneration and the rise of the "ex-centrics" (children and pygmies, women and the colonised).

Cannibalism

The imagery associated with empire and with the colonists returns again and again to the idea of eating or consuming, the implication being that colonialism is a form of cannibalism. In a satirical passage of free-indirect speech at the beginning of the story, Monkey sets the tone and makes this connection:

The english would never fill rivers with corpses, he hides them instead in the ground. He eats with sharp knives. He chews with a knife and a fork. He buries his dead so the other white castes will not cook them and eat them. Worms and the maggots are better than teeth of one's enemies, that's why the white caste is always at table. . . . He eats cities, chews names. He eats people. Her name was something a long time ago that the english had chewed from its whole state of "Menaka" into a word they said "Monica" into the status of "Monkey", for short. (pp. 7-8)

The colonials are presented as people obsessed with the ritual of eating and are prepared to devour anything. There is talk of eating dolphins (p. 36) and, sitting around the cooking fire on the island, they discuss cannibals and boast about the various exotic

things they have consumed. The colonel talks of eating bats and Amanda says that she believes that bats, like vampires, suck human blood. They slaughter pigs for dinner and later set about butchering the beached turtles. The relish with which these gory descriptions of the killing and the preparing of such dishes is delivered, calls into question the "civilisation" of the colonists, and the stories deeply affect the children.

Furthermore, there are metaphorical allusions to anthropophagy. When pregnant, the twins' mother talks of "baking them a new sister. *Something to eat* they at first thought" (p. 54). For girls who have witnessed and heard such bloodthirsty things, the catechism that Nolly recites acquires another meaning. Renunciation of "all the sinful lusts of the flesh" (p. 115) translates into a prohibition on cannibalism and when the tidal wave hits them, Oopi feels herself going "into its jaws and its stomach" (p. 123). Even the story of "Little Red Riding Hood" that Amanda narrates involves the protagonists being eaten!

And there is literal cannibalism too. The twins find what they think is a monkey skull on the beach, but Mat. [sic] realises that it is human and that the head has been trepanned and carved: "*You poor bastard,*" he thinks, "*how long ago and from what hell did you wash up on this forgotten beach-?*" (p. 109). The answer is of course that the skull has not been "washed up" and hell is right there, in and among them. After the earthquake the allusions to cannibalism snowball: when Amanda cuts Dollar while shaving him, she automatically licks the blood on her finger and finds the taste "*di-vine*" (p. 182). Soon after this the girls witness the horrific spectacle of their parents and elders being roasted and devoured by pygmies: the beach where the colonists massacred the turtles bears witness to another such massacre. But some of the girls also perversely and unconsciously identify with these "naked children" - almost the same size as them - who rebel against the parent figures. When the smell of cooked flesh reaches them they fill their mouths with sand as they watch the bodies being torn apart. At this point some of the girls tip over the edge into madness.

When hunger and insanity get the better of Nolly and Amanda, they put into practice what they have learnt and begin to eat from the flesh of Dollar's paralysed legs. The

consuming of his flesh also accords with their awakening sexuality.²⁰ Not surprisingly, the other girls confuse the sounds of sex and of eating (Oopi, we recall, had thought that John had been "eating Charlotte's breasts" [p. 115]), trying to understand what the older girls are doing: "Nightly, they fell into a silent wakefulness . . . hearing sounds from Nolly and Amanda that they'd heard before, in animals, from parents, sounds they didn't like to hear" (p. 214).

Religion

Nolly's religious upbringing has led her to understand the world in Old Testament terms. She tries to manage the spiritual life of the children on the island, making prohibitions, offering prayers, and making them aware of their mission (hoping that there might be natives to convert). But soon their Christianity becomes distorted: Oopi collects Dollar's hair and carries it around in her hot water bottle as a sort of a talisman, a mobile shrine to manhood. Indeed they begin to worship adult maleness, the father figure (only Monkey, who has already lost her father, is able to cope with the loss of the patriarchal guiding hand).

Amanda thinks that Dollar's blood tastes like something from heaven (p. 182) and she and Nolly become priestesses, turning his body into a "Dionysian" shrine or oracle.²¹ Nolly gets John to pronounce on the time of their rescue and on the coming of the (cannibalistic) devil as though he had supernatural powers and could bring about a miracle. She sees things in Manichean terms, placing herself on the side of the good, white, right; unable to see that the devil may arise from within as easily as from across the waters. To establish whether the devil is coming they devise a form of "banana divination", the little girls' equivalent of Golding's boys' blood offerings to Beelzebub.

²⁰I. M. Lewis notes the close connection between the intimate social interactions of eating and sexuality: "I do not think that we can reach any general understanding of the meaning and pervasive appeal of the ideology of cannibalism, and its use in labelling others and in interpreting their activities, unless we take due note of these sexual allusions" (*Religion in Context: Cults and Charisma* [Cambridge, 1986], p. 75).

²¹The Dionysian aspect of their worship is further suggested in the maenadic element of their treatment of Dollar as well as in the murder of Gaby. Like King Pentheus, Gaby does not worship at the shrine of the God and, like Pentheus, she escapes her pursuers by hiding in a tree, where she is eventually discovered and killed. However where Golding's use of Greek allusions is motivated in anthropological terms, in this postmodern borrowing the connection is not made.

And when the "devils" actually arrive, it appears to them as a scene out of the apocalypse with the sea on fire and "snakie dragons" (p. 198) bearing down on them.

While the men are being roasted and eaten, Nolly recites prayers and says: "*Take, eat; this is my body*" (p. 201). After the feast the girls descend to the beach and try to reconstruct the men from bones, sinews and ashes. Finding resurrection impossible they build a totem of bones, a sacred shrine, and then smear themselves with and even eat the faeces of the pygmies. Soon they are covered in flies and we immediately make the connection with Beelzebub, Lord of Dung or Lord of the Flies.

John is their only link with a male, adult world and he is treated like a divine object, being groomed and having his face painted and his body decorated. A flame burns at the place of worship and soon it is only the older ones who are allowed to tend to him. Having failed to change their conditions, Nolly transforms him into something supernatural, a saviour. Confusing what they have witnessed with the Christian Eucharist, Nolly and Amanda turn the giving of the daily dose of quinine to John into a kind of Holy Communion. What their ritual (which becomes pared down and symbolic, the way all religions evolve) and exclusivity disguise from the other girls, is another form of communion: the literal eating of his body and drinking of his blood.²²

The Law

The novel lays bare the artificial nature of laws in a world of survival of the fittest and shows what a thin veneer is the overlay of reason, rationality and humanism. At the beginning of the story Monkey notes the arbitrary nature of British law:

The english makes laws. He makes one law for men. He makes one law for women, a law for his children. (p. 7)

Although the girls do not attempt to form a rudimentary government as Golding's boys do, they do try to institute a few basic laws. But it is the two older ones who make the, often arbitrary rules, and they exclude themselves from their sanction. They have learnt

²²I am reminded here of the Margaret Atwood novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969), in which the proto-feminist protagonist equates the actions of the patriarchy with acts of cannibalism upon women and decides to remove her body from the possibility of "consumption" and even fantasises about devouring her new, liberated lover.

well from their fathers. It is only Jane who, having been a victim of neglect, suggests laws that seem practical in terms of their mental well-being: "We should make it 'outlawed' if you frighten someone," Jane insists, "if you make the other person cry" (p. 136). Attempts to delegate tasks, make fire and shelters, are doomed to failure. Soon their laws and the loose structure of their society decay:

Laws of nature, laws of grammar, parliamentary laws could not apply to what they found to be an alien and purposeless reality. Even their own Laws had been forgotten or discarded, dying, like an ancient language, from disuse. (p. 172)

During this rapid degeneration the underpinnings of modern, post-Renaissance thought - logic, reason and humanism - dissolves and all that is left is the husk. These ideals are symbolised in *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* that Dollar takes with him wherever he goes. Leonardo writes of the human eye: "Who would believe that so small a space could contain the images of all the universe?" (p. 106) and this could just as well apply to the island, a microcosm of life. But after witnessing the atrocities on the beach, Dollar no longer finds pleasure in da Vinci and can no longer see the beauty in the notebooks. He looks at the drawings of the proportions of the human body (attempts to measure, quantify and render man more comprehensible to the rational mind), but can only interpret them as a manual showing how to mutilate and where to butcher. The things held dear and sacred in Western culture - art, beauty, science, reason, humanism - do not explain or protect us from the darkness within, what I would term on one level a biological inheritance; indeed they can harbour it.²³ Finally he asks the girls to burn his secular bible.

Degeneration

The girls' path of degeneration has similar co-ordinates to that of Golding's boys, but with a clichéd feminine inflexion. Their "feminised" descent into "savagery" centres

²³In his introduction to the notebooks Edward MacCurdy shows how da Vinci's genius was used to advance all aspects of knowledge, including inventions that came into their own on the battlefields of the First World War, the conflict which has indirectly wreaked havoc on the island:

All the most characteristic developments of the Great War, those which distinguish it from all in the long roll of its predecessors - the use of the bombing aeroplane, the use of poison gas, the tank and the submarine - all afford examples of his prescience. (*The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* 1 [1938; London, 1977], p. 24)

around a devolution to "primitive" religion whereas the boys' centres around warfare, hunting and tribal government. Where the boy's steal fire to cook meat with, the girl's steal fire from the pygmies to create a sacred flame. Their painted faces are not warrior camouflage, but more like make-up and the result is confusing: they look "like dolls or demons" (p. 111). Stereotypically the females are more ardent worshippers and look to a messianic solution. Their disorganisation, neuroses, anorexia, Electra Complexes and psychological conflicts are manifestations of their upbringing within the "degenerate" patriarchy and colonial structure. These two systems of authority are torn apart (as they were in the war), leaving the girls in a post-apocalyptic islandscape, almost entirely without white, male, adult power.

Their descent is matched by a growing mental derangement: they slowly become "batty", their minds taking nightmare flights of fancy, often with a "vampire" element (bats are mentioned throughout the novel, sometimes as a delicacy, sometimes as blood-suckers). The disturbed children want to return to early childhood to escape the adult horrors: Amanda starts sucking her thumb again (p. 173) and all they want is "for John to tell them stories and renew their childhood" (p. 196). Oopi retreats into her bower in the forest where she has imaginary tea parties. Jane reacts to the situation by refusing to eat and slowly starves herself to death.

They tell themselves reassuringly that the hooting, screaming and grunting coming from the interior are monkey armies making war (p. 172), not realising that their own existence has been reduced to the level of monkeys: "They liked washing one another's backs with sand and scratching one another's arms and legs" (p. 196); and Oopi takes to "hooting like a chimpanzee" (p. 208). "All of them had learned to do things that they'd never done before, things that marked them out as creatures, beings in the wild" (p. 218). In Oopi's mind the word "native" is confused with "naked" (p. 137) and as the girls divest themselves of clothing, the implication is not lost on us. When Gaby is roasted alive by Nolly and Amanda, these "little people" (p. 229) are completely identified with the pygmies.

Conclusion

Why are all the women spared by the earthquake, the tidal wave and the cannibals, and none of the men (except a paralysed and dying John)? That the pygmies are aware of the presence of women is hardly under debate: they only attack the vessel with men on it, sparing the *Charlotte*; they shake their fists at the forest where the girls are hiding after the feast, but leave them unharmed; and none of the adult women from the third vessel are devoured. Perhaps the cannibals consider these women taboo or goddesses: the fears of the bearers when they first land on the island might provide a clue. They ask nervously if there are lions, snakes or "giant women with white breasts" (p. 72) here. To the pygmies the English women are just such "giants" and need to be appeased with human sacrifice. Within the narrative this is a plausible explanation (but the anthropological sources for such a deduction are very tenuous indeed), however the author has other objectives. She is overturning the traditional island paradigm whereby European male castaways (often isolated from women) are allowed to refashion the world according to their own blueprint. This feminist project is achieved with the "help" of another marginalised group, the "primitives" (feminist and postcolonial projects working in tandem). After this cannibalisation/dismemberment of the patriarchy, it is up to the female survivors to "re-member" history in a more balanced way.

Another explanation is that so often islands are mind-forged spaces which reflect the narrator's or main protagonist's (Charlotte's) dreams or nightmares. Many elements of the island episodes point to them being part of a dream (after the tidal wave the section is entitled "Waking" [p. 121]), not least the setting: "The Island of Our Outlawed Dreams". Where the male island tale has traditionally been one of quest and conquest, the woman's fictional island shapes itself as a journey into the unconscious there to experience a violent overthrowing of the patriarchal symbolic. And it is Charlotte who "wakes up", regaining her eyesight,²⁴ at the end of the novel. As an emanation of her unconscious, it is not surprising that those who are saved in her dream narrative are all those who are close to her or who are in accord with her emancipated ideas: her female pupils and her

²⁴Gilbert and Gubar note how prevalent blindness (metaphorical or otherwise) is in the creative acts of women (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 58).

sympathetic lover. In Lamarckian/Freudian terms the rise of the "primitives" and a return to a "primitive" memory stored in the unconscious is again plausible, but Charlotte is so obviously a new woman (Freud's Lamarckianism having been discredited today) and the psychological groundwork for such a narrative leap is not properly laid.

Whichever explanation chosen, it is clear that the books have been cooked a little too obviously and that the author's intervention is unconvincing. The feminist and postcolonial projects are working together too neatly and the result is an implausible scenario. Similarly the fact that the pygmies and the tidal wave strike at the same time to wipe out the adult, white, male population in a simulation of the First World War is too contrived, especially in comparison with the deftly handled equivalent *Lord of the Flies*.

John Dollar fails as a postmodern island text in a number of ways. Where Golding's thesis is rooted in Darwinian, anthropological and psychoanalytic knowledge, Wiggins does not have a clear agenda and uses a superficial application of these epistemes to sensational and gratuitous ends. For instance, the arrival of a dead airman on Golding's island is both plausible and rich with symbolism (concerning history, the Fall, the nature of man/adult society and his arrival is entirely appropriate given the war taking place), but the appearance of Dollar does not have the same cogency, the same rootedness in the story.

From a feminist perspective Charlotte is certainly a new woman, one who refuses to toe the line, to dress and act according to the conventions; however I find her to be implausibly liberated, a 1980's feminist in a conservative colonial environment. Her "extraterritorial" position is too neatly orchestrated by Wiggins, the language too "knowing". The feminist project fails partly as a result of the unconvincing characterisation and scenarios, but also a result of Wiggins' postmodern technique.

Similarly there are problems with the author's postcolonial critique. Wiggins uses stereotyped colonials (they are patchwork characters from fiction rather than believable, three-dimensional people) who are subordinated to her theme, and fashions them into easy targets to be shot down: there is no room for them to breathe, for their personalities

to develop. Likewise, there is no detailed examination of colonial or native society. Just as the colonists play at being empire builders on the island, so Wiggins' revisit to the imperial past is a game with the dice heavily loaded to suit her own ends.

Elements of degeneration, anthropophagy in particular, are used for their shocking effect and are not sufficiently justified by the narrator in evolutionary anthropological terms. Where cannibalism arises "naturally" and gradually out of the tribal society forged by Jack's gang, and is only metaphorically alluded to by Golding, Wiggins exploits the horror to the full. Where the quest for meat in Golding's novel is predicated upon a carefully constructed anthropological devolution and is rooted in the exigencies of their society, the roasting and eating of Dollar at the end of the novel is based on very tenuous child psychology and is a "cannibalisation" of traditional island narratives (where cannibals were *de rigueur*) rather than a carefully motivated theme.

Similarly the use of religious imagery is only superficially integrated and the concept of evil is not sufficiently developed; it is not traced from its anthropological origins and presented as a complex marriage of intellect and "animal" in the way Golding does. It is as though Wiggins is taking this genealogy for granted, assuming the reader's familiarity with *Lord of the Flies*; but surely it is absolutely central to her thesis to investigate this in the laboratory of her island? Where Golding employs biblical allusions judiciously, integrating them into the plot and using them as a counter to the "Darwinian" theme, Wiggins goes for the sensational aspects of religion and ritual in her satire. The idea of a perverted Christianity is not carefully worked through and religious/Dionysian/totemic aspects are employed at random with insufficient plausible motivation.

Thus we find that in a novel such as *John Dollar*, postmodern play degenerates into a montage of previous island texts: in the absence of an allegorical thesis that is rooted in contemporary philosophical and societal concerns, island texts lose their way in a hall of mirrors. The postmodern elements are perfunctory and without any clearly worked out moral or political intent: the text easily falls foul of the kind of negative accusations regularly directed at postmodernism as being bankrupt, arbitrary, random, implicitly conservative and complicit. The novel is not grounded either historically or ethically and

does not attempt to go beyond the sensational and clichéd to comment on or offer some corrective for man or society in the island laboratory. We get hysteria and fetishisation without much insight into the stereotyped society or the minds of the girls. We learn very little about human nature in the absence of the powerful anthropological, psychological and theological ideas (other than in pastiche form) that are investigated in *Lord of the Flies*. Where the previous, Darwinian texts I have examined, engage in a sophisticated way with contemporary thought systems, *John Dollar* skates superficially over some of these in a way that suggests they have been culled from former island tales and pasted to create a patchwork fiction, a pastiche²⁵ devoid of any seriously considered issues. Indeed, the feminist and postcolonial concerns are undermined by postmodern eclecticism, by an attempt to do and say too much (in her haste Wiggins even makes obvious factual errors, for instance she calls James Joyce's protagonist Stephen Hero [p. 15]).

John Dollar is guilty of overt self-reflexivity and a foregrounding of textuality which detracts from the "enised" state of readers and characters (discussed in detail in *Foe* below). In moments of inauthenticity the presence of feminist and postcolonial theory makes itself too strongly felt in the narrative voice. The text is also overly literary, the voices of Golding, Crusoe, da Vinci, Ibn Battúta, Marco Polo, Cavafy and Kipling echoing through the novel without being deftly integrated into it. These elements serve to make the narrative *less* commanding, even collage-like and more arbitrary in its intentions. Furthermore the novel is not, by this method of diegesis, trying to highlight the way we come to know the past, thereby according with a political, postmodern project. Instead the method is depthless, exhibitionist, and of the "anything goes" variety. The novel's unusual typography, its paratextual elements, also draws our attention away from the island. The wide margins have (often cryptic) headings reminiscent of the chapter introductions of nineteenth-century island texts such as *Masterman Ready* and these are distracting and unmotivated (Wiggins quite literally draws our eye to the

²⁵Frederic Jameson describes pastiche as being "like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists" (from *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan [eds.] *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* [Buckingham, 1992], p. 197).

margins, the area "inhabited" by the "ex-centrics" - the girls and pygmies). For example, the reproduction in columns of Crusoe's ledger (p. 77) and the frequent use of pictographs are tricks that highlight the literary construction. They have very little to do with forwarding the narrative and everything to do with iconoclastic postmodern play. Golding's concern for a strong ethical statement has been replaced by aesthetic *jouissance*.

FOE

Introduction

J. M. Coetzee is one of South Africa's foremost writers who, during the nineteen seventies and eighties, produced half a dozen compelling novels quite unlike anything else being written in the country at the time. His form of critique of the apartheid system came in a fiction that was non-realistic and enigmatic, often coached in critical theoretical terms that made his approach to "colonialism" and oppression both more challenging and at the same time more universal in its compass.

Coetzee's retelling of *Robinson Crusoe* operates on a number of levels: there are Absurdist elements reminiscent of Beckett (whom Coetzee greatly admires); it contains poststructuralist debates on the nature of language and literature; and we can identify the influence of theorists such as Derrida, Lacan and Foucault²⁶. However it is on the ("Darwinian") areas where he breaks most tellingly with Defoe - in his representation of Friday and his inclusion of a woman on the island - that I wish to concentrate. The novel, written during the final years of apartheid (Africa's last overtly colonial system), explores the relations of power in a colonial world, examining means of resisting the white, patriarchal coloniser. Yet his novels are not overtly political and his examination of the power structures of colonialism are concerned with their metaphysical and conceptual,

²⁶Coetzee is particularly interested in Foucault's ideas about the exercise of power, about how we cannot separate knowledge, power and truth (truth is determined by discourse and verified by power), how power is always exerted in a particular direction, how it is ritualised violence, a two-way process that always entails resistance. Foucault's concerns intersect with those of historiographic metafictional novelists such as Coetzee who ask: who is speaking; who is accorded the right to use language in a particular way; from what institutional sites do we construct our discourses; and from what position do we speak/interpret? (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 84).

rather than their material base. His project is to retell *Crusoe* from a feminist and postcolonial, a sexual and racial, perspective (and to show the areas of incommensurability between these agendas), but he is also interested in locating sites of dominance and subjugation in a wider arena (in the relationships between characters, author and reader, between text and world) showing language to be the significant agency of oppression. The novel is a deft marriage of issues relating to narration/representation with racial and gender concerns.

The story, then, is a rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe* centred around the figure of Friday in which Coetzee adds a castaway woman, Susan Barton, to the famous isle and it is she who narrates her adventures. Her tale begins with the story of the island: her arrival and subsequent descriptions of the coloniser/colonised relationship that exists between Friday (whose tongue has been cut out, ostensibly by slavers) and his master. But after she, Cruso (Coetzee's spelling) and Friday are rescued by a passing ship, the tale continues in London where she tries to sell her story to Mr Foe (the "de" is [re]dropped from Defoe thereby suggesting that the author is ultimately the "foe" of Susan's and Friday's stories). Much of the remainder of the novel comprises a series of letters and dialogues between Susan and Foe in which she argues for the truthful transcription of her island story.

Foe is not interested in Susan's tale and tries instead to shape it into a popular adventure story. During the course of confessing her adventures, largely in letter form, Susan grows in confidence and by the end of the narrative decides to be the author of her own story and, in a scene suggestive of sexual vanquishing, she takes possession of her history, thereby overcoming the phallocentric insistence of woman as muse to male authorial power.

Foe is overtly intertextual with Coetzee introducing characters from other Foe/Defoe novels to intrude and to disrupt Susan's narrative. Foe tries to lure Susan away from her island tale and get her interested in the story he wants written by sending a girl to her who claims to be her long-lost daughter.²⁷ The presence of a maidservant called Amy, a

²⁷The strange characters that pass in and out of Mr Foe's house, waiting to have their story told, are in effect characters in search of an author, a postmodern device drawing attention to the construction of the text.

gambling brewer called George Lewes who flees to Flanders and the girl's mention of being brought up by gypsies recall *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders*. The novel is littered with scraps of Defoe's stories: like Moll's second husband, Foe (and Defoe) is chased by creditors and must seek other lodgings; Moll is in search of her mother, Susan for her daughter; Roxana and Susan (Roxana's real name, like her daughter's, is Susan) deny their daughters' existence and turn them from their door; refugees from France flock to Roxana's father's door just as people hawking stories seek out Mr Foe and inhabit the author/creator's house/mind. Significantly, Moll and Roxana are free-thinking, active, strong, independent women. Moll's quest for the lost familial paradise and Roxana's misgivings at abandoning her children are counteracted by their new, free spirit - a proto-feminist spirit. In this respect Susan is clearly related to Moll and Roxana.

The novel is self-reflexive with characters talking of their creator/conjuror (Susan even discovers a chest with the initials M. J. on it). It creates many realities to rival the authoritative texts and histories of colonialism, contemporary South Africa and *Robinson Crusoe*. At the end of the novel Coetzee shows them all to be fictions, pulling the pack of cards in on top of himself, while still trying to make a political statement about the limits of representation.

Narration and Representation: Coetzee's Poststructuralist/Postmodern Islandscape

Coetzee experiments with his genre and is clearly aware of current debates relating to linguistics and critical theory. Structuralism and poststructuralism (an interest in deconstruction, the limits of narrative discourse, and the arbitrary nature of the signifier) are concerns that make themselves felt in *Foe*. The subversive re-presentation of *Robinson Crusoe* accords with Derrida's notion of *différance*: a *differential* play of meaning. In a poststructural world we can no longer expect the text to give us accurate information concerning "reality" or "history" because language is recognised as a self-referring system of signs that does not indicate meaning beyond its island/self. Coetzee goes out of his way to highlight the fiction's unreliability and pays more attention (perhaps too much) to the telling of the tale than the story itself. The text resists

interpretation: it resists an easy "colonisation" by the reader and in doing so forces us to be aware of the political nature of the act of reading. Susan complains of the difficulties she has with writing stories and with language itself. Her struggle draws attention, by implication, to the ostensibly unmediated, but in reality ideologically charged, realist narrative of someone like Robinson Crusoe.

Susan begins to understand the disjunction between signifier and signified when she discovers a ripple in a window-pane and moves her head allowing the distortion/narrative to pass over the landscape/"reality" beyond. When she tries to find out how Friday lost his tongue she draws pictures of possible scenarios, but immediately lands herself on the slippery slope of representation, realising that Friday is not interpreting her pictures in the same way as she. Unknowingly hinting at Derrida's notion of the freeplay of the signifier, Susan muses that "the tongue belongs to the world of play" (p. 85) and she finds that her "stories seem always to have more applications than [she] intends" (p. 81). Her narrative draws attention to the various "applications", the silences and difficulties of writing her island rather than covering them up as a realist text would do. Words become unreliable: "What is a gipsey? What is a highwayman? Words seem to have new meanings here in the west country" (pp. 108-9). In a world where meaning is endlessly deferred she is unable to teach Friday language: "Friday wrote the four letters h-o-u-s, or four shapes passably like them: whether they were truly the four letters, and stood truly for the word house, and the picture I had drawn, and the thing itself, only he knew" (pp. 145-6). Yet Susan feels that she has a duty to try to pin down language, to find a way of granting Friday some sort of voice and she has a harsh rebuke for those theoreticians who are content to play irresponsible games of endlessly deferred meaning: "May it not be a slaver's stratagem to hold [Friday] in subjection while we cavil over words in a dispute we know to be endless?" (p. 150).

The final chapter constitutes the culmination of the many themes of the novel, most notably Foe's meditation on representation. It consists of poetic, dream-like visits to the characters and settings of the narrative by some contemporary figure, perhaps Coetzee himself. The chapter is the most overtly postmodern and theoretical (effacing the author

and breaking with eighteenth-century time and narrative) and it refuses to be colonised by any hegemonic theory, leaving the closure enigmatic but "pure" in its resistance to the totalising impulse of its many "foes". There is no narrative logic to these scenes and we are unsure of the author/authority of the text at this point. And rightly so, as this final chapter deconstructs and attempts to move beyond the concept of authority.

In the final scene the protagonist dives down to the sunken wreck of Cruso's ship and enters through a hole in the text/vessel, decaying symbol of the wreck of the colonial narrative/enterprise.²⁸ Susan and her captain-lover float in the cabin, having been dead for three hundred years. The diver finds Friday, half buried in sand, but he does not answer the questions asked of him, for this is not a place of words: "This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday" (p. 157). Here, at the eye of the text, there can be no split between the signifier and the signified, no chance of misrepresentation and no room for the interpretation/colonisation of a Susan or a Coetzee.²⁹ At least the body is real, a counter to continual *différance*. It is its own power. Logically this still centre of meaning should be a position of silence, and yet miraculously from Friday's mouth issues a "slow stream, without breath . . . it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth" (p. 157). This is the story of oppression, the "talking back" of the silenced other (which Coetzee can only presume to hint at, not represent) that has begun in earnest in the postcolonial era and overwhelms the voices of those who would speak for it: the Crusos, Foes, Susans and Coetzees. Friday has the final say and can effect some form of closure: he has control over the "o" (omega) of the narrative (recall that he draws enigmatic o's - which refer to himself as the silenced, but all-seeing eye/I of the story - as well as eyes on feet: the feet of the oppressor treading on the "I", the subjectivity, of the colonised).

²⁸This new narrator, like the androgynous diver of Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" (*The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New 1950-1984* [New York, 1984], pp. 162-4), replaces the previously established authorities: Cruso, Foe and more recently Susan. In the poem the diver explores the wreck of civilisation, the history from which women have been excluded and which has divided the sexes, and tries to develop a new myth from what can be salvaged. Similarly Coetzee's diver explores the wreck of the colonial enterprise (the *kraken* that Foe imagines living in the vessel represents the power strategies of and atrocities committed by the oppressor).

²⁹We recall that at moments during the text bodies and signs, signifieds and signifiers are only very loosely connected (for example, the girl sent by Foe stands for Susan's daughter, but is really a stranger).

Before I discuss the diluted "Darwinian" elements of *Foe* (although it is clear that Defoe has largely taken over from Darwin as palimpsest in this island text), its postcolonial and feminist agendas (centring around the issues of narration and representation), it is necessary for the purposes of my broader argument to situate these within the postmodern framework of the novel.

When it succeeds, the sophisticated postmodern way of going about a critique can result in a nuanced and perceptive attack, using the "weapons" of anarchic eclecticism, intertextuality and parody on dominant and totalising strategies and narratives. And I think *Foe* is, from the point of view of a postcolonial and feminist assault on dominant Eurocentric and patriarchal modes of discourse using a postmodern approach, a qualified success.

In defence of postmodernism it can be argued that it is not simply a matter of replacing representation with the idea of textuality; rather it is a case of representation not following mimesis or realism to reach its ends. Postmodern representational strategies also challenge our assumptions about the "naturalness" of traditional forms of representation. Representation is thus problematised, not discarded. The negative criticism of postmodernism as not having a centre or a strong vision of truth can be countered by demonstrating, as I will show in my analysis, that the postmodern project, when politically successful, entails an interrogation of *all* positions of power (implicit in the notion of "centrality" and of "truth").³⁰ Instead of the totalising, closed, "evolutionary" narratives (such as *Foe* tries to fashion from Susan Barton's epistolary and narrative fragments) we get heterogeneous narratives that flaunt their lack of an overall perspective and a coherent knowledge of the past: we get the histories of the centre as well as the periphery. Thus Coetzee's investigation into the genesis of *Robinson Crusoe* is

³⁰Brian Macaskill and Jeanne Collier succinctly describe Coetzee's critique of power-positions: "Finding himself in a position similar to that of Susan resisting Cruso and *Foe*, or to that of Friday resisting Susan and the alphabet, Coetzee resists by undermining, while participating within, a feminist critique of patriarchal power relations and by undermining, while participating within, a postmodernist critique of representation enacted via his reproduction of eighteenth-century *Crusoe* conventions" ("Reading History, Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of Resistance in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*", *Contemporary Literature* 33, 3 (Fall 1992), p. 454).

not in any conventional sense "true" or "mimetic", but it does have something "truthful" to say about the position of blacks and women, and about the politics of representation both in the eighteenth century and today. Speaking of historiographic metafiction (self-reflexive novels that both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematise the question of historical knowledge) of this kind, Hutcheon claims that "the facts of these fictional representations are as true - and false - as the facts of history-writing can be, for they always exist as facts, not events."³¹ The historiography of *Foe* reveals how the act of storytelling does entail the exclusion and silencing of certain people and histories.

Coetzee draws our attention closely to the act of reading: the first three sections of the novel are eighteenth-century set pieces (a travelogue/epistolary narrative and a first-person narrative with limited omniscience); the "you" to which the first section is addressed is left ambiguous until the end, thereby pulling the reader in as participant; the novelist, characters and reader are all shown to be involved in the act of reading in some way. Similarly, Michael Marais demonstrates how both Susan and Foe refer to Friday as the silence, the absent centre, of the tale, and they try unsuccessfully to "make sense" of him.³² Such attempts to decipher Friday's silence, mirror the reader's attempt to make sense of the novel. The implication is that the master-slave power relations of Susan and Foe towards Friday are similar to those of the reader towards the text. Reading is thus not a safe, ideologically innocent, pastime, but rather a political act. Similarly as a result of Friday's silence, Susan is able to "interpret" and thereby to shape and manipulate his story. Her role is thus not only analogous to the reader but also to the author of the text, effectively breaking down the boundary between critical and creative discourse and further politicising reading. Of course the ultimate act of reading in this novel is its final "product", *Robinson Crusoe*, Foe's reactionary and oppressive "reading" of Susan's history. But how successful is this postmodern deconstruction in terms of the island genre? By drawing our attention to, and politicising, the act of reading, the island illusion

³¹Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 77.

³²Michael Marais, "Interpretative Authoritarianism: Reading/Colonizing Coetzee's *Foe*", *English in Africa* 16, 1 (May 1989), pp. 11-12.

is broken and with it the central project of the genre. We are drawn in as accomplices to the production of meaning; our minds fixed to the paper island, a critical and theoretical construct. The illusion or "presence" of blue lagoons and swaying palm trees, of cannibals and pirates, is lost - a point I return to in my Conclusion.

Feminist Isle

Even before Susan gets to the island she is a "liberated" woman who does not particularly mind being labelled a whore in Bahia (or free woman, as she likes to think of herself): she is a post-Darwinian equal to the male protagonists. She comes into conflict with Cruso who desires to have control over her story (he does not want to hear the tales of her pre-island life) and her person. But she is prepared to challenge male authority and soon begins to wander the island on her own against Cruso's wishes. She also fails to keep a "reign on [her] tongue" (p. 25) and she seeks out "a private retreat, the one place reserved for me on an island owned by another" (p. 26), a hollow in the rocks (Freud calls a cave a female place, a secret, womb-shaped enclosure³³). She even fantasises that Cruso fears that she is one of a group of "exiled queens come to reclaim the islands men have stolen from them" (p. 86).

Susan is a born storyteller, a pastime that brings her into confrontation with the patriarchy. She is determined to hang onto her account and will even withhold the details in order to have a history told that is faithful to her experience. She finds that when Foe transcribes her narrative, he appropriates it to serve his own ends. He starts to turn her history into his-story. But as an eighteenth-century woman she feels inadequate to the task of writing herself and besides, her material circumstances are not conducive to creativity. Anticipating Virginia Woolf she writes: "To tell the truth in all its substance you must have quiet, and a comfortable chair away from all distraction, and a window to stare through" (pp. 51-2) in order to write. These she partially acquires by moving into Foe's vacated rooms and attic (thereby occupying the "madwoman's" attic space) where

³³Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 93.

she sits writing at his desk using his pen.³⁴ Indeed she becomes a subversive squatter in the house of language.

Foe soon takes control of her story, more interested in what will sell than in telling the truth of a woman castaway's experience. The statement "In Mr Foe's house there are many mansions" (p. 77) refers to his God-like authorial role in which he, like the patriarchy in its dealings with women, is able to dispose of the lives of his characters as he wishes. Foe wants a neatly ordered, quest narrative with a beginning, middle and end. Susan, caught in the grip of a patriarchal narrative begins to doubt herself and to lose control of her own subjectivity. Foe's manipulations have led her to understand that storytelling is political, "that he has the last word who disposes over the greatest force" (p. 124).

When Susan becomes Foe's begetting "muse" she asks to be on top in the sexual act and thereafter a role reversal takes place with Susan becoming the dominant partner and Foe the intended/mistress/wife/whore (pp. 126 and 152).³⁵ She takes control and claims the power of the muse to "father her offspring" (p. 140), impregnating Foe with the story she wants told, one that is centred around the act of silencing. Through her narration she has gained confidence and learnt to ask questions about language and representation, making her an able competitor with Foe. She comes to realise that she is a "free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her own story according to her own desire" (p. 131) and learns to "trust in [her] own authorship" (p. 133). That she ultimately fails to convert Foe is of course evidenced in his final interpretation/reading of Susan's story: *Robinson Crusoe*.

Susan's tale is about the difficulty of telling stories from within a phallogentric discourse and tradition, particularly those like her own and Friday's which are stories about silence. As a white colonial woman she is able to give a unique version of, and

³⁴Gilbert and Gubar note that Western society has for long considered the text's author to be its father and his pen an instrument of generative power like his penis (ibid., p. 3).

³⁵Susan and Foe's love-making is presented as a form of cannibalism in which they suck each other's blood, metaphorically preying on each other in quest of a story (p. 139). Teresa Dovey suggests further that Susan's fear of cannibals is in effect one of being "devoured", or having one's story appropriated by, the other (*The Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* [Craighall, 1988], p. 382).

suggest similarities between, racial and sexual subjugation, even if she is obliged to use the language of the patriarchy. Talking for Friday, however, poses complicated problems.

Although she is a sensitive vehicle for looking at the colonial subject she does not identify with Friday: her position of relative silence cannot be equated with Friday's. (In one of the dream-like underwater scenes in the last chapter, Susan and Foe lie dead in bed in an embrace and Friday has a scar on his neck, ostensibly from the cord around his neck that held the papers granting him his freedom. Attwell suggests that these changes signify the "unspoken collusion of the male tradition with its unauthorized female counterpart, as seen from this, the colonial-postcolonial perspective."³⁶) Indeed, she betrays her racism and later the liberal guilt of a white colonial: she is repulsed by Friday's smell, by the thought of his mutilation; she wipes the utensils he has touched, fears he might be a cannibal and gives him "as little thought as [she] would have a dog's or any other dumb beast's" (p. 32). Susan is, however, indignant at the racism shown towards him in England and begins to feel a maternal duty towards him. She tries to get rid of him and to assuage her guilt by granting him his freedom papers and booking him a passage to Africa. This plan fails (responsible extrication from colonial rule is not as easy as that) and she resigns herself to the fact that he "belongs" to her. Both desire to be liberated but are trapped in a master/slave colonial condition of dependency. She eventually comes to realise that the key to her and to Friday's freedom is the unlocking of his silence.

Postcolonial Isle

Foe is the tale of a colonial storyteller (the white mediator, Susan) seeking authorisation/authority through the metropolis, while the tongueless Friday, the colonised, must remain the silenced and absent centre of the narrative. It is a self-conscious attempt to foreground those who have traditionally been excluded from Western literary history: women, blacks and Third World writers. The story unfurls around the figure of Friday and the "treatment" of him by his antagonists: Cruso, Susan, [De]Foe and Coetzee.

³⁶David Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 115-16.

Cruso/Friday, Coloniser/Colonised

Robinson Crusoe is the tale of how a castaway on a desert island becomes master of himself, his environment and those who come ashore on his island, most notably the cannibal, Friday. It is about the triumph of white, civilised, rational, Puritan, patriarchal man over the chaos and darkness of the other and is the ultimate allegory of empire.

Cruso is not the eighteenth-century adventurer and hero of the former tale. Gone is the energy and enthusiasm, the industry and the guiding hand of Providence (at one point he exposes Crusoe's Providence for its expediency, saying "If Providence were to watch over all of us . . . who would be left to pick the cotton and cut the sugarcane?" [p. 23]). This is rather the outpost of a colony that has degenerated. Cruso makes no attempt to improve their condition and his insularity is reminiscent of the most recalcitrant Afrikaners during the apartheid era. Susan makes a general comment about the power relations she finds in Cruso's world:

But those whom we have abused we customarily grow to hate, and wish never to lay eyes on again. The heart of man is a dark forest. (pp. 10-11)

She instinctively puts her finger on the master/slave relationship and at the same time becomes curious about the tales Cruso tells of his time on the island, stories that were "so various and so hard to reconcile one with another" (p. 11). The coloniser creates a master-narrative for himself, full of contradictions, a history of so much inhumanity that it needs the sugar of self-deception and amnesia to sweeten the tale for posterity.

Cruso and Friday set to work building useless stone terraces ostensibly so that these can be cultivated by those who come after them. The stone walls resemble fortifications appropriate to an outpost of empire and the dedication with which Cruso tackles the job is reminiscent of Crusoe's Puritan work ethic, but here it is pointless labour. No longer a Dissenter, capitalist allegory, *Foe* is rather an Absurdist meditation on power - and Coetzee's/Susan's consciousness of that power is partly derived from a "post-Darwinian", political way of looking at the other. When she asks him why he has not kept a journal of his time on the island, Cruso replies that it is his terraces and walls that he will leave

behind (p. 18): a legacy of oppression and silence rather than the potentially democratic agencies of the spoken or written word.

Cruso is naked power (the only tool he saves from the wreck, a knife, is also a weapon) and his is a sterile colony. The master pretends there is no mastery, saying: "There is no call to punish Friday" and yet, despite the peaceful atmosphere, she senses that "all things were possible on the island, all tyrannies and cruelties" (p. 37). Echoing Mannoni's explanation of the dependency condition of the colonised in *Prospero and Caliban* she wonders: "Is there something in the condition of slavehood that invades the heart and makes a slave a slave for life" (p. 85), and she muses that the cutting out of his tongue has taught Friday "eternal obedience" (p. 98).

By contrast with Defoe's tall, light-skinned, handsome, intelligent Carib, the Friday of *Foe* is an African, a "dull fellow" (p. 22) whom Susan describes as having "a head of fuzzy wool", "dull eyes", a "broad nose", "thick lips" and "skin not black, but a dark grey, dry as if coated with dust" (pp. 5-6): like Darwin's Fuegians, he is of a "race" diametrically opposite to the Europeans, wholly other (but like the Fuegians, Friday must ultimately be considered a Darwinian equal). She immediately assumes he is a cannibal. Defoe's Friday learns pidgin English, is faithful, resourceful and asks intelligent questions: he is the perfect slave to a benevolent ruler. In *Foe*, however, Coetzee presents a victim of the power relations between master and slave: he is a sullen, mysterious mute. Cruso pays him little attention other than giving him orders. As Neville Alexander, one time prisoner on Robben Island, puts it: "The apparent inaccessibility of Friday's world to the Europeans in this story is an artist's devastating judgement of the crippling anti-humanist consequences of colonialism and racism in the self-confident white world."³⁷

Silencing Friday

Foe is concerned with building a bridge over the gulf that separates the silenced, colonial other. In *Robinson Crusoe* Friday is taught enough of the coloniser's language to be able to perform tasks assigned to him (although he also picks up pidgin English as

³⁷Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 108.

time goes by). In *Foe* this is taken to an extreme where Friday is only taught the most essential work-related words: he does not, for instance, know the difference between "firewood" and "wood", as Crusoe finds the latter term unnecessary for the carrying out of his duties.

Susan secretly suspects that it might have been Crusoe who removed Friday's tongue (and we as readers are led to suspect that it is writers such as Foe and Defoe who have metaphorically removed Friday's voice from the literary canon). He is thus at the mercy of others and has "no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others" (p. 121). Indeed he is defenceless against anyone who wants to tell his story: Susan's position as narrator is thus a dangerously powerful one. Refusing to learn the language of the colonised is his only defence against being an accomplice in his own appropriation by the dominant discourse. Coetzee is outlining the silence that is present in so many island texts, from *The Tempest* to *The Coral Island*, from *Robinson Crusoe* to *Victory*. The coloniser's control of communication is emblematic of his mastery. Susan realises this and despite the fact that she can never speak for Friday, she feels it her duty to represent his silence in some way:

To tell my story and be silent on Friday's tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost! (p. 67)

Susan presumes that the "true story will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday" (p. 118). Her attempts to teach him language are reminiscent of Miranda's lessons to Caliban, attempts by the coloniser to impose his language on the colonised, however here the colonised has been truly silenced: there will be no conspiracy and no talking-back on Crusoe's or John Bull's island. Like Miranda, Susan discovers a link between linguistic ability and sexual capability and wonders whether the cutting out of Friday's tongue does not also stand "for a more atrocious mutilation" (p. 119).³⁸

³⁸The idea of an "unsexed" Friday accords with the postcolonial notion that races are gendered under colonial rule, Anglo-Saxons seeing themselves as "more masculine" while Africans are "feminised", becoming "natural" subjects of the masculine power.

Her attempt to teach Friday English is, in itself, a form of cultural imperialism. Instead of sticking to trying to understand Friday's enigmatic system of signs (written, in music and dance form and his "mopes" [p. 78]) she acts as Foe's accomplice in trying to make him "speak" in the coloniser's tongue. When she attempts to play her flute in tune with Friday's there is a "subtle discord" (p. 96).³⁹ She cannot presume to speak for Friday (and neither can Foe or Coetzee): the projects and narratives of oppression of the *semi*-marginal feminist (given her complicity with Foe at this point) and postcolonial are not interchangeable. As a Western woman she is excluded *by* the nature of words, not *from* the nature of words.⁴⁰ She remains a "master" to Friday.

Conclusion

In *Foe* literary theory and criticism have washed ashore on the fictional island: it is a writer's text, not a reader's. Indeed the middle two sections of the novel are characterised by long passages dealing with theoretical issues pertaining to language, representation and the nature of narrative art and one might be excused for thinking that Susan/Coetzee becomes a bit like Crusoe building his elaborate terraces of stone resulting in a narrative "lacking . . . a substantial and varied middle" (p. 121). The style is meditative, the narrative slow, reflective, overly reflexive and the thrust of the story dissipates after they have left the island. It is a meditation on the authority of the storyteller, of the conditions under which one can speak for the other. Despite the fact that I find *Foe* a compelling postmodern novel of theory and criticism and successful in exploring power relations within the European patriarchy with respect to women and blacks (the postmodern methodology certainly supports the feminist and postcolonial politics and the novel succeeds as a subtle portrayal of the politics of language and representation), it fails as an "island text".

³⁹Forcing the oppressor's language on him will not release the whole story and will merely perpetuate the oppression: "There will always be a voice in him to whisper doubts, whether in words or nameless sounds or tunes or tones" (p. 149).

⁴⁰Dovey, *The Novels of J. M. Coetzee*, p. 379.

My argument here is a generic one. The fictional island "requires" a totalising,⁴¹ even mimetic diegesis in order to fulfil its appointed role; that is, to investigate an aspect of society or systems of thought in the microcosm of an island laboratory. If this definition is too narrow, at least it can be said that the fictional island space is by nature a hermetically sealed, isolated environment. The illusion of isolation, the enisling of characters and reader alike in a fictional world is crucial to the fictional island experience; indeed it is the condition the novelist seeks, Prospero-like, through the alchemy of his art. The postmodern self-referential, fragmented and, in the worst scenario, seemingly arbitrary pastiche/cannibalisation of former island tales (as in *John Dollar*) ends up destroying the "enisling" illusion and with it the very essence of the genre. By making autonomy and objecthood the enemy and by self-consciously exploiting the space between novel and history, original text and commentary, the postmodern island breaks with illusion, forging "ties" with the "mainland" through its critical and self-reflexive method. The whole point of the island project, of creating a separate (mimetic) world, gets lost. It could be argued that the fragmented and arbitrary nature of the postmodern island reflects the condition of life in our society. And in a sense this is a valid assertion, however the postmodern form implicitly shatters the hermeticism central to island fiction.

Indeed, it is the grand metanarratives, the "totalising" impulse that provides a focus for the fictional island experiment. Whether the island scenario is played out around the issues raised by, for instance, Montaigne, Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau, or more recently by Darwin, it is the sealed laboratory of the island (where all extraneous factors can be surgically removed to the mainland) that allows for a "total" experiment. Novelists have traditionally sought to conduct experiments regarding the nature of man and tested the validity of philosophical, theological and biological explanations of man, on islands. Poststructuralists have tried to show that philosophy is an imposition of truth and today the metanarratives, or *grands récits*, of modernity, have lost credibility. In their place

⁴¹I use the term "totalising" in the same way Hutcheon does: "The function of the term totalizing, as I understand it, is to point to the *process* (hence the awkward 'ing' form) by which writers of history, fiction, or even theory render their materials coherent, continuous, unified but always with an eye to the control and mastery of those materials, even at the risk of doing violence to them" (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 62).

come a self-conscious distrust of large scale theories (such as Darwinism), a fevered critical awareness that dispels the "evolutionary" and teleological narrative thrust - one that is central to island novels. The postmodern celebration of accretions of texts, voices and meanings prevents the author from speaking from an "authentic" and omniscient position: as a consequence the island illusion cannot be sustained. In place of the utopian/anti-utopian isle we now get something along the lines of Foucault's heterotopia, that is the coexistence in "an impossible space" of a "large number of fragmentary possible worlds", or incommensurable spaces superimposed upon each other.⁴²

A further criticism I have of a postmodern island of the *Foe* variety is that through its excessive preoccupation with contemporary theory and criticism, with the nature of narrative, and with the dichotomisation of language and life, it loses much of the "flesh-and-bones" one comes to expect of the genre and prevents one from moving beyond the word/text to the world/island. Around the time he was working on *Foe* (1985) Coetzee stated in an interview: "I believe very strongly in the critical activity of the literary critic - and I hope that I bring across [in] my fiction writing some of that same concern with the importance of criticism, which is to me a matter of taking nothing for granted."⁴³ However the result (a text like *Foe*) is a novel that is too concerned with covering its critical bases, so to speak (or making the ground overly fertile for criticism). As a consequence the "roughage" of the tale gets refined away by the sophistication of postmodern and poststructural concerns. The day to day practicalities of island life and the struggle for survival, are lost, and with them the unique island atmosphere. Susan ironically identifies the problem when she acknowledges the importance of verisimilitude and "particularity" that bring an island story to life: those "thousand touches which today may seem of no importance, such as: When you made your needle (the needle you store in your belt), by what means did you pierce the eye?" (p. 18). The novelist should have taken his character's advice. In fact an "abstract" and cerebral story about theoretical concerns, such as Coetzee's, need not take place on an island at all. The setting is not

⁴²David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1989), p. 48.

⁴³Quoted in Dick Penner, *Countries of the Mind: The Fiction of J. M. Coetzee* (New York, 1989), p. 129.

worked integrally into the fabric of the tale the way it is in the texts we have looked at previously. On Coetzee's minimalist isle, events and relationships have been pared down and subordinated entirely to critical and theoretical arguments pertaining to language and representation. At times it even seems as though the dice have been loaded too obviously: for instance, Friday is so wholly other and indecipherable as to be implausible: surely Susan (a character who is also at times too transparently subordinated to her feminist role) can get some access to him via his art, music and body language?

Island novels have always been thesis novels, but in a novel like *Foe* this is taken to an extreme. The balance between theoretical and "realist" diegesis, between critical and creative rendering, has shifted too far in favour of the former.

* * *

What we have then in postmodern islands such as *Foe* and *John Dollar* is the celebration of, on the one hand, theory and critique, and on the other, of pastiche. What we do not have is the kind of energy, the *making* of a representative and believable "society". Neither Susan nor Charlotte are particularly credible considering their eras: they are too obviously vehicles, tailor made for their authors' purposes. Postmodern island fiction is metacritical and overly aware of the islands that have preceded it: the allegory is too self-conscious and too dependent on what has gone before. Postmodern conventions (particularly its eclecticism) do not allow the artist to speak from an "authentic" imaginary position, going instead for a proliferation of texts and meanings, and in *John Dollar* the playful postmodern elements actually undermine the postcolonial and feminist projects.

The gains of the violence done to the generic island through the form and style demanded by mainstream postmodernism, the cannibalistic dismembering and re/membering, do not (even when successful) justify the loss of the island illusion.

DARWINIAN ISLANDS: HOW MUCH OF A REVOLUTION?

Having pieced together a thesis about evolution and island literature and its "devolution" into contemporary forms of the genre, perhaps it is time to loose a tidal wave at my argument in order to put it into perspective.

The scientific underpinnings of Darwin's theories *were* new and revelatory, but theories of evolution themselves are, as I have already mentioned, very old indeed. As a consequence literature about islands has, since the time of *The Odyssey*, explored the idea of creatures, giants, cannibals and monsters, who have developed or evolved in a different way on remote islands. Every traveller or castaway in fiction has felt trepidation when setting foot on the shore of an unknown island, not knowing which route evolution has taken (even if he could not articulate it in this way). "Proto-evolutionary" figures like Caliban, Friday and the Yahoos foreground the kind of questions that Darwin's findings were to spark in a later era: what does it mean to be human? what rights, if any, do we grant the animal-like other? is morality "innate" or relative? and what constitutes sexual and racial purity/degeneracy?

It is thus perhaps a matter of degree and not kind: an evolution rather than a revolution. Darwin's great achievement was to legitimise evolution scientifically and eventually to dispel wild speculation as to the kind of variations the natural world could throw up (the nature of the strange creatures and races found on far-flung islands was no longer dependent solely on the imagination of the author: attempts had to be made to show that these species had developed as the result of adaptation to a particular environment or some such evolutionarily plausible explanation; similarly degeneration and "going native" had to be rooted in anthropological and psychological thought). The force of his argument injected a new urgency into the literary world, demanding a creative response to his discoveries; and the remote island became the obvious setting for such fictional explorations. Over the last century and a half or so the history of the fictional island has largely been a working through and a refinement of Darwin's seminal arguments in the neutral space of nature's palm-fringed laboratories.

APPENDIX A

A Brief Summary of *On the Origin of Species*

In the *Origin* Darwin is unable to demonstrate conclusively that evolution *had* occurred, all he could do was marshal a multitude of facts and clues to the process of natural selection in an attempt to convince the reader that evolution was indeed taking place. The book starts with an explanation of his belief in the mutability of species showing how selective breeding in domestic animals (such as pigeons or dogs) brings about rapid and dramatic changes in breeds. He stresses the flexibility of nature and goes on to show that there are no clear dividing lines between species and that variation occurs continually in nature. Darwin then tries to account for variation in offspring (without the help of genetic science) discussing such elements as hybridism and sterility; he quite rightly saw that the chief source of variation lay in the process of reproduction. He argues that the endless struggle for survival is the main reason for the "creation" of new species: any slight variation that gives an individual an advantage over another, might grant it a crucial edge in the struggle for survival (Malthusian over-population results in the systematic weeding out of the "unfit"). He goes on to explain that there are no "missing links" between varieties because the struggle is most severe between closely related species, hence the less highly specialised, intermediate forms - lacking the specific advantages of the two closely allied species - would be rapidly eliminated. At this point Darwin touches on sexual selection, but reserves it for a later, fuller discussion (in the *Descent*). Instead he returns to his discussion of the process of natural selection, emphasising that it is extremely gradual and outlining the conditions in which it operates most freely (such as on an island). He then employs geology as evidence for his theories, showing the succession of species by analysing the (imperfect) fossil record. Using the geological and fossil records he shows how the extinction of species, simultaneous changes in forms of life throughout the world and the appearance of new species, supports his case. He devotes two of his final chapters to the geographical distribution of species showing how populations (particularly those on islands) differ from one another and have adapted to their environments according to the rules of evolution.

APPENDIX B

A Brief Summary of *The Descent of Man*

Darwin omitted explicit discussion of man in the *Origin*, something he deals with fully in the *Descent* where he takes a close look at man's place in nature. In the first section he sets out by marshalling the evidence in support of man's descent from other forms of life, pointing out the homologous structures in man and the lower animals. Darwin goes on to show that the laws of variation are the same in man as in the lower animals and suggests Lamarckian explanations for the effects of use and disuse of parts. He applies the laws of natural selection and survival of the fittest to the realm of man and shows the stages by which *Homo sapiens* developed into an erect, reasoning, social animal. He pays particular attention to man's mental powers, his self-consciousness and his emotions in the description of man's "ascent" and compares our mental powers, notably our moral sense, with lower animals. He considers from an anthropological perspective the "ascent" of "civilisations" from "barbarous" beginnings showing how a form of natural selection also takes place in the social realm. He discusses how "races" came about and argues against the ranking of these as distinct species.

The second, and longest, section of the book deals with sexual selection in animals showing how the selection of mates on the basis of preferred traits is a significant factor in the natural selection process. He goes into a lengthy explanation of sexual selection in insects, amphibians, birds and mammals discussing such things as special "weapons" developed by males and peculiarities in voice, odour, colour et cetera developed in order to be more attractive to the mate. In the final section he turns to sexual selection in relation to man and outlines the differences between the sexes (particularly with regard to mental and physical powers). He shows how different societies have varying standards of beauty by which mates are selected and argues that, over time, these have resulted in the variations in, for instance, skin colour or body hair in different "races". He sums up by recapping on the manner of man's development, his genealogy, his intellectual and moral faculties, and finally the impact of sexual selection.

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