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# Dying Worlds: Environment, Ecology, and Empire in British Literature 1878-1919

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“Dying Worlds”: Environment, Ecology, and Empire in British Literature 1878-1919

by

Susanna Williams

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*May 2018*

For Eric, Arthur, and Theo.

# Introduction

This dissertation argues that models of approaching environmental crisis in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British literature have been obscured by a false, mid-twentieth century, American-centered genealogy of environmentalism. As Victorian scientists made discoveries about deep time, entropy, and tidal drag, scientific and popular writers in the following decades came to terms with ideas about an earth made unfit for human existence and humans' imminent extinction. Writers grappled with feelings of loss and grief, and they felt disoriented by time scales and energetic processes that were beyond the scope of a single human life. This overwhelming information required them to take a position that is in marked contrast to the totalizing colonial view from afar—the point of view required of the map-maker, the racial scientist, and the armchair explorer. Instead, they had to begin to make sense of the whole from the inside; that is, to understand gigantic time scales, distances, and energetic processes from a disoriented, limited point of view. Responding to impending environmental catastrophe from an awestruck, overwhelmed space—a space that, as this dissertation will show, is often more accessible to women—produces ethical aesthetic positions that we might be attentive to today in facing our current environmental crisis.

It is perhaps surprising to find such productive, ethical models embedded within popular novels and travel writing produced during the peak of the British empire, as colonialism and imperialism have wrought great environmental harm throughout the globe since their inception. Many of the authors discussed register the interrelationship between colonial power and environmental degradation in their work. Sometimes, they offer explicit critiques of colonialism; sometimes they depict it unwittingly in their representation of colonial and touristic impact on local ecosystems, including depicting how they themselves, as early tourists, contributed to environmental

destruction. The coincidence of colonial travel and environmental awareness belies the colonialist beginnings of early environmentalism, a history that is swept under the rug by most current American-centered environmental discourse, which seeks to distance itself from its imperial, global origins. Yet by uncovering these connections, a different history of environmentalism is revealed, one that brings to light how imperial and neoimperial efforts enacted under the banner of environmentalism, including indigenous land theft, continue to occur. By insisting on seeing a longer history of environmental thought that includes environmentalism's indebtedness to colonialism, we orient our present environmental circumstances within a longer history of anthropogenic climate change that coincides with the history of global modernity. This reorientation insists that the center of environmental thought is the indigenous and the postcolonial, and it requires that ecofeminism, often considered a radical offshoot of mainstream environmentalism, be understood as both the heart and the future of environmental thought.

## **The Obscured Colonial Origins of Environmentalism**

There is a surprisingly intimate relationship between the origins of western environmentalism and colonialism. A small subset of scholars, however, has attended to this connection. Richard Grove has shown in *Green Imperialism* (1995) that early colonial contact with the tropics as early as the fourteenth century provoked the beginnings of environmental thought, as witnessing the “geographically circumscribed observations of environmental processes” on tropical islands—particularly their decline—led colonists to recognize the fragility of their ecosystems at home (Grove 6). He explains that “observations of the ecological demise of islands were easily converted into premonitions of environmental destruction on a more global scale” (9). Grove suggests that early colonists were influenced by indigenous histories and practices more so than previous histories of environmental thought have recognized (Grove 3). There was an “economic



advantage” of “conservationism” for colonials “in ensuring sustainable timber and water supplies and in using the structures of forest protection to control their unruly marginal subjects” (15).

These conservationist impulses spread throughout the British empire and beyond over the next two centuries. In *Empire Forestry and the Origins of Environmentalism* (2002), Gregory Barton shows how, in “the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the most sweeping environmental initiatives emerged under the auspices of British imperialism” (1). Imperially directed, large-scale forest conservation projects began with British efforts in India in 1855. As early as this point, conservationists identified a link between forestry and climate change (Barton 5).<sup>1</sup> Barton explains that these conservation efforts were so successful that the model gradually spread throughout both the developed world and to colonial territories over the next hundred years (and ultimately became responsible for the development of the American park system) (3).

Just as the conservationist origin of western environmentalism grew out of colonialism’s response to environmental degradation wrought by its presence in foreign places, Ecology, which developed as a scientific discipline in Britain in the early twentieth century, also had imperial beginnings. In *Imperial Ecology*, Peder Anker outlines how the discipline “grew out of the imperial administrative and political culture” and “owes its success to its patrons in the economic administration of the environmental and social order in the British empire” (1, 2). A group of Oxford botanists, frustrated by botany’s obsession with lineage and descent, chose instead to focus on plants as chemical composites in exchange within an “economy of the world” (Blackman et al. 243). Funded by big business, this emerging discipline positioned itself as a resource for pharmaceutical research and other financial interests (Anker 17-18). Thus, the rise of British colonialism throughout the world gave birth to the advent of both conservation and Ecology, a key

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<sup>1</sup>Grove points toward an even earlier genealogy: the ancient Greeks (1). See Hughes’ “Theophrastus as Ecologist” and Glacken’s *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*.

scientific discipline that has helped legitimize and popularize environmentalism for scientists and lay people alike.

Many scholars of environmental history identify a reluctance among contemporary environmentalists to look back at the colonial origins of conservation and environmentalism, as to do so would be to embrace this sinister, global, imperial beginning (Grove 2, Barton 5, DeLoughrey and Handley 14-16). Instead, the long history has been occluded by a more recent, American-centered genealogy that begins with the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. This origin story erases the influence of earlier American conservationists, like George Perkins Marsh, whose *Man and Nature: Or Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* (1864) discussed at length the danger of environmental degradation to civilization. By ignoring the long, colonially-inflected history of environmentalism and focusing on its more recent iteration, contemporary American-centered environmental discourse conceals more than just its original, imperial taint. It ignores environmental thought's global history, including those "zealous French anti-capitalist physiocrat-reformers" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century who, in addition to forestry conservation, were concerned with deforestation's effect on climate as well as the extinction of species of animals and plants (Grove 9). By ignoring this global history, it also empties out the longstanding tradition of environmental thought within indigenous communities and among colonized people, and their influence upon mainstream environmental discourse and environmental science (Grove 3, DeLoughrey and Handley 15). As Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley say in their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies*, the "founding narrative of modern environmental ethics could just as well include Mahatma Gandhi" (15). The origins of environmentalism have been global and arisen through cultural contact and exchange. These beginnings, in the west, are tinged with colonial interests, and understanding this history is critical to understanding how mainstream environmentalism today acts as a hegemonic force.

As postcolonial ecocritical critique has shown, the global South has the most at stake in the current global environmental crisis (Huggan and Tiffin 4-5). In the past few decades, increased global warming has begun to exacerbate natural disasters and affect postcolonial nations disproportionately, and the story of climate change has become less a warning or a doomsday narrative of the future than a contemporary human rights issue (Huggan and Tiffin 4-5). Rob Nixon has proposed climate change as one manifestation of what he calls “slow violence,” or violence that is “neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2). This violence disproportionately affects the poor and the global South (Nixon 2). Justification for conservation and protection of the environment, however, has historically been used as a means to exploit those who are most affected by environmental decline.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-four years ago, in their seminal introductory text *Ecofeminism* (1993), Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva warned that “Protection of the environment now figures in the rhetoric and is cited as the reason for strengthening ‘global’ institutions like the World Bank and extending their reach accordingly” (10).<sup>3</sup> For this reason, Mies and Shiva point toward the “victims of the development process. . .who struggle to conserve their subsistence base” as the people who best illustrate the “common ground for women’s liberation and the preservation of life on earth” (13). Indeed, more recently, Nixon has identified what he calls an “environmentalism of the poor,” arising in opposition to this exploitation: “the neoliberal era has intensified assaults on resources, it

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<sup>2</sup> Some contemporary environmental preservation efforts closely resemble colonial practices. Resettling indigenous people under the banner of environmental efforts is how neo-colonial globalization justifies its theft of indigenous land in the interests of populations of large mammals loved by tourists. Deane Curtin has discussed the formation of the Indira Gandhi National Park in India in 1989 which required the removal of human beings in order to make a natural habitat for tigers and elephants (9). He also has described how Chitwan National Park in Nepal where “people who were indigenous to the land were removed to create a wilderness experience for tourists who pay hundreds of dollars a night to sleep in tree houses and experience ‘wild’ nature outside their windows.” Curtin explains that “Often, as happens in Nepal, the new global economic elite joins with old, local sources of corrupt power to further disenfranchise the most vulnerable people in poor countries” (8-9).

<sup>3</sup> Two and a half-decades after Mies and Shiva, Nixon opens *Slow Violence* by citing how the president of the World Bank uses “the calm voice of global managerial reasoning” to argue that “the bank develop a scheme to export rich nation garbage, toxic waste, and heavily polluting industries to Africa” (1).

has also intensified resistance” (4). Ella Stam and Robert Shohat too have suggested that indigenous environmental activist movements “now form the cutting edge of social change” (387). Indigenous critique combines “maximum radicality and maximum traditionality,” thereby creating a “temporal paradox” for criticism that “challenge[s] the logics of colonialism, Eurocentrism, and the nation-state” but “also questions the productivism of Marxism, the nomadism of postmodernism, and the constructivism of poststructuralism” (385). They argue that “while many Eurocentric commentators see Indians as vanished and ‘behind the times,’ one might just as easily see them as ‘ahead of the curve’” (389). Thinking about a long contemporary environmental moment that includes the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within a postcolonial ecocritical frame does more than just uncover the obscured global, imperial origins of environmentalism—thereby challenging the American-centered genealogy. It foregrounds the intimate relationship between environmental degradation and colonialism/imperialism. And it insists that we see the ways that imperialism manifests itself through environmental efforts today. Finally, it centers indigenous and postcolonial resistance throughout the long history—and future—of environmental thought.

## **Victorians’ Preoccupation with Climate Change and Human Decline**

As the British Empire rose to power over the course of the nineteenth century, scientists made discoveries about entropy, deep time, and tidal drag that shocked and preoccupied the imagination of the Victorian public, making them think about climate change and even the eventual extinction of humankind. The discovery of the Second Law of Thermodynamics cast an apocalyptic pall over the last half of the nineteenth century, when scientists and philosophers began to meditate on the distant future of a cold planet unfit for human life. T. H. Huxley thought about the future in the context of a drastically changing ecosystem: “If what the physical philosophers tell us, that our

globe has been in a state of fusion, and, like the sun, is gradually cooling down, is true; then the time must come when evolution will mean adaptation to a universal winter, and all forms of life will die out” (“From *The Struggle For Existence*” 165). The authoritative estimate of the age of the earth fluctuated wildly during this time. While geologic, “deep” time proposed by Charles Lyell dated the earth as billions of years old (which was itself an extreme revision of biblical time), the discovery of the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the subsequent estimates of Lord Kelvin challenged the “almost unlimited time scale of Lyell” to a “meager twenty million years, and then back up to hundreds of millions of years” (Kern 38).<sup>4</sup> These fluctuations drastically affected the course of scientific thought. Darwin, for example, in light of Kelvin’s estimates, reconsidered catastrophism and suggested that evolution may have happened more quickly than he originally theorized (Kern 37). In his writing, Kelvin depicted a dark future: “inhabitants of the earth cannot continue to enjoy the light and heat essential to their life, for many million years longer” (Thomson 174). He suggested that instead of assuming, as much contemporary science did, that there was an “an endless progress, through an endless space, of action involving the transformation of potential energy into palpable motion and thence into heat,” humans must acknowledge that it is really a “single finite mechanism, running down like a clock, and stopping for ever” (Thomson 173). To the downward arc of entropy, Balfour Stewart and Peter Guthrie Tait proposed the idea of tidal drag, or that phenomenon which “owing to something analogous to ethereal friction” would cause “the earth and the other planets of our system” to be “drawn spirally nearer and nearer to the sun” to be “at length...engulfed in his mass” (174). The dark images of the future that were circulating throughout scientific discourse worked their way into popular culture as well.<sup>5</sup> The preoccupation with global

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<sup>4</sup> Contemporary science, on the other hand, posits that the earth has been here for almost 5 billion years, or about 250 times longer than Kelvin’s lowest estimate, and that the sun will continue to provide enough energy to support human life for another 5 billion years (Zirker).

<sup>5</sup> In H. Rider Haggard’s popular novel *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), Ignosi presents the cooling of the sun as a change that would be felt within the lives of the English explorers: “At times when ye look back down the path of life, or when ye

cooling, entropy, and the decline of humankind that occupied the minds of Victorian scientists and popular writers set up a vision of the future that complicated the idea of human progress and advancement.

Fear of human extinction and mourning the loss of an earth made uninhabitable for humans by changing climate may surprise today's reader as uncannily contemporary. Reading late Victorian and early modernist works with attention to environmental themes connects contemporary readers with models of responding to impending destruction of humankind that can inform our own response to the current environmental crisis. The significant difference, of course, between Victorian climate change obsession and our vision of our own approaching climate catastrophe is that they felt as though they were not in control and that it was something happening to them, whereas we, with notable exception of those who remain willfully ignorant, recognize that we are responsible for global warming.<sup>6</sup> Realizing our responsibility has resulted in the future-focused rhetoric of today's popular environmentalism, which proposes action on an individual level (recycling, for example) and operates as if the future of the planet is yet undetermined, and that we

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are old and gather yourselves together to crouch before the fire, because the sun has no more heat..." (191). Recent ecocritical work by nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scholars is bringing to light how literature from these periods responds to environmental change and demise. See Gold's "Energy, Ecology, and Victorian Fiction," Taylor's *The Sky of Our Manufacture*, and Miller's "Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Victorian Studies."

<sup>6</sup> What does it mean to say *we* in this context? Thinking in a postcolonial framework makes one resist a universal *we*, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has discussed at length in his important essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses:"

One could object, for instance, that all the anthropogenic factors contributing to global warming—the burning of fossil fuel, industrialization of animal stock, the clearing of tropical and other forests, and so on—are after all part of a larger story: the unfolding of capitalism in the West and the imperial or quasi-imperial domination by the West of the rest of the world. . . [D]oes not the talk of species or mankind simply serve to hide the reality of capitalist production and the logic of imperial . . . domination that it fosters? Why should one include the poor of the world—whose carbon footprint is small anyway—by use of such all-inclusive terms as *species* or *mankind* when the blame for the current crisis should be squarely laid at the door of the rich nations in the first place and of the richer classes in the poorer ones? (216)

While outlining the problems of using *we* uncritically, he proposes that the problem of global warming forces us to think of the human at a different register, "to think in terms of species" (217). Gayatri Spivak, in her discussion of *planetarity*, uses *we* to refer alternately to humans dwelling on the planet—"we inhabit it [the planet] on loan" (72)—and fellow literary critics—"we will construct an allegory of reading" (74). Timothy Morton, citing Chakrabarty, invokes a global human species *we* as well, even as he seems to call attention to the power division within the species: "We will need to act on global warming, *even if* we are not strictly 'responsible' for it" (*Ecology without Nature* 183). It is in this context that I use *we*.

must (and can) save the earth for our children.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, there is an unpleasant reality already unfolding. Given the damage already done and the unlikelihood that there will be necessary global cooperation and changes in politics that encourage long-term thinking, it is, in many ways, already too late (Maslin 146-8).<sup>8</sup> Mark Maslin says it bluntly: “we must prepare for the worst and adapt” (qtd in Chakrabarty “Climate” 212). For many indigenous and colonized people throughout the world, the destruction of their homes and ways of life has already happened, and those that remain living continue to exist in an environment that has already been made unfit for them. Thus, the future, conservationist focus of contemporary popular environmentalism both erases the experiences of those who have already lived through the end of the world and also refuses to recognize that the future is, in fact, already here. In this way, the inevitable future that the Victorians steeled themselves to accept is not, in reality, so different from the environmental crisis we are ourselves facing, even though popular environmentalism today would have us think and behave otherwise.

In *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton proposes that rejecting the premises of popular environmentalism marks the beginning of an ethical approach to the current crisis, an approach he calls *dark ecology*. To embrace dark ecology is to embrace “melancholic ethics” that are “based on negative desire rather than positive fulfillment” and that “look more like perversion—or like acknowledging the perverse quality of *choice* in itself” (186, 183). Dark ecology is “the shutting down of possibilities, the acceptance of death” or “the contingent and necessarily queer idea that we want to stay with a dying world” (183, 185). This is not a shoulder-shrugging, head-in-sand, position wherein one makes oneself unaccountable for an insurmountable problem by couching it in

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<sup>7</sup> The tone of environmental education focuses on “appreciation” of nature. Nature is a place outside of and separate from civilization that one enters to be edified. Appreciation is assumed to be a catalyst for political action directed toward conservation and protection of the global ecosystem in and for the future.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion about whether or not it is already too late to addressing global warming see *The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report*, “State of the Planet Declaration” from the “Planet Under Pressure” conference (2012), and Nina Chestney’s “Global Warming Close to Becoming Irreversible.”

overwhelming abstraction. Rather, this position, as Chakrabarty has suggested independently of Morton, requires one to think the human on different levels simultaneously, as a political force and as a species: “We will need to act on global warming, *even if* we are not strictly ‘responsible’ for it, *even if* it will not come about” (Morton *Ecology without Nature* 183). When we look at our current environmental crisis in this light, the Victorians’ responses to the decline of humankind and of an earth fit for human life emerge as strikingly relevant positions from which to encounter catastrophe today. Victorian thinkers come at climate change and looming human decline with a recognition that these forces are out of their control. For these reasons, we can look to them to learn how to be dark ecologists. Understanding how they grappled with decline and related to their environments recovers ways of thinking that predate and challenge popular environmentalism’s future-focused edification. From them, we might learn how to stay with a dying world.

## **Globalization, Fossil Fuels, and Human Agency in the Late Nineteenth Century**

Though there are several advantageous points from which to understand the connection between global imperialism, fossil fuels, and human liberty, the late Victorian and early modernist period is one where this relationship is especially legible. Over the course of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth century, as the British empire rose to its peak and then declined, it burned a tremendous amount of fossil fuels to power the advancing steam-engine technology that allowed the empire to flourish. Increased globalization during this period was made possible by technological advancement, especially with steam, that allowed for expanded railroad coverage, and the more efficient use of coal, thereby allowing longer journeys across the oceans. For example, Lady Annie Brassey, whose account I discuss in the third chapter, was able to circumnavigate the globe in such short time because she and her husband purchased a cutting-edge



steam engine small enough and efficient enough to take aboard a private yacht. Increase in fossil fuel use is intimately tied to the elaboration of imagined human freedom, even as dependence on fossil fuels, we now know, undermines this freedom, as it simultaneously contributes to human decline. The writers I discuss—H. G. Wells, Robert Louis Stevenson, Lady Annie Brassey, Katherine Routledge, and Joseph Conrad—illustrate the paradoxical relationship between freedom and fossil fuel dependence. Reading them today with a greater knowledge of anthropogenic climate change brings to light the danger and naiveté in believing that one has a total, aerial view from above. At the same time, many of these writers aestheticize a partial view from inside, what Morton would call an awareness of being inside the *hyperobject*, a position that is necessary to confront, understand, and reckon with our current environmental crisis.

It is critical to remember that the technological advancements at the end of the nineteenth century promised greater freedom and comfort for some, but they came at a cost to others. In *Late Victorian Holocausts*, Mike Davis explains that between 1875 and 1900, in a time with global surpluses of grain, expanded railroads, and better food transportation technology, between thirty to sixty million people died of famine and disease in India, China, and Brazil due to the failure of colonial organization to transport food to areas affected by drought and flood (13-17). Modernity, rather than helping improve the lives of millions of people, resulted in their death: “Millions died, not outside the ‘modern world system,’ but in the very process of being forcibly incorporated into its economic and political structures” (Davis 9). The freedom to move safely through a world that is increasingly interconnected and easily traversed has existed only for those who Zygmunt Bauman would call the “tourists” of the world, or those who travel freely, whereas the “vagabonds,” or the migrant workers, refugees, and immigrants who are mobile not by choice but by necessity constitute “the waste of the world which has dedicated itself to tourist services” (92). Though Bauman refers to the human consequences of globalization in the late twentieth century, his distinction between

“tourists” and “vagabonds” is helpful to think about in the context of increased global movement and the rise of global tourism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, too. This distinction forces one to remember always that globalization, modernity, and increased global movement for some has always depended on the enslavement or exploitation of others: “There are no tourists without the vagabonds, and the tourists cannot be let free without tying down the vagabonds” (Bauman 93). The freedom of movement (for some) engendered by fossil fuels is intimately related to the continuing oppression and exploitation of others.

The idea of modern human liberty as it exists in the west is itself partially constituted by access to and use of fossil fuels. This intersection is the focus of *material ecocriticism*, a mode of inquiry that foregrounds the relationship between humans and fossil fuels. Material ecocriticism is invested both in how “human and nonhuman agencies exchange energy, matter, and information” and also in “the impact of fossil fuels on cultural productions” (Sullivan 414). Works of literature that deal with human dependence on fossil fuels are “petrottexts, and culture that emerges from the relationship between fossil fuels and humans is “oil culture” or “petroculture” (Sullivan 414).<sup>9</sup> These “stories of energy are literal tales of nonhuman *agents*, often with surprising twists about who or what has the most impact” (Sullivan 417). Set atop an abandoned mine, Joseph Conrad’s *Victory*, which the dissertation takes up in its fourth chapter, is one such story of energy, a petrottext wherein coal functions as an agent and a force. This is not to say that the fossil fuels determine human actions, only that there are “tandem, joint agencies coalescing into hybrid human-petroleum actions” (Sullivan 414). Likewise, Hannes Bergthaller has suggested that human liberty itself in the context of modern liberal democracy has been enabled by access to fossil fuels. Bergthaller explains that, “In

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<sup>9</sup> Though they emphasize petroleum and oil, the terms “petroculture” and “oil culture” are used broadly to refer to human use of fossil fuels dating back to the eighteenth century. Petroleum transformed human culture over the course of the twentieth century, but the use of fossil fuels by humans before then is understood as a part of the same timeline. Thus, thinking about the age of coal as a part of petromodernity emphasizes the trajectory of human dependence on and influence by fossil fuels generally. For further discussion, see Barrett and Worden’s *Oil Culture*, and, for an American-centered perspective, Stephanie LeMenager’s *Living Oil*.

the emancipatory master narrative of modernity, the advancement of individual liberty and the promise of economic betterment were always closely, albeit conflictually, intertwined” (430).

Chakrabarty has said the same: “the mansion of modern freedoms stands on an ever-expanding base of fossil-fuel use” (“Climate” 208). Prosperity has depended on the energy of fossil fuels—on the steam engine and, later, the internal combustion engine, on the nitrogen extracted from petroleum to fertilize large crops via the Haber process, on gasoline powered farm machinery, and on “new technologies for energy conversion” (such as the rise of domestic electric appliances) within the home (Bergthaller 427-8). Human dependence on fossil fuels, like Derrida’s *pharmakon*, “is both that which makes liberty possible, and, at the same time, poisons it at the root” (Bergthaller 426). This dissertation builds on the work of material ecocriticism as it intersects with postcolonial ecocriticism, and investigates how access to fossil fuels engendered by colonial power enabled the texts it deals with to be produced, how consumption of fossil fuels is depicted in their pages, and how human liberty and agency are enabled by this access and consumption.

The ascension of Britain as a colonial power, specifically the use of fossil fuels that allowed it to progress, left a mark on the earth that can be read in the geologic record. Many geologists and environmentalists use the term *anthropocene* to refer to the current geologic period wherein human effects on the global ecosystem can be read in the stratigraphic record.<sup>10</sup> The increased use of fossil fuels over the course of the nineteenth century is a critical point to consider in understanding the idea of the anthropocene. Though still somewhat controversial, the term began to gain widespread acceptance after it was used by Nobel prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000 in an *International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme* newsletter. Along with his coauthor, Eugene Stoermer, Crutzen set aside *anthropocene* as a special term employed “to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology

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<sup>10</sup> Geologic periods are traditionally capitalized, but *anthropocene* is an exception, in part because some mainstream geoscientists resist its separation from the *Holocene*. Paleoclimatologist William Ruddiman explains his preference this way: “I don’t mind the term anthropocene, I just don’t want it capitalized. . .The term is only useful if you use it informally” (Wilson).

and ecology” (Crutzen and Stoermer 484), and it “thus became a powerful concept for framing the ultimate significance of global change” (Steffen 486-7). Crutzen and Stoermer admit that “to assign a more specific date to the onset of the ‘anthropocene’ seems somewhat arbitrary,” but they suggest that a productive working period would be the late eighteenth century, a period that includes both the beginning of glacial ice cores indicating an increased atmospheric concentration of “greenhouse gases” (carbon dioxide and methane) and James Watt’s “invention of the steam engine in 1784” (484).<sup>11</sup> Identifying the ramping up of fossil fuel use by human beings as the beginning of a new geologic epoch emphasizes the impact of increased globalization and dependence on coal and steam (and later, petroleum). However, their indication that the date is “somewhat arbitrary” speaks to the fact that humans’ impact on the earth’s ecosystem has been a long process over millennia, one that is broader than just humans’ fossil fuel usage. For this reason, contemplating the anthropocene requires one to think about a long environmental history that includes the present, and how this history relates to human technology and, often, colonial power.<sup>12</sup> In the same sentence, the authors suggest that “alternative proposals can be made (some may even want to include the entire Holocene)” (484).<sup>13</sup> Conversely, many environmentalists and scientists choose a much later date, focusing instead on the “Great Acceleration,” or the mid-twentieth century, postwar development of nuclear technology and the widespread use of plastics (Crutzen and Stoermer 483, Lewis and Maslin 176, Steffen 490).<sup>14</sup> One other notable date that comes up is 1492, the beginning of the global exchange of plant species used for human food as well as the depopulation of the Americas over the

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<sup>11</sup> Though Crutzen and Stoermer assign 1784 as the date of the steam engine’s “invention,” its development happened gradually in stages over the course of the latter half of the eighteenth century. See Cardwell’s *From Watt to Clausius: The Rise of Thermodynamics in the Early Industrial Age*.

<sup>12</sup> Morton has suggested that the concept of Nature, which he considers antithetical to ecological thought, grew out of the development of agriculture, and the resultant thinking is *agrilogistics* (*Dark Ecology* 55). In calling for a long environmental moment, he says: “I take *present* to mean *for the last twelve thousand years* (*Dark Ecology* 2).

<sup>13</sup> The Holocene, the geologic epoch that precedes the anthropocene, began around twelve thousand years ago, and coincides with the development of agriculture and its resultant changes on global ecosystems (Waggoner).

<sup>14</sup> The global evidence of radiocarbon in the stratigraphic record makes this date particularly appealing to geologists. For an in depth discussion of why the Great Acceleration is an accurate geologic indicator of the anthropocene because the radiocarbon deposits are a “globally synchronous marker,” see Lewis and Maslin (171-180).

next century.<sup>15</sup> Though the discrepancy in date ranges is dramatic, from 10,000 to seventy years ago, what all of these proposed dates have in common is a connection between increased human technology, the development of trade (and resulting globalization), and the material effects of these changes on the geologic record of the earth. Crutzen's assertion that the date is "somewhat arbitrary" gets at the fact that what is most important is seeing how these decisions by human beings have continued to impact the earth in increasingly legible ways over recent (geologic) history. The intersection of imperialism, advancing technology, fossil fuel use, and increased globalization thus makes the height of British imperialism a particularly advantageous point from which to understand the anthropocene.

Morton compares our role in the current ecological crisis to the characters in *film noir*: "Ecological awareness is that moment at which these narrators find out that they are the tragic criminal" (*Dark Ecology* 9). In this sense, Victorians' obsession with entropy, decline, and tidal drag, which caused them to meditate on future climate change and an earth unfit for human life, can be oriented as the first half of a dark ecological noir plot. At the very moment that they were putting fuel on the fire of the catastrophe that would make the earth unfit for human life within generations—the catastrophe that they/we were causing—they were obsessed with a more distant future of decline over which they thought they had no control.<sup>16</sup> Morton talks about the fact that in a time of dark ecology – the time that we are now living in – there is a "dissolution of the notion of *world*" and "the impossibility of maintaining cynical distance" (*Hyperobjects* 24). For Morton, these

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<sup>15</sup> The dramatic decline of the American population caused a dip in atmospheric carbon dioxide levels because with fewer people alive, less wood was burned and land that had been farmed regrew into forests (Lewis and Maslin 175). The effects of these changes were intelligible in the geologic record in the early seventeenth century. By 1610, carbon dioxide levels had bottomed out, resulting in the counter-intuitively named "Orbis spike." Lewis and Maslin have suggested a correlation with the Orbis spike and the beginning of the modern "world system" as defined by Immanuel Wallerstein (175).

<sup>16</sup> There is a sustained body of writing throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that indicates some humans were aware of how interference in an ecosystem affected the environment in unexpected, surprising ways (Grove 1), but it was not until 1896 that the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius discovered scientific proof that increased carbon dioxide levels led to global warming. Mainstream science, however, did not widely accept nor study global warming until the mid-twentieth century (Chakrabarty "Climate" 199).

responses happen post-awareness of our complicity in the end of the world, after totalizing control and cynicism—“the dominant ideological mode of our age”—no longer work (*Hyperobjects* 24). Yet, these very same traits show up in the literature at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, sparked by a response of wonder to a new, overwhelming environment. For example, the young narrator at the end of the H. G. Wells *The Time Machine*, which I discuss in the first chapter, meets the time traveller’s tale of human decline and extinction with both wonder and belief in a room of otherwise skeptical businessmen. These instances interrupt the expected narrative of British colonial arrogance in contact with the other, revealing insecurities about mastering environments and recognition of a partial and/or accurate view. Such moments are more often than not generated by overwhelming experiences that question one’s ability to see the whole completely, what Morton would describe as recognition that one sees from within *hyperobjects*, or “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” which “‘stick’ to beings that are involved with them,” and “involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to” (*Hyperobjects* 1). Fossil fuels are a hyperobject. Climate change is a hyperobject.<sup>17</sup> In an age of burgeoning globalization and imagined environmental catastrophe, the writers I discuss grappled with their inability to see the total picture and, sometimes, chose instead to represent and aestheticize a partial view from the inside.

## **Women and Hyperobjects, or Why Material Ecocriticism Needs Ecofeminism**

Such a vision from the inside is oftentimes more accessible to women, who, as Mary Louise Pratt has shown, “constitut[e] knowledge and subjectivity” through different sight lines than men, often through domestic settings, or what Pratt refers to as their “personal, room-sized empire” (159,

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<sup>17</sup> Other examples Morton gives illustrate the expansiveness of the term: “the Lago Agrio oil field in Ecuador, or the Florida Everglades...the biosphere, or the Solar System...the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth; or just the plutonium, or the uranium...the very long-lasting product of direct human manufacture, such as Styrofoam or plastic bags, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism” (*Hyperobjects* 1).

160). Released from the expectation to see the whole picture from above, women instead are poised to see from within. Gayatri Spivak picks up on the gendered correlation between seeing the planet outside of a totalizing perspective in her idea of *planetarity* in *Death of a Discipline* (2003). Planetarity describes a sense of collective worldliness that is simultaneously alongside and yet at odds with globalization (which she defines as “the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere”) (72). Planetarity resists seeing the earth as an “abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes” (72). The planet “is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan” (72). Rather than seeing the “globe” and the “planet” in “neat contrast,” Spivak suggests we think of them in a continuous and discontinuous ways: “in spite of our forays into what we metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is not, indeed, specifically discontinuous” (72, 73). As a literary critic, Spivak invites her readers to turn this vision toward texts. Reading from a planetary point of view makes the earth—“our home”—uncanny or, more precisely, *unheimlich* (73). What is particularly apt in Spivak’s vision is, not surprisingly, its attention to gender. In calling for planetarity in how we approach texts, Spivak says “we will construct an allegory of reading where the discursive system shifts from vagina to planet as the signifier of the uncanny, by way of nationalist colonialism and postcoloniality.” She explains that “This is in keeping with my method: gender as a general critical instrument rather than something to be factored in in special cases” (74). Even as she sometimes offhandedly, seemingly unintentionally dismisses environmental thought,<sup>18</sup> Spivak proposes a vision of ethical global

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<sup>18</sup> Spivak makes it clear that she is not defining “planetarity” within an established ecological perspective: “To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided ‘natural’ space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interest of this globalization” (72). She recognizes the risk of the slipperiness of positing a concept of the planet that is whole and yet cannot be totalized, that is simultaneously within and yet outside capital. The risk of this gesture is that “planetarity” will become conflated with an overly simplified “unexamined environmentalism” that forgets not only that borders and political boundaries bear on human experience of our environment, but also, in keeping with her own postcolonial critique, that human beings’ relationship to land is always constructed within a political frame. The notion that there is an unconstructed ‘Nature’ only reinforces global capitalism, as in the ecotourist who wants to witness virgin land free from evidence of depressed populations who have been displaced to preserve it. To write about the globe/earth/planet in terms that depict it neither as (only) the staging

consciousness and reading that identifies a connection between the alterity of women, the alterity of postcolonial subjects, and the alterity of the planet.

Spivak asks us to “shift” our referent from the vagina to the planet, but for ecofeminist thought, these two terms are always already interrelated. Often omitted from ecological genealogies, ecofeminism arose as one expression of the environmental movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the US, largely in response to nuclear testing (Mies and Shiva 14).<sup>19</sup> Ecofeminism takes as its premise that all hierarchies and dualities are interrelated and mutually supporting, and colonial domination of land mimics masculine domination of feminine bodies and human domination of the natural world. Val Plumwood’s claim in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) resonates with what Spivak claims in *Death of a Discipline*: “By means of dualism, the colonised are appropriated, incorporated, into the selfhood and culture of the master, which forms their identity. The dominant conception of the human/nature relation in the west has features corresponding to this logical structure” (42-3). Women’s rights are inherently tied to and enmeshed with the rights of all oppressed groups, a claim that is implicit in Spivak, as well as other feminist postcolonial thought and black feminism.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, for many ecofeminists, this oppression extends beyond the human to include the oppression of nonhuman agents (Colebrook 11). Mies and Shiva have explained it simply: “This [capitalist patriarchal world system] emerged, is built upon and maintains itself through the colonization of women, of ‘foreign’ peoples and their lands; and our nature, which it is

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ground for rampant globalization nor as the arch-symbol of a borderless, “Natural” space of conservation and multiculturalism requires a critique of what is essentially an extreme version of deep ecology. Begun by the Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer Arne Naess in 1973, deep ecology honors equally the inherent worth of all living things, including humans, plants, and animals; in its most extreme version, it privileges the conservation of pristine nature above ensuring human survival (Drengson). Spivak carefully positions “planetarity” outside of environmentalism to avoid its being recaptured within a discourse that aids global capitalism. Yet by doing so, she positions “unexamined environmentalism” and the premises of deep ecology as the sole representative of environmental thought.

<sup>19</sup> One exception to these typical omissions is Robert Young’s *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, which includes a section on “Feminism and Ecology.”

<sup>20</sup> See Crenshaw’s “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color;” Lorde’s “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House;” Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. For a discussion of the intersectionality of gender and colonialism, see McClintock’s *Imperial Leather*.



gradually destroying” (2).<sup>21</sup> Though Spivak and Morton would challenge the uncontested idea of “our nature” set forth by early ecofeminists like Mies and Shiva, the emphasis on the interrelation between the oppression of women, colonized people, and “nature” that early ecofeminists set forth has revealed itself over time to be far more critically important than the reception of ecofeminism would indicate.

Though ecofeminism has often been written about as a small subfield, contemporary environmental criticism is showing that the fundamental claims of ecofeminism are endemic not only to environmental thought but to feminism as well. DeLoughrey and Handley attribute ecofeminism’s exclusion from ecocriticism to the fact that ecofeminism has been “incorrectly reduced to a dated essentialist methodology” (37). In her book *Sex After Life* (2015), Claire Colebrook proposes, “Eco-feminism is no minor off-shoot of feminist thought but structures its genealogy” in part because “The very concept of feminist emancipation harbors an implicit ecology” (8). In giving a genealogy of feminism, she explains “By the time eco-feminism emerges, the concern for the environment explicitly takes feminism from a mode of human-human combat (women fighting for their rights for the sake of all humanity) to a war on the man of reason; for it is man whose drive to master for the sake of his own self-maintenance has resulted in an unwitting suicide” (9).<sup>22</sup> This “man of reason” is set up as he who wants to dominate nature and be free from his dependence on it. Mies and Shiva set themselves against him in *Ecofeminism*: “This celebration of our dependence to Mother Earth is quite contrary to the attitude promoted by Francis Bacon and

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<sup>21</sup> Morton suggests that French feminism and its emphasis on non-dualism is the origins of ecofeminism (*Dark Ecology* 65). However, like ecocriticism’s postcolonial beginnings, the earliest “ecofeminist” arguments preceded the use of the term “ecofeminism” and, like ecocriticism, originate in the third world (Huggan and Tiffin 12, Young 100-108).

<sup>22</sup> Colebrook’s history is intended to explain the importance of the idea of the posthuman as the inheritor of feminist (and ecofeminist) thought: “...one might say that the posthuman is required by feminism’s critical trajectory” (9). Ecofeminism’s logic makes it so that “...either humanity must be redefined or broadened to include women, or the very question that enabled women to challenge the rights of man, will lead to a full-scale destruction of any assumed right whatsoever” (11).

his followers, the fathers of modern science and technology” (18).<sup>23</sup> Ecofeminism suggests that the “unwitting suicide,” or the impending environmental catastrophe that is global warming, has been caused by the “drive to master” of men of reason, or the world system that privileges science and technology. This idea is starkly in contrast to, for example, the premise of early ecology that Wells writes about in *Science of Life*, wherein the earth’s resources are referred to as “reserves of nitrogen and phosphorus, of timber-growth and soil-fertility, of useful animals and of sources of energy” akin to “the reserves of gold and credit” held by the Bank of England, and the role of the ecologist is to master and manage the environment on a global scale (1030).

Ecofeminism’s skepticism of the liberating promise of advanced science and technology coupled with its emphasis on an intersectionality that includes the subjugation of the natural world makes it well positioned to think about the full scope of the human consequences of petromodernity. In other words, material ecocriticism, which investigates the relationship between human agency and fossil fuels, needs to be understood alongside the ecofeminist tradition. A recent essay by Catriona Sandilands, in discussing changes in feminism in relation to the environmental humanities, declares that “it is crucial to remember that, for anti-oppressive politics, matter matters *critically*, and bodies and flows are always already implicated in (if obviously never reducible to) power relations” (447). Reading petrottexts in light of ecofeminism and material ecocriticism simultaneously makes clear that, for example, there is a connection between the management of the global supply of naturally occurring nitrogen and the management of women’s bodies in the global sex industry. Or that the domestic conveniences, enabled by private energy consumption, that constitute part of the liberty that Bergthaller describes, have been positioned as responsible also for

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the association between maleness and reason in western thought, see Lloyd’s *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*.

women's liberation from housework.<sup>24</sup> Fossil fuels have allowed humans to put themselves and their things into ever greater and more intense circulation. This movement has engendered liberty as we know it, even as it will be our undoing (Bergthaller 426). But for others—the enslaved, the colonized, the poor, the oppressed, the “vagabonds” of global modernity—fossil fuels have enabled others to make them into things.

## Chapter Summaries

The four chapters of this dissertation tell a story of an increased willingness to be comfortable in not being able to see the whole picture that is environmental catastrophe. In the first chapter, I discuss a dramatic change in environmental consciousness in H. G. Wells's writing, reading his earliest novels written in the 1890s, *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*, alongside his late ecological writing, most notably his contribution to the extremely popular and long-enduring science textbook *The Science of Life* (1931). This textbook helped to popularize ecology in the US and Britain over the first half of the twentieth century. In contrast, Wells's early novels offer productive responses to environmental catastrophe such as moments of unworlding, moments of seeing the relationship between environmental and colonial degradation, moments of condemning simple cynicism, and moments of feeling pain and grief when nonhuman timespans of the future are made accessible to a single human life. In juxtaposing Wells's earliest writing with his late, nonfiction ecological writing, one can see how uncomfortable and ultimately unsatisfied he becomes with the seemingly passive responses to impending environmental threat that he explores at length in these early works. As a contributor to the burgeoning field of Ecology in Britain, Wells embraces a

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<sup>24</sup> “This, indeed has to a large extent happened in Western society: modern chemistry, household technology, and pharmacy were proclaimed as women's saviours, because they would ‘emancipate’ them from household drudgery. Today we realize that much environmental pollution and destruction is causally linked to modern household technology. Therefore, can the concept of emancipation be compatible with a concept of preserving the earth as our life base?” (Mies and Shiva 7)

logical, practical, business-like tone that surprises a modern-day reader who would not associate Ecology with the establishment and brings to light the financial interests of early Ecology. In the next chapter, I show how reading two of Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific short stories, "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices," points us toward this well-intentioned writer's competing pressures to conscript his new friends and neighbors in Samoa into his reading public, while at the same time satisfying readers "back home" in Britain who were thirsty for sensationalized travel writing about the Pacific in the tradition of Pierre Loti and Herman Melville. Though Stevenson is able to offer a radically different representation of the Pacific and Pacific Islanders, including their contemporary concerns about land use, invasive species, and ecological decline, his stories ultimately reverse this good work in their need to tie up the plot successfully and satisfy readers "back home." For both Wells and Stevenson, the authors' productive moments are reversed by their necessity to make their work relevant to a greater world system.

The women that I write about in the next chapter, Lady Annie Brassey and Katherine Routledge, are released from this pressure. Lady Brassey's *A Voyage in the Sunbeam* (1878) was originally a collection of letters sent back to family and friends, always intended to be a document circulated primarily among women. Routledge's *The Mystery of Easter Island* (1919) was written as an anthropological survey, and the section that I read is tangential to the overall intention of the book. Both Brassey and Routledge, writing as women (though a generation apart), are not expected to uphold the same conventions of travel writing that their male counterparts display, such as needing to repeat the visit of those before them, seeing the same sites, and commenting in the same tone afterward. Such writing, I suggest, invites cynicism. In their freedom to write new observations, these women are able to represent—and obscure—their overwhelming experiences, leading to fresh writing about perception of natural spaces and indigenous people that is in opposition to the traditional colonial gaze. In the final chapter, I offer a material ecofeminist reading of Joseph

Conrad's *Victory*, a petrotext set atop a coal mine, waiting to be rediscovered by Conrad criticism. Lena, the main female character, and Wang, a Chinese laborer, respond to their environment in ways that model ecological awareness, even as they are dismissed as unintelligent by the white men around them. Lena's discomfort with looking from afar, coupled with an openness to sincerity that is ridiculed and misunderstood, models an ethical response to environmental catastrophe. Lena's body has been put into global circulation and treated like the unmined coal beneath the earth. When she takes herself out of circulation, she unwittingly makes possible the restoration of the island's ecosystem and the land use of the indigenous population. The women that I write about in the second half of the dissertation are comfortable with a partial view, which, ironically, is the only way to begin to discern that which is too big to see. This comfort is not akin to denial nor willful ignorance. Rather, it is a model of interpretation that makes perception possible at the beginning of the dark ecological noir plot that we are still living in, though now we are aware that we are both the victims and the villains.

# Chapter 1

## **The Cosmic and the Human: H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine, War of the Worlds*, and the History of Ecology**

*The earth is warm with men. We think always with reference to men.*

--H. G. Wells, "On Extinction"

At the close of the nineteenth century, the imagined future of human life on planet earth appeared bleak. Geologic science and the discovery of deep time in the early part of the century had broadened the understanding of the short duration in which human beings had populated the planet. Scientists in the latter half of the century had to recalibrate their understanding of deep time in light of the discovery of Second Law of Thermodynamics and advancing ideas of entropy, or the idea that there is only a fixed amount of heat within the universe that is gradually dissipating. This led to a depressive, apocalyptic spirit among late-century scientific writers. Interrupting ideas of progress, these theories situated humankind on a cooling planet, progressively expending all of its available energy even as it was slowly being dragged into the sun, gradually decaying and devolving into a more savage, immoral, and degenerate version of itself. Humankind was left with mouths agape, staring up at a universe so vast and expansive that human accomplishment was insignificant, its centuries of history nothing more than tiny moments within vast geologic scales, all on the way toward destruction.

Into this chaos, . G. Wells was born. In it, he wrote his early novels. Both his first novel, *The Time Machine* (1893), and his subsequent novel *War of the Worlds* (1897) reflect and engage with the depressive spirit of late-nineteenth-century science but do so in ways that insert human feelings and ethical positions into what are otherwise non-human spaces and times. Yet the wonder and awe of the universe and the natural world that Wells provokes in his early work is nonexistent in his ecological writing forty years later, exemplified by his wildly popular textbook *Science of Life* (1930). The same author who, as a young man, merged cosmic and human registers to make grand scales legible to a single human life writes, in middle-age, as a practical strategist, less interested in being stupefied by the sublime than in managing the earth's resources like an efficient businessman. What happened? The answer to this question involves understanding the little-known origins of Ecology as a discipline in early twentieth-century England and examining Wells's largely unrecognized contributions to the development of it in his late career. Juxtaposing Wells's early fiction with his late ecological writing produces a particularly productive—and apt—understanding of the ethics of human agency in the face of environmental catastrophe.

## **“Black and Blank:” *The Time Machine* and Climate Change**

Of the more than fifty novels Wells published over his long career, *The Time Machine*, his first novel, has received the majority of critical attention. The novel's plot largely takes place in the year 802,701, when the time traveller discovers that the stratified English social structure of the nineteenth century has led to the human species breaking into two distinct species: the Eloi, effete, vegetarian, leisure-loving, petite darlings who wear garlands of flowers and eat fruit all day, and the Morlocks, loathsome workers who live below ground and who, the time traveller learns eventually, harvest the Eloi for meat. Much critical attention has been paid to reading this strange dichotomy of future humans and to the thought experiment of degeneration as it unfolds over millennia in

England. Less attention has been paid to what takes place in the novel after the time traveller leaves the Eloi and Morlocks, pulls the lever, and “flung himself into futurity” not thousands, but millions of years ahead when a cooling sun hangs perpetually in the sky, and the earth is no longer amenable to human life (19). Critics who have written about this further scene often read it as a flash of unexpected literariness in Wells. Roger Lockhurst has called the final scene “one of Wells’s most impressive literary passages” (255). Bernard Bergonzi sees it as an apex of Wells’s poetic career: “this vision of a dying world is conveyed with a poetic intensity which Wells was never to recapture” (59).<sup>1</sup> More than just a flash of literariness, this “further vision” imagines how entropy and degeneration could come to bear on human lives in the future.

Lockhurst and Bergonzi are right: the language used to depict this “dying world” provokes intense and conflicting feelings: aversion and wonder, horror and attraction, repulsion and awe. The image of the future as a “dying world” is arresting. What was once the middle of London is now the edge of a frosty ocean in which strange crab-like, tentacled creatures, at first indistinguishable from rocks, begin to fix their intent upon the time traveller as prey. “I cannot convey the sense of abominable desolation that hung over the world” the time traveller expresses as, gasping for oxygen, he shivers on the beach that was once the English countryside (92). “All the sounds of man, the

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<sup>1</sup> The confidence with which those who write about Wells have dismissed his later work is surprising and often amusing. V. S. Pritchett’s statement that “Without question *The Time Machine* is the best piece of writing” is typical (125). Jorge Louis Borges writes diplomatically that “Before Wells resigned himself to the role of sociological spectator, he was an admirable storyteller” (330). Bergonzi agrees that the only works of literary interest are the early scientific romances and “assum[es] as axiomatic that the bulk of Wells’s published output has lost whatever *literary* interest it might have had, and is not likely to regain it in the foreseeable future, whatever value it may possess for the social historian or the historian of ideas” (165). Frank McConnell agrees that his early work is best, but admits that though the “later utopias are not, by any means, his best books. . .they are flawed honorably” (5). Brian Aldiss has suggested even that the fact that Wells’s late novels “do not recapture that darkly beautiful quality of imagination, or that instinctive-seeming unity of construction which lives in his early novels” can be attributed to the lusty Wells’s sexual frustration of youth—or as McConnell puts it “he genuinely *liked* women” (19)—frustrations presumably dissipated by the many relationships and affairs with women he would have throughout his adult life (126).

In one of the first book-length studies of Wells, Bernard Bergonzi describes how “Wells has not, on the whole, been taken very seriously as a literary artist; partly, perhaps, because he was at such pains in later years to deny that he was one” (16). John Hammond has shown how Wells’s infamous public dismissal of Henry James (and the ruin of their friendship), which centered around Wells’s skepticism of a stable and reified idea of art and composition, led to his later cultivating an exaggerated, anti-academic persona, one that would consequently hurt his literary reception (24).



bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives—all that was over” (93). In this “remote and awful twilight,” when “the work of the tidal drag was done,” the sun hangs perpetually in sunset, ironically still not setting over what was once the center of the British empire. As the traveller moves ahead in further increments until he finally sees the sun go black, he feels in his body a “horror of this great darkness.” Transported from the safety of the Victorian drawing room to the catastrophe of environmental destruction, he becomes “sick and confused,” “nauseous,” and feels a “terrible dread” (94). The traveller has a visceral, immediate reaction, as if in pain, as if in mourning.<sup>2</sup> And yet this is not the end of his life, nor the end of the world. After all, the world, the earth, the planet, still exists. Why then is he in pain? What is he mourning for? What has been lost? It is only the end of a habitat amenable to humans and to those species dependent on a particular global ecosystem. In this moment, Wells imagines the individual, bodily reaction to the decline of the global ecosystem, making a nonhuman timescale not only intelligible to a single human life but viscerally, bodily felt. Wells takes the idea of degeneration and entropy to its final limit. He stages a human response to long-term environmental catastrophe. This fictional moment envisions a human response to climate change.

It is significant that *The Time Machine* does not leave its readers abandoned in this dying world. Instead, readers are brought back to the safety of the Victorian drawing room where a young man, the story’s narrator, interprets the story and gives the novel its final words. Although all of the listeners in the gentlemen’s club have dismissed the time traveller’s tale, the young narrator accepts it as true and, by doing so, authorizes the story for readers. Though he believes the time traveller’s depiction of a bleak future and a civilization that will “inevitably fall back upon and destroy its

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<sup>2</sup> In *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton critiques the tendency within environmental criticism to fetishize Nature as a distinct place “out there” with which humans must become “re-enchanted” in order to provoke respect and conservation. He argues that instead we should think ecologically, that is, relationally, but without drawing a line around what is inside or outside of nature, which is itself impossible to distinguish from anything that is *not* nature. He writes that nature “if it is anything at all, is what is immediately given, which at its simplest is pain” (182). In this context, we might understand the time traveller’s nausea, sickness, and experience of horror at the end of the world as a dark, yet transcendent moment.

makers in the end,” he insists that “If that is so, it remains for us to live as though it were not so” (102). At first glance, his unwillingness to accept a hard, difficult future might be read as youthful ignorance and unexamined optimism. But the desire to hold onto an ethics of life even in the face of annihilation is perhaps more sophisticated than it first appears. The narrator emphasizes the importance of constantly shifting one’s scope between different time scales, to hold cosmic and human scales simultaneously.

Though the time traveller has offered the narrator a harrowing vision of the future of humanity, the narrator insists that “to me the future is still black and blank” (101). A future “black and blank” is a future at once black: empty, absent, void, unenlightened, unexposed, dark; and blank: present, yet waiting to be filled, a space that exists and yet is empty, a space waiting to be written upon and marked by a human hand.<sup>3</sup> While the young narrator ponders the unknown future, he is steeled by the presence of two unusual white flowers taken from the pocket of the time traveller, flowers that had been a love gift from the traveller’s tiny Eloi girlfriend, Weena. The presence of these flowers lets readers know that the narrator was correct to believe the traveller’s story, making the skeptics, pessimists, and rationalists the fools who have cut themselves off from the truth because of their blindness. The narrator’s meditation on these flowers closes the novel: “even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man” (102). He interprets the gift from Weena, who is herself a degenerated, mentally declined, and physically frail descendant of humans, as proof that human kindness—“gratitude” and “tenderness”—endure despite changes to physical form. The seemingly saccharine ending is not just a late Victorian way of saving the novel from despair, nor a kind of narrative bandage that covers the huge existential problem that has been brought up. These final lines force readers to choose between the bleak pessimism of the time traveller and the innocent optimism of the narrator.

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the development of racial associations with the word “black” as it relates to the rise of colonialism see pp. 1-24 in Hall 1-24.

At the same time, they insist that the imagined distant, cynical position of clarity taken up by skeptical businessmen is the position of fools. That the narrator has the last word suggests that his humanist optimism is the novel's message too. In the end, *The Time Machine* models a way to imagine environmental catastrophe of the future without burying one's head in the sand while at the same time privileging human time scales and human consequences, living "as if it were not so." The shift between these registers is a kind of ethical, human-centered environmentalism.

## Unworlding *War of the Worlds*

*The Time Machine* demands that its readers shift focus between the cosmic and the human scale in order to make human needs meaningful within an otherwise bleak future. *War of the Worlds* (1897) forces a perspective as well, one that is relational and resists a totalizing, aerial view from above, or what Peder Anker has described as "the very core of British ecological reasoning" (116). *War of the Worlds* refuses to zoom out far enough to see the "whole picture," and by doing so, shows that there is never a whole picture to see at all. It not only critiques the ideological underpinnings of nineteenth-century racial science, and, with it, justifications for colonialism, but it also critiques the kind of "worlding" that is necessary to objectify and dissociate oneself from a space. This "worlding" is at its simplest an act of enclosure, but it is also akin to the construction of the idea of "nature." *War of the Worlds* reorients the global ecosystem into an interplanetary one while it destabilizes colonial and species hierarchy. In doing so, it envisions a global—even interplanetary—ecological perspective to replace the fiction of a totalizing, colonial whole.

From the beginning, the novel disrupts any sort of easy hierarchy in how it depicts the Martians, who are characterized in seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, their bodies are highly evolved and relieved from the conditions that motivate human desire. They are asexual, do not sleep, and have "no sense of fatigue." Their liquid human diet means that "they did not eat,

much less digest” (93-4). Liberation from digestion and reproduction has allowed their bodies to evolve into mere capsules for their large, powerful brains. They are “heads—merely heads,” and “minds swaying vast mechanical bodies” (93, 55). On the other hand, they threaten as savage, racial others: they are naked, “small brown figure[s],” cannibal-like, with a “preference for men as their source of nourishment” (61, 94).<sup>4</sup> This primitive language is most evident in how the novel describes their first spaceship. After crashing into the English suburbs, it lingers there for a few days “sticking into the skin of our old planet Earth like a poisoned dart” (24). In the end, their race is wiped out as many indigenous peoples have been: by a strain of bacteria that the English are immune to, and, afterward, their bodies are displayed in the Museum of Natural History (134). Both savage and evolved, these cannibal super-creatures terrify on both fronts, embodying the threat of humankind’s future and past. To the English at the top of their imagined racial and species hierarchy, these foreign bodies uncannily signal both the future human body that humans may evolve into and yet also the past body that they have evolved from. That these powerful figures can occupy these two positions simultaneously, that these two positions are in fact inseparable, implodes any rational, linear narrative of evolution and progress. The novel destabilizes these structures in order to evoke terror in the readers sitting safely in their armchairs in the midst of an empire that over centuries had convinced itself that it was at the apex of evolution.

Moreover, as it shakes the terra firma of imagined evolutionary and racial hierarchies, the novel foregrounds the environmental domination inherent to colonization.<sup>5</sup> The colonizing Martians come to planet earth seeking a new food source (human blood) because their own planet has undergone such extreme environmental changes that it is no longer habitable for the Martians (2). The novel is not explicit about whether or not the environmental changes were Martian-made,

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<sup>4</sup> Their cannibalism is not a taste for human flesh, but human blood, a paradoxical, “evolved” cannibalism that is savage and yet also a more efficient way to gain nourishment and provide energy to power their large brains.

<sup>5</sup> For an anti-colonial reading of *War of the Worlds* see Sussman 162-193.

but the arrogance and wastefulness with which they begin their takeover suggests that, though highly evolved, they may be unfit to manage a global ecosystem. The weapons they use against the colonists mimic environmental threat. They use “Heat-Ray” guns to zap their prey. Their chemical weapons, canisters of “Black Smoke,” throw deadly vapors—“death to all that breathes”—and block out the sun (64). The heat and smoke kill; they overkill. Though there to cultivate food (that is, again, human blood), the Martians spend a tremendous amount of energy to acquire it, spill it carelessly when they have it, and make it difficult for themselves to produce more. Surely, they do not understand entropy. Their reckless and indiscriminate destruction of the English countryside mimics the inefficient, arrogant colonial farmer. That they bring with them an invasive, parasitic “red plant” which grows with “astonishing vigour and luxuriance” and chokes out the native English flora only strengthens this association (96).

By the end of the novel, the simplistic, linear hierarchy has spiraled out of order, as the most powerful creatures, the Martians, are themselves brought down by the lowliest organism, the bacteria, who are akin to the imaginary “transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water” to which humans are compared in the novel’s opening sentence (1). Power in the universe now seems to function like a twisted version of the children’s game Rock, Paper, Scissors, each entity equally vulnerable and powerful. In this new topsy-turvy world, the narrator warns his countrymen “We have learned now that we cannot regard this planet as being fenced in and a secure abiding place for Man” (134). This statement may seem to be a part of the page-turner, a kind of thrilling realization that that which is canny, home-ly—*heimlich*—is no longer so, just as the Gothic reader could no longer look upon her bedroom in safety once she realized the horrors that might take place in one just like it. Yet, the image of a “planet as being fenced in” reveals the irrationality of English relationship to land. How can one put a fence around a planet? The archetypal English colonial act is to enclose and to cultivate. To fence in is to make separate, to contain, to control. In

the days after first Martian cylinder lodges itself into the earth of the English countryside, the local council decides that, in order to help control the crowd, a fence should be built around the capsule (24). Once the Martians emerge from the vessel and begin to destroy everything they see, the fence becomes all the more ridiculous. A planet, a species, cannot be fenced in, controlled, or separated. What the narrator at the end of the novel insists is that separation, like the fence around the Martian ship, is a joke. Contact happens. There is no hierarchy, only relation.

Thinking relationally, or what some might call *ecologically*, as the narrator begins to do once his home is threatened, changes how humans relate to their environments. Toppled off his place at the top, the narrator feels “a sense of dethronement, a persuasion that I was no longer a master, but an animal among the animals, under the Martian heel” (108). The lines between species that constitute power have grown thin; the fences are crumbling. He now thinks relationally, as “an animal among the animals.” As he does so, he experiences his homeland as unhomey: “I found about me the landscape, weird and lurid, of another planet” (108). The world he grew to love as a child has become odd-looking, strange, and sickly. Part of the reason for this change of vision can be attributed to the narrator’s witnessing the environmental degradation wrought by the Heat-Ray, the Black Smoke, and the non-native red plant. Yet, seeing his home ecosystem as “weird” and that of “another planet” is also due to its having been “unworlded” or having the boundaries—the fences—around it break down. His view is not the totalized, aerial view from above, nor a view that can be understood within the borders of the pages of a paper map.<sup>6</sup> Describing the land after the destruction wrought by the Martians, the narrator imagines that had a “balloonist” been far enough above England to see it “spread out like a huge map,” then “it would have seemed as if some monstrous pen had flung ink upon the chart. . . exactly as a gout of ink would spread itself upon

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<sup>6</sup> Such an experience might look like some models that have been offered by postcolonial theorists, such as Gayatri Spivak’s idea of “planetary” in *Death of a Discipline* (NY: Columbia UP, 2005) or Édouard Glissant’s “aesthetics of the earth” in *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997). For a further discussion of “worlding” and postcolonial theory and ecocriticism, see DeLoughrey’s “Postcolonialism” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*.

blotting paper” (77). The narrator is not the balloonist; he cannot get high enough to really see the damage. He imagines it as he imagines looking down on a map, from the mastered, distanced, abstract appropriation of the landscape. Even still, this document is destroyed, written on, spilled upon by “some monstrous pen.” The destruction left by the Martians is one that can now be read too, but by whom? Who can get high enough, besides the Martians, to see the damage? It can only be imagined from within the map. The Martian colonization has shifted the English vision of land from an objectifying and dissociated point seemingly outside the fence to one within a space whose boundaries cannot be seen.

## **Wells’s Early Influences: T. H. Huxley and Ray Lankester**

From a young age, Wells was fascinated by contemporary science, and as a young man, he found himself on scholarship at The Normal School, studying under T. H. Huxley, who was then at the end of his career. Wells would later say that this year was “beyond all question, the most educational year of my life” (qtd in McLean 23). From Huxley, Wells learned to question evolution as a teleological process, to think about human degeneration, and to consider how entropy might come to bear on human life in the future. It was Huxley who first encouraged him to think within human and cosmic scales simultaneously. At this late stage in his career, Huxley was focused on how evolutionary theory should be understood in relation to human societies and their ethics. He argued against Herbert Spencer’s idea of social Darwinism, which proposes that the logic of natural selection can be applied to human beings’ interactions with one another, a course of thought that centers the English at the top of an imagined racial and national hierarchy. Instead, Huxley proposed the theory of “ethical evolution.” Wells listened to Huxley lecture that, although human compassion and cooperation were only temporary moments in evolutionary history, their temporariness does not diminish their significance, for “the ethical progress of society depends, not

on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it” (*Ethics and Evolution* 83). To the overwhelming realization of humankind’s irrelevance in larger scales of space and time, Huxley inserted the prospect that humans can have an effect on the quality of their lives in the future. Thus, it is not surprising that Wells sent a copy of his first novel, *The Time Machine*, to Huxley with the note, “I am sending you a little book that I fancy may be of interest to you” (“From Letter 224”). Wells was attracted to the ray of hope Huxley’s theories offered in an otherwise bleak landscape, and one sees this ethical optimism borne out in his early fiction.

The practical optimism that Huxley put forward jibes with Wells’s other significant early influence, his friend Ray Lankester, the author of *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880). Like Huxley, Lankester argues that evolution toward further complexity, or what he calls “elaboration,” is only one possible outcome of natural selection, and that “balance” (or stasis) and “degeneration” (devolution) are just as likely (McClellan 25). Lankester applies this model of physical evolution to human ethics and argues that moral corruption is perhaps indicative of degeneration. Despite the pessimistic conclusion that one might draw from the possibility of devolution, Lankester insists that, because we humans have “the power to *know the causes of things*,” we are “able to control our destinies” and thus have the ability to ward off degeneration. Lankester calls for humans, “by ceaseless and ever hopeful labour to try to gain a knowledge of man’s place in the order of nature” (162). This reaction is a different response to what one would expect to the overwhelming realization of humankind’s place in a larger cosmos. It is a reaction that offers, like Huxley, some hope that humankind’s actions are not just futile and that, despite what the future may bring, humans have some influence upon it. Wells may have been drawn to the apocalyptic spirit within scientific writing at the end of the century, but he fixed his attention on how this bleak future can engender ethical actions in the present and the near, not-quite-yet-destroyed future. In the nihilist



hellscape of environmental destruction, Wells saw a kernel of sweetness, the potential for human beings to realize their best selves.

Wells's early novels like *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), and *War of the Worlds* (1898) reflect his interest in thinking through the human consequences of new scientific discoveries and theories like entropy and degeneration. These novels, in addition to Wells's many scientific essays, helped popularize these theories among the public.<sup>7</sup> This role as public educator would follow Wells throughout his career, first as an essayist and later as a contributor to a wildly successful multivolume textbook, *Science of Life*, that would help introduce Ecology as a discipline to the English and American public over generations. Wells seems to have experienced the denouement of the century not from within an aesthetics of dissipation and excess but instead from within an aesthetics that remained rational, logical, and practically optimistic despite the outlook.<sup>8</sup> What to do with the knowledge that the sun is cooling, that energy is dissolving, and that human beings might as easily be headed toward decline and decay as toward evolution? One answer is to feel it, to dwell in it, and to aestheticize it, which is what Wells does in his early novels like *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*. As Wells matured, his career blossomed, and his writing became more popular and influential, he became unsatisfied with this solution, choosing instead to change his tack.

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<sup>7</sup> His significant body of scientific journalism demonstrates his investment in these public conversations. In "Zoological Retrogression," he questions humankind's place in a hierarchy of species, "There is. . .no guarantee in scientific knowledge of man's permanence or permanent ascendancy" (135). In "The Man of the Year Million," he considers entropy: "...the earth is ever radiating away heat into space" (143). In "The Extinction of Man," he argues that humankind should be more humble and skeptical of the future: "...man's complacent assumption of the future is too confident" (146). And in "The 'Cyclic' Delusion," he asks that humans reframe what they consider to be natural patterns of growth and decline: "...the great stream of the universe flows past us and onward" (149).

<sup>8</sup> Wells did read Nordau's *Degeneration* (James 6). He described it as "pretentious and inconsistent" (*Mankind in the Making* 59).

## The Problem with Awe and Wonder

T. H. Huxley had asked humans to move always between registers of the cosmic and the human and thus to focus between close and distant fields of vision. In Wells's early work, he takes up his former professor's admonition and, through his art, does something that is otherwise irrational: he makes the cosmic scale rational to a single human experience. Rather than alternate between cosmic and human scales, as Huxley had advised, he merges the two together. In *The Time Machine*, the time traveller witnesses millions of years of human and geologic history; he feels not only the decline of western civilization but also the decline of geologic time, the literal ending of the world. *War of the Worlds* forces humans to think of themselves relationally even beyond the scope of the earth. Through art, Wells turns theories into stories, and by doing so makes that which seems to be inaccessible to humans immediately available. In his 1934 Preface to *Seven Famous Novels*, a collection of his early work, Wells explains how "these stories of mine collected here do not pretend to deal with possible things" but instead "have to hold the reader to the end by art and illusion and not by proof and argument" (154). Wells makes the case that the role of the writer is to help the reader "in every possible unobtrusive way to *domesticate* the impossible hypothesis" (155). What Wells does in his early work is to put the human at the center of an understanding of time and space that is dazzlingly nonhuman. By doing so, these works provoke wonder, awe, and humility. But what is the difference between making the cosmic rational at a human level and colonizing the world as a human space? And what is the difference between being stupefied with awe and being a passive witness? Wells's early and late works grapple with these questions in disparate ways. In the context of colonial contact and global imperialism, eliciting wonder and appreciation for what will soon vanish is not necessarily an ethical position.

Both *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds* position humans as mourning, passive witnesses, akin to reclining readers, watching catastrophe unfold because there seems to be nothing they can

do about it. In the context of late-nineteenth-century science, this position makes sense. Yet, at the turn of the century, even as humans saw their place in the universe as insignificant and passive, even as they understood themselves as victims of a global system of heat transfer over which they had no control, they were simultaneously, carbon molecule by carbon molecule, writing their presence upon the earth in ways that would come to bear on the viability of human life in the not-so-distant future. The threat of a cooling sun that the Victorians saw in their future has instead, of course, become a warming earth. Thus, as Wells fetishized the decline of human and animal life outside of human control, newly-changed human behavior was actually causing a markedly similar kind of environmental destruction that they feared. In light of global warming, we readers today may interpret the passivity that Wells proposes not as a humbling affect that generates respect for “nature,” but instead may identify the seed of a kind of reverent respect and appreciation, seemingly benign, that, in another context, like the one we are facing with global climate change, might be understood as dangerous.

Looking at a distance at the decline of something beautiful or precious may masquerade as appreciation when, in truth, it is a kind of fetishization of decline that reinforces one’s place at the top. Colonial travel narratives illustrate this well. Wells’s essay “On Extinction” (1893), written a few years before *The Time Machine*, demonstrates this phenomenon too. Wells attributes the extinction of animals during his time to the “gleaming scissors” of “One Fate” who once wiped out the dinosaurs and left a “riddle of their scattered bones” (137). But in the next paragraph, Wells acknowledges human impact on extinction: “In the last hundred years the swift change of condition throughout the world, due to the invention of new means of transit, geographical discovery, and the consequent ‘swarming’ of the whole globe by civilised men, has pushed many an animal to the very verge of destruction” (137). Is extinction then the result of a timeless, scissor-wielding, riddle-writing, god-like figure? Or the result of the “swift change” of modernity, and its “new means of

transit”—powered, lest we forget, by steam and, therefore, coal? Are these visions irreconcilable? Or are modernity and its accompanying environmental consequences an expression of Fate, and therefore inevitable? He mourns bison as “The statuesque type and example of the doomed races” and sees them following the “same grim path” as “the seals, the Greenland whale, many Australian and New Zealand animals and birds” (137). Yet his examples of late-nineteenth-century endangered species, read in the twenty-first century, illustrate not the inevitability of decline but the possibility of preserving species from extinction through human efforts. Today the bison, seals, and Greenland whale are recovering and healthy, not extinct, and, many (though not all) of the mammals and birds in Australia and New Zealand were saved from extinction by early conservation efforts. His meditation today reads strangely, as a lament for something that can in fact be fixed, a sigh that one’s train one is headed over the cliff when in fact there is ample time to pull the brake.

That he lingers on the “doomed race” of bison and imbues bison with human qualities belies his association of threatened species with declining indigenous human populations. In this association, the passivity and wonder that Wells’s early novels provoke take on a sinister tone. The bison are of a “statuesque type,” and he imagines the last one “looking with dull eyes from some western bluff across the broad prairies” who “must feel some dim sense that those wide rolling seas of grass were once the home of myriads of his race, and are now his no longer.” This creature, not an “it” but a “he,” with “dull eyes” is imagined as having possession of the land he lived on. The essay describes beings on the verge of extinction as possessing the ability to mourn: “The sunniest day must shine with a cold and desert light on the eyes of the condemned. For them the future is blotted out, and hope is vanity” (138). Like humans, the bison feels the “cold and desert” future inserted into even the brightest moment of the present. Wells places the bison in a landscape corrupted by man and dwells on the last moment before the animal goes extinct with especially grand language. In this way the text makes a move similar to the novels: it fetishizes the imminent

loss of something beautiful and precious. Like the dinosaurs described poetically as having "faded at last altogether among things mundane" due to "some change of climate, some subtle disease, or some subtle enemy," the bison's end is a privilege for the passive observer—and the reader—to witness (136). It makes the appreciator simultaneously a voyeur. It sensationalizes loss in the same way that many travel accounts to beautiful, tropical places describe indigenous populations: sickly and vanishing, and the traveler being one of the last to see them. The fetish of loss does violence to those who have not vanished, and it makes their extinction seem inevitable even though, like the bison, the Greenland whale, or the seal, that is simply not so.

The spectacle of inevitability of loss is a problem generally for the ecological vision of Wells's early work. Reading Wells's essays from the 1890's and his early novels like *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr Moreau*, and *War of the Worlds*, one feels despair alongside him. Readers are left unsatisfied, disoriented, and conflicted. These works offer a small glimpse of the scope of infinite time and space, or the impossibility of deciding whether or not something is evolution or decay, or they disturb with a vague, seemingly saccharine ending that does little to assuage the feeling of horror and despair that they provoke right up until the very end. Often, they abandon readers in a state of wonder, asking *So what should we do to avoid this?* But the answer is always *Nothing. There is nothing you can do.* That these novels answer back a resounding *nothing* in the face of our good intentions to save humanity from destruction is deeply unsatisfying for those of us reared to solve problems, be practical, and focus on happy endings, and by "those of us," I am referring to all who have inherited the legacy of the nineteenth century, Wells included. McConnell describes Wells as cursed with being an "heir to not only the Victorian apotheosis of the Will, but its Darwinian negation" (10). Although Wells may have witnessed and inscribed the futility with which humankind can face its future at a cosmic scale, we cannot blame him for refusing to accept the vacuum of the unsatisfying *nothing* that his early novels finally offer readers, even though this *nothing*

is, as I discussed in the introduction in relation to Timothy Morton's idea of *dark ecology*, perhaps the most productive and ethical way to think about the future. Wells chose not to stay with a dying world. Given the fear and terror that his early work predicts and the humility that it evokes in humans, it makes sense that he would use his later writing to work out solutions to an otherwise unbearable problem. In this light, we can understand Wells's commitment to Ecology later in his life as a delayed expression of his early desire to stave off decay and degeneration, to control nature so that humankind would not slip into excess and despair.

## Wells's Shift into Ecology

Ecology as a discipline emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, reinstating human beings as masters of the world, holding the reins of a nature that was once red in tooth and claw. The despair that Wells brings us to at the end of *The Time Machine* or the horror he evokes at the possibility of humankind's "evolved" future in *War of the Worlds* seems to have been the catalyst for his interest in Ecology, a science that in its infancy sought to control, instead of observe and predict, the future. Many of the first ecologists in Britain were botanists who had become frustrated with the tedium of morphological botany and its decades of meticulously comparing stamen lengths and petal variations among species (Anker 19). In 1917 a group of ecologists led by Arthur Tansley published an article in *The New Phytologist* calling for a radical revision of how botany was taught at university. In what is now referred to as "The Tansley Manifesto," they criticized morphological botany for being "excessively academic," "sterile," and leading "to little but further refinements of itself" (Blackman et al. 243). Ecology's rebellion against the stifling impracticality of morphological botany can be understood in a larger context as a rebellion against a depressive downward arc of late-nineteenth-century science generally. Tansley and his co-authors argued that, instead of being "limited by a crude Darwinian teleology" (242) and divorced from any "practical first-hand

knowledge of the life of plants in the field or in the garden” (246), botany should be a means to study the practical application of plant science in order to gain “deeper insight into the working of plant processes or into the part which plants play or can be made to play in the economy of the world” (243). Morphological botany had looked backward, obsessed with not only lineage and descent of plants but also its own legitimate lineage from the Darwinian modes that dominated science in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In contrast, Ecology imagined a future, one in which humans had control over their ecosystem and in which resources are managed in exchange with one another—an “economy of the world.” Rather than revealing humanity’s insignificance within deep time or the possibility of its demise, Ecology focused on humankind as the chief influence upon the future.<sup>9</sup>

The shift from morphological botany to Ecology was a shift from studying isolated species in a vacuum to thinking about species relationally within ecosystems. The manifesto argued that plants should be studied in their geographical context, taking into account soil, climate, and geology as well as “the part they play in relation to the inorganic world and to animals,” yet “the part they play” is one “conditioned by their chemical and physical nature” (Blackman et al. 246). The plant is at once a part of a larger structure dependent on exchange (the ecosystem) and at the same time a raw, elemental material—“chemical”—capable of being extracted for use by human beings. Ecology contributed to modern science both the ideas of *exchange* as a natural process and that plants are *chemical* composites. These two ideas allowed ecology to position itself as a practical, modern science, one that would be in harmony with economic opportunities in the beginning of the early

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<sup>9</sup> There were two strains of ecology which emerged simultaneously at the turn of the century. The Tansley Manifesto exhibits the ideology of those ecologists centered at Oxford University, who were committed to both “romantic environmental preservation and hard-core ecological management” (Anker 110). The Oxford version is the version of ecology that H. G. Wells was influenced by and contributed to. In South Africa, General Jan Christian Smuts was simultaneously developing a holistic ecology that was “a more idealistic and spiritual strain of ecological reasoning” than that proposed by Tansley (Anker 41). Peder Anker has argued that these simultaneously emerging forms show that “the history of ecology is best understood as a product of north-south relations, which took local research as models for an emerging global reasoning” (4).

twentieth century, including imperial interests. The reinvention of botany as the practical application of plant research, imagined as an economic exchange dependent on the chemical, elemental properties of plants jibed well with budding economic ventures at the beginning of the century, and ecologists benefitted from this collusion.<sup>10</sup>

Peder Anker has argued convincingly that Wells's "importance to the history of ecology has long been ignored" (111). He was not only a major contributor to the discipline as it emerged in England but also was a significant figure in disseminating its ideas to the general public. It was in the emerging community of Oxford ecologists that Wells found a way to address the problems that had preoccupied his early novels and essays. The novels and scientific journalism he produced in the 1920's and 30's indicate a marked change from his early approach. Instead of dwelling in the horror of a decaying future and imagining scenarios in which humankind is revealed to be insignificant and powerless within a larger universe, his later works, such as his novel *Men like Gods* (1923) or his nonfiction writing, exemplified by his contributions to the textbook *Science of Life*, verge on being optimistic, or at the very least steeled to accept the future with a practical, logical affect.<sup>11</sup> From this position, Wells continued to write both fiction and essays, and later a scientific textbook, that would help popularize the premises of Ecology for the masses.

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<sup>10</sup> The "formative event for modern plant ecology in Britain" was funded by a wealthy London pharmacist, George Claridge Druce, who, like the ecologists, had become disillusioned with what he saw as the conservative, morphological emphasis of modern botany practiced at Oxford University. In 1911, Druce arranged for Tansley and other Oxford ecologists to take an excursion around the British Isles under the banner of the Central Committee for the Survey of British Vegetation. It was lavishly provisioned; the men stayed in luxury hotels and ate like kings:

Exclusive dinner cards made especially for the excursion reveal sumptuous menus of French cuisine, prearranged seating, a carefully planned order of toasts, and extensive wine lists. The foreign members of the party were overwhelmed when their British friends at the dinner at the Royal Hotel in Truro proposed after a cabinet of custard puddings, stewed fruits, trifle, jelly, and creamed meringues to toast and sing 'I dream of thee' in their honor (followed by a violin playing 'meditations' by Squire). Afterwards the party would sign Druce's dinner card with remarks like 'for kind remembering' or 'with love' as a special tribute to their generous patron. All the extravagance was of course prepaid; the participants had only to contribute a small fee and bring their evening dress as well as a dark suit for the dinners. (Anker 17)

Druce's patronage of this event ensured that he would later have a bevy of ecologists, the likes of who signed his dinner card "with love," to cull from in his future pharmaceutical research (Anker 18).

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent discussion about the thematic changes in Wells's early and late work and its relation to his interest in ecology, see Alt's "Extinction, Extermination, and the Ecological Optimism of H. G. Wells" in *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2014).



Wells had first been introduced to Ecology by Julian Huxley, the grandson of T. H. Huxley and a professor of Zoology at King's College London (Anker 111). Julian had read and admired *Men Like Gods* which he thought showed “an understanding of Nature for its own sake, and its control for the sake of humanity” (qtd in Anker 111). A friendship emerged, and in 1925, Wells suggested that they, along with Wells's son George Philip, collaborate on a multi-volume science textbook, *Science of Life*. The enormous book was intended as a money-making venture that promised to pay each man upwards of 10,000 pounds, a tenfold increase on Huxley's annual stipend for his professorship at King's College (Anker 112). The significance of *Science of Life* for popularizing ecology for the masses is difficult to overstate.<sup>12</sup> *Science of Life* was a remarkable success, well reviewed and republished multiple times over the next three decades in various multiple- and single-volume editions (Anker 116). It became not only a standard introductory science textbook up until the 1950s, but also was widely used by the Oxford ecologists in their own research (Anker 116).

In many ways, the chapters on Ecology in *Science of Life* say what a modern reader would expect from an ecology textbook today. They explain food chains and describe how ecosystems, which the authors call “life communities,” are ordered and balanced. They rally against smoke pollution, condemn deforestation and its effect on climate, argue for using fertilizers responsibly, and recommend cleaning up air pollution (including setting limits on coal and oil use). There is frequent reference to future generations. Yet the text is not simply descriptive of natural processes and balance; it is also focused on how human beings might control these systems for their advantage. Nature is depicted as a force that is antagonistic to humanity's survival, one that must be

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<sup>12</sup> Although Wells was the first author on *Science of Life* and though in reviews he is often referred to as its sole author (Anker 116), Julian Huxley and George P. Wells wrote the majority of the book (Wagar 176). Huxley wrote the first draft of the ecology chapter, which he then sent on to another Oxford ecologist, Charles Sutherland Elton, for scrutiny. It was only after these men had approved the copy that H. G. Wells then edited it into an accessible “science-for-all style” (Anker 112).

controlled efficiently and modified when possible for human benefit. Ecology is “applied biology,” or a practical method for improving the efficiency of the transfer of resources in order to improve the quality of human life (1022). Descriptions of the transfer of nitrogen in soil are interspersed with arguments for “positive eugenics,” or “the promotion of desirable births” to improve the quality of “human stock” and prevent overpopulation in order to match the global supply of available food (1467). Instead of seeing an ecosystem as a perfectly functioning, balanced system, the text treats it as a system into which humans can intervene for their own benefit, but they must do so craftily and with a full acknowledgement and even respect for the balance of the system.

*Science of Life* presents Ecology as a science that seeks to combat the inefficient loss of energy. The “general problem” facing the future of humankind “is to make the vital circulation of matter and energy as swift, efficient, and wasteless as it can be made; and, since we are first and foremost a continuing race, to see that we are not achieving an immediate efficiency at the expense of later generations” (1029). Anxiety about entropy remains a preoccupation in the twentieth century but here takes a new form. Whereas in his early writings at the end of the nineteenth century, Wells understood the loss as a large, cosmic process of decay, represented by an image of humankind shivering before a fading sun, here it is a process that happens through physical matter *at a chemical level*.<sup>13</sup> The transference of energy is “considered chemically” as a “cyclic process from green plant to bacteria and so again to green plant.” And this “cycle does not run smoothly” but with “various leakages and blocks” that make some transfers “useless to the majority of living things.” Thus the

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<sup>13</sup> Lankester’s reading of how Lyell and then later Darwin shifted the consciousness of the scientific world by explaining the world through “physico-chemical causes” indicates another moment in which Wells’s early influences took up ideas that would later arise (with a difference) in ecology (157). Lankester explains that “what the Darwinian theory really is” is “all the great facts of the universe, the constitution and movements of the heavenly bodies, the form of our earth, and all the peculiarities of its crust” explained by “one set of causes—the *properties of matter*, which are set forth in what we know by the name of the ‘laws of physics and chemistry’” (157). In this model, human evolution is a *chemical* reaction, a smaller manifestation of a larger chain of reactions that began with the creation of the universe and continue in the present. Although in Lankester’s late-nineteenth-century frame, humans are still positioned as miniscule parts of a much larger chain of events, a model that might still evoke humility and wonder. This is in contrast to the entitlement that made early Ecologists think that they might manage the resources of the world. However, the shift into thinking of physical transfer as a *chemical* reaction is already there.

problem facing humanity no longer is cast in large terms, no longer is it that humankind must come to terms with its insignificance in the face of giant cosmic events. Instead, the problems are comparatively smaller, such as that the “[s]hortage of available nitrogen is a chronic state in life’s affairs” (965). This practical shift even approaches an optimism that these realistic, measurable issues might be solved through science in the future, especially chemical science: “[Man] is tapping new sources of chemical supply and new sources of energy. He may even succeed in dispensing with green plants as prime producers, and himself obtain the manufacture of food-stuffs direct from their elements” (1027). By treating species as chemical composites, ecologists turn species into deposits of resources that can be used by humans for their own interests. In collusion with economic interests, this understanding of the natural world threatens to make an ecosystem into an economic resource.

What is most arresting about the explanation of ecology is that the authors claim that the global circulation of energy and resources is an exchange that is not simply *like* an economy, but *is a part of* the global economy. In a section titled “Ecology is Biological Economics,” they explain the shared etymology of *ecology* and the “kindred older word,” *economy* (from the Greek *oikos*, or “house”) (961).<sup>14</sup> Ecology explains economics; it “lays the foundations for a modern, a biological and an entertaining treatment of what was once very properly known as the ‘dismal science’ of economics” (962). The natural resources of the earth are understood as bank holdings, akin to reserves of gold:

In the matter of supplies [man] must make provision for the future; the species must have its reserves of nitrogen and phosphorus, of timber-growth and soil-fertility, of useful animals and of sources of energy, just as surely as the Bank of England must have its reserves of gold and credit, or a factory must allow for the depreciation of its plant. (1030)

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<sup>14</sup> It was only in the first years of the twentieth century that the spelling of the word *ecology*, which had first been used in 1875, spelled *oecology*, was standardized. A dictionary editor settled on its current spelling because it agreed with the spelling of *economy* (Anker 1).

They lament that humans “in the last couple of centuries” have “accelerated the circulation of matter” at “an unprecedented speed” by “drawing on reserves of capital.” The capital they are referring to is “bottled sunshine of coal” which humans use “thousands of times more quickly than Nature succeeds in storing it; and the same rate of wastage holds for oil and natural gas” (1020). These natural resources—coal, oil, and natural gas—are “reserves of capital” akin to “reserves of gold and credit,” and Ecology is the management of these resources, an expression of political economy. The best way to manage these resources, according to these ecologists is through a “collective human mind” (Wells would later refer to it as a “World Brain”) (Anker 116). Anker has explained how the authors of *Science of Life* “literally envisioned themselves as being on the board of directors in the economy of nature, managing the circulation of matter and energy for the world” (116). Even though the economy that they imagine is not a “free-market utilitarian economy, but rather [a] socialistic planned economy,” as Anker acknowledges (114), the vision of ecology as an economy is still one in which the world’s resources—including food reserves—are managed like a business, a fact that is all the more alarming given the connection that the authors make between fossil fuels and “reserves of capital,” as well as their repeatedly referring to human beings as “stock.”

It is disturbing to see Wells’s name attached to a project that today reads as so counter to the progressive politics of his youth, and it is curious that this legacy is all but omitted from his reputation within literary criticism as a political radical.<sup>15</sup> For a time, influenced in part by his friendship with George Bernard Shaw, Wells was an active socialist, joining the Fabian society in 1903 (McConnell 19). The overwhelming majority of Wells scholarship focuses on his early writing—his novels like *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*—and so it follows that scholarship tends to focus on the earlier, progressive Wells. It is hard to make sense of the fact that the same

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, Wells is not the first author whose politics mellow with age, yet the significant inclination toward studying his early work, produced when he was his most radical, has made it so that within literary criticism he is remembered as a different kind of figure than he was in the popular imagination at the beginning of the twentieth century.

man who writes in the 1893 essay “On Extinction” of his empathy for the “last shaggy bison” who “must feel some sense that those wide rolling seas of grass were once the home of myriads of his race, and are now his no longer” (138), is the same man who, thirty years later, in a chapter titled “Life Under Control,” writes that “The plans for the exploitation of the earth may be released almost insensibly from the entanglement of frontiers” (1475). This is not to say that the mature Wells wants to slaughter all of the bison, but rather that the earlier passage that considers the bison as a subject with “dull eyes” and a humanizing pronoun (“his” instead of “its”) is so out of harmony with the idea of the “exploitation of the earth” and the characterization of the frontier, not as the edge of a home, but as an “entanglement” to a larger, industrious project.

Despite such fraught political bearings, Wells and his co-authors were also teaching, however imperfectly, the public ideas, however flawed, of balance and symbiosis within what we now call ecosystems, and arguing for moderation in use of fossil fuels and the preservation of wilderness. Although they did not invent these ideas, their book played a significant role in shaping the public’s perception of modern Ecology. Ironically, some of their arguments undergird how we think about Ecology today in ways that are productive in challenging capitalist interests. The authors of *Science of Life* believed they were helping the world, and Wells saw his contribution to science as a continuation of his artistic endeavor:

...there is hardly a dividing line between a man who vents himself in carving beautiful patterns, and one who uses his mind to experiment interestingly with living forms or to pursue thought into its remotest recesses. The impulse in all these instances is akin to sportive play...to begin with it was no more than surplus energy seeking an outlet. (1471)

Whereas the scholars of the late nineteenth century that had such an impact on Wells had asked that humans think of themselves always humbly, within a large cosmos, to shift always between cosmic and human registers, Oxford ecologists and their inheritors thought they were helping humankind

by giving it a solution to these feelings of impotency by raising humans up above the world. However, by doing so, they reversed what had been so productive about some late-nineteenth-century science to begin with—how it had humbled humankind, especially the British, from their perch atop an imagined hierarchy and primed humans to think of ourselves not as masters of the world, viewing it from above, but as a species bewildered and fragile, one in *relation* to others just the same. Staying with a dying world requires simultaneously orienting ourselves within grand scales while working within smaller ones to protect human interests. Juxtaposing Wells's early and late work produces a way to see how these seemingly conflicting positions can work together and the consequences—the resultant suffering—of choosing just one.

## Chapter 2

# “Nearer Home”: Indigeneity and Environmental Critique in Robert Louis Stevenson’s Pacific Short Fiction

“The coral waxes, the palm grows, but man departs.”

--Tahitian saying, adapted by Herman Melville

“...in a perspective of centuries I saw their case as ours, death coming in like a tide, and the day already numbered when there should be no more Beretani, and no more of any race whatever, and (what oddly touched me) no more literary works and no more readers.”

--RLS *In the South Seas*

In 1890, four years before his death, Robert Louis Stevenson and his wife, Fanny, bought a large tract of land on the coast of Samoa with the intention of establishing a small farm. After years of living nomadically, shuffling between elite health resorts, camping in abandoned silver mines, and cruising aboard commercial steamers, the couple had resigned themselves to the fact that the always-ailing Stevenson would live the rest of his life in the Pacific’s warm weather. At first, they lived in a small, open cottage where Louis (as he was known to family and friends) papered his study with handmade *tapa* bark cloth and kept his windows open to the storms. Rations scarce, the couple supped on avocados and tinned salmon. Over the next few years, they would build their great house Vailima. The home accommodated the many family members and friends who came to join them, and wherein Stevenson’s mother, a proper Victorian woman who continued to wear a corset in tropical weather, would feel at home. Fanny’s work was outside, where she was the headmistress of planting, directing the ever-rotating staff of local Samoans and beachcombers trying to earn an

honest wage. Inside the house, Louis set about reorienting his writing career to satisfy the demands of a new market of readers and writers, one composed of new friends and neighbors, and one that he imagined would ripple outward into a pan-Pacific audience. Stevenson wrote the short stories “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices” during this time, intending to have them translated into Samoan and, later, Hawaiian. Both of these stories, however, largely failed to connect with their intended audience. Stevenson’s other attempts, too, failed, and his experiment in conscripting a new Pacific audience was ultimately abandoned. Instead, facing the rapidly mounting costs of running Vailima (and bankrolling his family’s expenses), Stevenson focused solely on writing for a British audience and achieved success with novels such as *Catriona* (1893), the sequel to *Kidnapped*. Eventually, “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices” were collected, against Stevenson’s wishes, alongside the realist short story “The Beach of Falesá” and sold successfully in Britain.

In this chapter, I will discuss the environmental, indigenous-centered critique staged by “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices.” Both stories present the Pacific as a modern, globally integrated space, thereby interrupting the body of western literature before and since that has represented the region as a pre-modern, isolated, primitive dream world.<sup>1</sup> As the stories insist that the region is modern, they simultaneously critique modernity’s consequences, notably in how neocolonial investment affects local ecosystems, decisions about land use, and traditional Pacific practices. These stories demonstrate the intersection of foreign economic and ecological exploitation, especially the long-term consequences of interference in fragile tropical ecosystems for indigenous populations who depend on the preservation of these ecosystems for trade, travel, and

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<sup>1</sup> The major literary figures who wrote about the Pacific in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include American, British, and French writers. These works include Melville’s novel *Typee* (1846), his best-selling work during his lifetime and presented to the reading public as non-fiction; Mark Twain’s Letters to *The Sacramento Union* (1866), collected and edited into the volume *Mark Twain in Hawaii: Roughing It in the Sandwich Islands*; Charles Warren Stoddard’s *South Sea Idylls* (1873) and *The Island of Tranquil Delights* (1904); Pierre Loti (Julien Viaud)’s *Rarabu, or The Marriage of Loti* (1880), also presented as non-fiction; Jack London’s *The Cruise of the Snark* (1911) and *South Sea Tales* (1911); Henry Adams’ *Tabiti: Memoirs of Arii Taimai e Marama of Eimee. . . Last Queen of Tabiti* (1893); and Somerset Maugham’s fictional adaptation of Gauguin’s life, *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919).



the continuation of their traditional practices. The stories perform this critique without mourning for—or fetishizing—an imagined, pure, pre-contact past, thereby resisting the sense of pleasure in witnessing a culture “newly lost,” a way of looking that is the hallmark of the touristic gaze from its beginnings and that continues to motivate tourism in Oceania. And yet, for all the good work that these stories do to present a sophisticated, nuanced understanding of Oceania in the late nineteenth century, and to complicate its history of representation within western literature, both stories, in the end, pull the rug out from under their critique in order to tie up their plots satisfactorily. The witty endings undermine what had made the stories so radical. That they were later collected and sold successfully in Britain suggests that, however radical the stories seem to be, the endings ultimately satisfy British readers craving sensational, Orientalized Pacific stories. Thus, even as they critique global capitalism and its impact on the local ecosystem, the stories become consumer objects themselves.<sup>2</sup> This struggle between plot and critique embodies the many ambivalences that characterize Stevenson’s life and work in the Pacific, an aspect of his writing that makes it a particularly apt medium through which to think about the relationship between fiction, tourism, indigenous practices, ecological threat, and economic prosperity in the Pacific in the late nineteenth century.

## Stevenson in Samoa

Since his death in Samoa in 1894, Stevenson has often been remembered in British and American popular culture as “Tusitala,” the “teller of tales,” the man whose witty stories so captivated Samoans that they honored him with an elaborate funeral procession and a hilltop grave. As Stevenson scholarship came into its own in the 1990s, this characterization became more

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of how postcolonial literature in the twentieth century has simultaneously occupied similar poles, see Huggan’s *The Postcolonial Exotic*.

nuanced, especially through the work of Roslyn Jolly, who showed how the legend of “Tusitala” had more to do with publishers in England trying to sell books than the apotheosis of Stevenson himself by Samoans. Though the translation of “Tusitala” as “teller of tales” is more alliterative, its accurate translation, as Samoan writer Albert Wendt has pointed out recently, is “*writer* of tales” (Wendt 9, my emphasis). Jolly has discussed how, in a culture centered on oral storytelling, being a writer was unusual enough to warrant a moniker like Tusitala, but in England’s saturated print market, being a “teller” had an air of exoticism. She shows how Stevenson’s move to the Pacific and interest in Samoan politics effected dramatic shifts in his writing, spurring him to write more as an anthropologist, lawyer, and historian—personas that competed with the romancer identity he had so carefully developed up until this point. This intentional mistranslation of Tusitala by the British literary market disguises the new kind of writing that Stevenson had begun to work on and obscures the fact that writing was how he made his living (*Pacific* 164). In other words, the British literary market inaccurately depicted Stevenson as a man sitting among the leaves telling tales to willing native ears, tales that were “overheard” by readers in Britain. Stevenson’s new work “challenged [the British public’s] sense of what a ‘teller of tales’ could be and do” (27), and so his legacy was reinvented.

In literary criticism, a significant body of Stevenson scholarship has taken him up as a kind of precocious postcolonial hero, albeit a complicated one.<sup>3</sup> Today, among literary scholars, he is remembered as an outlier amongst westerners who have written about the Pacific, an anti-imperialist

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<sup>3</sup> Though some critics do still emphasize his exceptional anti-imperialism (see Buckton’s *Cruising with Robert Louis Stevenson*; Harris’ “Robert Louis Stevenson: Folklore and Imperialism; and Jolly’s *Robert Louis Stevenson In The Pacific: Travel, Empire, And The Author’s Profession*), it is now widely accepted that his life and work can best be understood as ambivalently collusive with and critical of foreign interests (see Edmond’s *Representing the South Pacific*, 1997 and Smith’s *Literary Culture and the Pacific*, 1998). Colley’s *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination* deals with these contradictions deftly, neither forgetting the history of inequality that engendered Stevenson’s voyage nor dismissing his work as mere reflection of this inequality. Showing how Stevenson was influenced by missionary culture, which itself had a contradictory relationship as both preserver and destroyer of Pacific culture, Colley takes issue with the body of anti-imperialist Stevenson scholarship, arguing that “one has to recognize, or, perhaps, reluctantly admit to oneself, that there are significant moments when he supports the colonial imperative and values its presence, indeed finds solace in it as well as hope for an island’s future” (6).

activist who worked on behalf of Samoans during a violent period in their history, and an eccentric gentleman writer who saw in Samoans a kinship with the Highland Scots from whom he was descended. In a genre otherwise populated by cannibals with pointed teeth and topless women swimming toward the boat, Stevenson's work rightfully stands out. He is the only major writer in the nineteenth century who wrote about the Pacific while he was living there.<sup>4</sup> His histories, poetry, and fiction from the latter part of his life are deeply invested in depicting something new: a Pacific region with a complex, mature history and culture that was quickly becoming integrated into global modernity.

Part of keeping literary criticism ethical is to remember that too much celebration occludes the asymmetrical power relations that permitted Stevenson to charter a private yacht or have a steamer make room for him and his family so that they could cruise the Pacific in the first place. Such celebration also ignores the ways that he benefitted from colonial structures in place there. While it is true that Stevenson became so involved in local Samoan politics that he was almost deported and that his choice to focus on Samoan culture and politics in his later career jeopardized his popularity and reputation among the English literary elite, it is also true that the decisions that enabled Stevenson to settle in Samoa were, perhaps, disappointingly mundane.<sup>5</sup> Stevenson's choice of Samoa over Tahiti, Hawaii, or any of the other islands he visited during his years cruising the

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, Gauguin also famously lived in the Pacific, both in Tahiti and later in the Marquesas, where he died. Gauguin's art and writing were never intended for a local audience, but always for an audience back home in France. His famous journal of his time in Tahiti, *Noa Noa* (1919), was written while he was on a trip home in France, and then heavily edited by his co-author Charles Morice. See Sweetman's *Paul Gauguin: A Complete Life*.

<sup>5</sup> The most controversial writings from this period were Stevenson's letters to *The Times*, which were later collected and expanded into *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa* (1892), a history of the Samoan civil war. His letters exposed the inadequate appointees in Samoa by the German, English, and American interests by the treaty in Berlin in 1889 (Balfour 131), and local officials were annoyed with Stevenson for meddling in their business. In his letters, he admits both that he was motivated to write primarily because of his "great affection for Mataafa," the Samoan chief who had been usurped by the treaty, and that "I thought it my business to bring certain facts clearly together and lay them before the public" (qtd in Jolly *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific* 67-8). Readers in England met these works with a lack of interest and even frustration. Oscar Wilde quipped, "I see that romantic surroundings are the worst surroundings possible for a romantic writer. In Gower Street Stevenson could have written a new *Trois Mousquetaires*. In Samoa he wrote letters to *The Times* about Germans" (qtd in V. Smith 14). Stevenson's close friend Edmund Gosse agreed: "it is very nice to live in Samoa, but not healthy to write there" (qtd in Buckton 151).

Pacific was made simply because he thought it would be a convenient island on which to get his mail, and thus secure his lifeline back to his family, friends, agents, and readers in Britain (V. Smith 16). Although his writing stands apart, Stevenson's initial visit was propelled by a South Pacific reverie with the same clichéd images that had motivated other travelers before him.<sup>6</sup> Once he learned that the Pacific climate would help heal his respiratory disease, he became "sick with desire to go there" and imagined the "beautiful places, green forever; perfect shapes of men and women, with red flowers in their hair; and nothing to do but study oratory and etiquette, sit in the sun, and pick up the fruits as they fall" (qtd in Harman 357). In the first pages of *In the South Seas*, Stevenson recalls pulling into Anaho Bay on Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas (made famous by Herman Melville's *Typee*) and seeing a man "who sticks in my memory as something bestial, squatting on his hams in a canoe, sucking an orange and spitting it out again to alternate sides with ape-like veracity" (40). As Rod Edmond suggests in his reading of both this scene and of *In the South Seas* as a whole, these touristic, racialized visions quickly receded as Stevenson traveled, and his point of view became more complex (166). The memory of the Marquesan man at the beginning of *In the South Seas* indicates Stevenson's change, for it is not that the man *is* bestial and remains so, but that the memory of the inexperienced tourist imaging "something bestial" for the first time is what "sticks." When we admire Stevenson's uniqueness, we must also acknowledge that Stevenson approached the Pacific initially with the eyes of the tourist; who sees a sea of interchangeable islands, one as good as another; who views Pacific Islanders through the Orientalized lens of the accumulated discourses of travelogues and racial histories; who sees "something bestial" on Nuku Hiva, just as Melville had before him. Remembering that Stevenson did not spring into the world fully formed as a sensitive, liberal champion of Pacific writing ensures that when we write about Stevenson, we are not

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the specific incidences that led to Stevenson's desire to visit the Pacific, including a conversation with Mark Twain, see Harman 357-9.

repeating another tale of a white savior ministering to the natives and not writing another imperial romance with a postcolonial twist.<sup>7</sup>

Instead of focusing on its exceptionalness, we can see how Stevenson's interest in the Pacific models the larger growing interest within Victorian culture for Oceanic travel and tourism. In the popular imagination at the end of the century, the Pacific was a place in which to envision both the past and the future. In one vision, it was a place to see the theories of nineteenth-century racial science confirmed and to glimpse the primitive origins of mankind. In another vision, the diseased Pacific island body reflected the decline of civilization generally and the decay, dissipation, and degeneration characterizing the final years of Victoria's reign specifically.<sup>8</sup> The tendency to use the Pacific as a mythic screen on which to project the anxieties about the future happened during the time when the region was becoming *less* remote from the west. That is, the Pacific became in the British public imagination a fetishized, remote, primitive space precisely when it was becoming a significant region for trade within an increasingly global economy (Fulton and Hoffenberg 5-6). Contact begat both modernity and the myth of the un-modern, and more frequent contact strengthened both.

In Stevenson's life we see reflected the rapid global changes taking place in tourism, agriculture, steam technology, and trade at the end of the nineteenth century. The story of how Samoa was made a *place* for Stevenson, a place to visit, a place to buy land, a place where, however unreliably, one could receive mail service, is, in many ways, a familiar colonial story of a region being opened to trade with Europe through advanced transportation technology and growing European demand for the region's natural resources. By the end of the century, advancing steam technology

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<sup>7</sup> Jolly has described how reports of Stevenson's life in Samoa led to his being mythologized in Great Britain: "Reports of a hero-worshipped white leader, who had insinuated himself into a primitive clan structure within which he wielded considerable power and commanded absolute loyalty and devotion, answered to colonialist fantasies that many British the in late nineteenth century were keen to indulge" (*Pacific* 161).

<sup>8</sup> See Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Lamb's *Preserving the Self in the South Seas, 1680-1840*, O'Brien's *The Pacific Muse: Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific*, and Fulton and Hoffenberg's *Oceania in the Victorian Imagination*.

allowed for more efficient travel between Europe and the Pacific. At the same time, agricultural practices within the British Empire were changing to an industrial, monoculture model that demanded large quantities of nitrogen-rich fertilizer to enrich the empire's ever-depleting soil. Centuries of accumulation of bat guano on the islands and atolls provided the means to keep industrially farmed soil in food-producing condition for an expanding empire (Cushman 17). The market for bat guano was rivaled only by the growing demand for copra, or raw coconut fiber. Copra was sent to Europe and processed to extract coconut oil for soft soap, which saw a sharp rise in popularity as the Victorian fetish for cleanliness (and its racial overtones of "white" hygiene) intensified (McClintock 207-208). Soon after the guano and copra industries opened the Pacific to trade, tourists began to arrive, often in the same boat. While the Stevensons had hired a private yacht for their first cruise, the second was a special arrangement aboard the *Equator*, a trading schooner, and the last was a trading steamer (evidence of their dwindling funds), the *Janet Nicholl*, a "rough, workaday vessel" that was "cramped and hot, full of rats, flies and cockroaches...and rolled like a drunk" (Harman 402). The ships that brought over the plants that Fanny ordered from Sydney to populate Vailima's farm would have been traveling along routes established to transport fertilizer to the massive farms in England. Thus, the forces that allowed the Stevensons to establish a small working farm in Samoa were intimately related to the rise of large-scale industrialization of agriculture in the nineteenth century. That the Stevenson's small farm was enabled by industrial agriculture is illustrative of the ways in which the Stevensons' presence in Samoa serves as a microcosm of the way global economic and agricultural changes were occurring in uneasy tandem with literary and touristic ones.

The irony that large-scale, mass-produced agricultural practices enabled small-scale, individual farms is just one of many that characterize Stevenson's ambivalent and paradoxical life and work in his last years. Like every other westerner who wrote fiction about the Pacific in the

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he came to the islands as a tourist, yet, unlike the rest, he settled, becoming a resident until his death. His fiction set in the Pacific is both supernatural and insistently realist, two genres that are, at first glance, at odds with one another. Stevenson is not a writer in whom these two worlds became hybridized; instead, he is a man in whose life and work contradictory ideas and concepts collide and do not reconcile. Stevenson is a colonial anti-imperialist, a romancer-realist, a tourist-farmer.

This internal conflict extends to the markedly different audiences for his Pacific short fiction: the intended Pacific audience and the eventual British one. As the descendant of Highland Scots, Stevenson sympathized with the oppression faced by Polynesians at the hands of colonial interests, and this motivated his desire to bring together Polynesian and Saxon oral traditions. He notes that, “[t]he grumbling, the secret ferment, the fears and resentments, the alarms and sudden councils of Marquesan chiefs reminded me continually of the days of Lovat and Struan” (qtd in Harman 366). During his two Pacific cruises before he settled in Samoa, Stevenson grew to admire Oceanic oral traditions and to take seriously the idea of cultivating a pan-Pacific readership. In Samoa, he became even more intent on this work. Although he may have chosen Samoa haphazardly, once he settled down, he set himself to a self-education in Samoan culture, history, and local politics, even if he learned mainly from other Europeans. From a local missionary, he studied Samoan and translated Samoan oral histories into English for practice. He experimented with writing a Saxon story in Samoan, but *Eatuiua* (the Samoan phonetic pronunciation of “Edwin”), like the majority of his other radical projects, was never finished. He did publish *Ballads* (1891), a collection that juxtaposed English translations of Tahitian and Marquesan epics alongside Northern European myths, but this collection sold poorly (V. Smith 11). The lackluster reception of *Ballads* was Stevenson’s first hint that his ambition to bring together Polynesian storytelling traditions with

English literature would be an uphill battle. Plans for a multi-volume history of Polynesia would, over time, ultimately give way to more immediately fruitful endeavors (Harman 382, 371).

The two stories that I am focusing on in this chapter, “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices,” are of interest because they tell the story of Stevenson’s struggle to conscript a new audience, his failure to do so, and his pivot to presenting these stories to an English reading public for whom they were not originally intended. Both stories were written in English for translation into Samoan and Hawaiian, and although “The Bottle Imp” was the first piece of English fiction published in Samoan and although it was also translated into Hawaiian, it never had more than a modest Pacific readership. “The Isle of Voices” was never translated. Against Stevenson’s wishes, the two stories were later collected alongside his realist story intended only for a western audience, “The Beach of Falesá,” in *Island Nights Entertainments*. This collection is the means through which most of his western audience has read these short stories originally intended for a Pacific audience. Thus, these short stories have not only performed a function largely at odds with what they were written for, but one that undermines Stevenson’s intent in writing them. Though intended to conscript a Pacific readership, the stories instead become, in part, anthropological artifacts that offer western readers a new kind of “peep at Polynesian life,” in the words of the subtitle to Herman Melville’s *Typee*.

The short introductory note to “The Bottle Imp,” written for the British audience reading *Island Nights Entertainments*, indicates Stevenson’s divided intentions. After explaining the origin of the story (“the very unliterary product, the English drama”) and expressing that “I believe I have made it a new thing,” Stevenson adds: “And the fact that the tale has been designed and written for a Polynesian audience may lend it some extraneous interest nearer home” (72). The “and” that begins this sentence would suggest that this information is an afterthought, additional information at the end of more important additional information. Yet, the admission that the story was not



“designed” for the reader frames the tale as a story about how a white man tells an English story to the natives. It turns the telling of the story into a kind of pseudo-anthropological scene into which the western voyeur can peer. The reader “nearer home” is not the Samoan reader who is physically nearest to Stevenson at his professed new home but is instead the armchair reader in the center of the British Empire. Stevenson becomes then a traveler on a temporary sojourn in a foreign land, not a man building a house and making a life for himself and his family nearer his home in Samoa. The “fact” of the exotic beginning of the story’s production increases its value in two ways and it “lend[s] it some extraneous interest.” Stevenson turns the “unliterary product” into a “new thing” for British consumption, capable of producing (or at least “lend[ing]”) “extraneous interest.” Though the note on its surface is an explanation for the different tone of the story, the economic, material language indicates how Stevenson was pressured to monetize his ethical experiments, thereby turning them against themselves. The note, itself “extraneous,” tells us that our reading of the stories must be framed by their always having been intended for someone else. Stevenson sets up the story as a “peep,” but the story he offers is instead a radical revision of representations of the Pacific. Even though he claims that “The Bottle Imp” was not intended for an English audience, and even if offering it to this audience enacts an anthropological scene at odds with the story’s original intention, I argue that the story challenges the hackneyed conventions of fiction about the Pacific and offers an environmental critique of western modernity centered on indigenous response.

## **Material Pleasures in “The Bottle Imp”**

“The Bottle Imp” tells the story of an imp living in a magic bottle who will grant the bottle’s owner any wish. However, the owner must sell it before his or her death or suffer eternal damnation, and it must be sold for less than it was purchased for. At the beginning of the story, a young Hawaiian trader, Keawe, buys the bottle from a rich, old man in San Francisco. He wishes

for a large house on the Kona coast of Hawaii.<sup>9</sup> Soon after, his uncle and cousin unexpectedly die, and he inherits their land on the Kona coast and their fortune. Disturbed by the bottle's potential evil, Keawe sells it, but continues to enjoy living in his newly built great house. After a few months, he falls in love with a beautiful woman, Kokua, and the two become engaged. Before they can be married, he discovers a leprous patch of skin on his stomach, which means that he cannot marry Kokua and will have to live the rest of his life in a leper colony in exile. Devastated, he decides to search out the bottle again and eventually buys the much-depreciated bottle in Honolulu for only two cents. The low price means that there can be only one exchange left, and Keawe assumes that he will never be able to sell the bottle and will therefore go to hell himself. Though married to Kokua and free of leprosy, Keawe spends his days sighing in melancholic agony on his large balcony, and his wife soon discovers that he has sold his soul for her happiness. Declaring that "all the world is not American," Kokua reminds Keawe that there are other economies with smaller denominations of coins, and convinces Keawe to go to Tahiti, where five centimes equal a penny, and so the bottle can be exchanged again (92). Although Keawe and Kokua are in Tahiti for many months, no one there will buy the bottle, believing that Keawe and Kokua's wealth comes from sorcery. Desperate, Kokua tricks Keawe into selling the bottle to her through an intermediary old homeless man, thereby ensuring her own damnation in order to save her husband. During a celebratory evening at the pub, Keawe realizes what Kokua has done and convinces a drunken boatswain, an "old brutal Haole" (a white foreigner), to buy the bottle back from Kokua, promising that he will then buy the bottle back from the boatswain for one centime (98). Once the *haole*

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<sup>9</sup> "The Bottle Imp" is set in Hawaii, San Francisco, and Tahiti, places that Stevenson spent significant time in during his Pacific cruises. "The Isle of Voices" is set in Hawaii and on an unnamed Pacific island. Though both stories were written in Samoa, their settings indicate Stevenson's understanding of Oceania as a region of islands in contact with one another and through which Pacific islanders traveled.

realizes the power of the bottle, he refuses to sell it back to Keawe, undeterred by the promise of eternal damnation: “I reckon I’m going anyway” (102).

“The Bottle Imp” is insistent upon depicting a modern, globally integrated Pacific. These are not remote islands populated by child-like natives and/or savages, but rather an emerging global space peppered with developers, architects, and tourists. Neither a stereotype nor an exception, the main character Keawe is a complex man—“poor, brave, and active”—living on an island that is one node within a global trading network in frequent contact with the west coast of the United States. When he wants to “have a sight of the great world and foreign cities,” he travels to San Francisco as a tourist (73). This modern depiction is compounded by the numerous historically accurate details, down to the names of the ships Keawe sees off the coast. The self-conscious precision of these details signals Stevenson’s desire to make sure that his setting is believable for Pacific Islanders specifically, an attempt to authorize himself as one qualified to represent the region.

Even as it insists that the region is modern, the story decries the influence of modernity and capitalism on traditional Pacific Islander practices concerning how decisions about land use affect local ecosystems and indigenous livelihood. In this doggedly realistic story, modernity and global capital are supernatural forces, embodied in the magic bottle, its dark imp, and its rules of exchange. With each exchange, something is lost. The bottle promises infinite wealth, but the object itself must decrease in value with every transaction. It is a fundamentally unsustainable investment, one that pays off immediately but that will cost a great deal in the future. It cannot be bartered, but must be purchased with “coined money,” or within a state-sponsored economic system, one that has purchase within an international market (75). As its value decreases, its frequency of exchange accelerates. The old man in San Francisco from whom Keawe buys the bottle had had it for most of his life. Keawe has it for less than a year. Once it is introduced into the Hawaiian economy, it exchanges hands so frequently that, by the time Keawe buys it the second time less than a year later,

it is worth only two cents. Those who resell it profit well, leaving a trail of “new clothes and carriages” and “men everywhere in great contentment.” Yet Keawe knows to look for “pale cheeks and sighing” and for someone “black about the eyes” to find the bottle’s current owner (88). For all of the inhabitants of Hawaii, be they native Hawaiians or descendants of immigrants, new wealth and subsequent modernization have made a few lucky people, both Islander and *haole*, comfortable, but the quick exchange and spread of wealth has brought some unlucky final buyer to his or her damnation more rapidly. The coined money needed to purchase the bottle masks the real, fundamental exchange taking place: immediate pleasure in exchange for eternal human suffering; convenience and novelty today for weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth tomorrow; the future paying for the sins of the present.

One need only look slightly deeper to see how this critique of economic modernity works simultaneously as a critique of the ecological ramifications of unchecked development. The changing economy is directly connected to changes in how Pacific Islanders relate to land and land use. Keawe imports to Hawaii his desire for a large, single-occupancy house like the one he saw atop Nob Hill in San Francisco “only a storey higher” and “with great chambers” and balconies “so broad that a whole town might have lived upon them in delight.” Walled in glass and full of “toys” and “knick knacks,” his house functions more as a fetishized commodity intended to conspicuously display wealth than as a comfortable place to live: “no one would care to live in such chambers, only to walk through and view them” (80). In order for the imp to fulfill Keawe’s desire for his dream house, his uncle and his uncle’s heir, Keawe’s cousin, must die. Thus, the house comes to him over their dead bodies, figuratively and literally, as it also sits perched above his family’s ancestral burial grounds. Without the bottle, Keawe, presumably, might have come and lived on his family’s land on the Kona coast, where he was born. But in this new economy of consumption, this

capitalist consumerist fantasy entails private ownership, curb appeal, and an absurd amount of square footage.

The private, bourgeois economic dream takes over the ancestral family land, changing how Keawe's family relates not only to their home, but also the land on which it is built. The great house, so much a symbol of power and wealth that it is nearly uninhabitable, begins to take on the characteristics of a ship, that arch-symbol of colonial investment capital. Facing seaward, it is on display for passing vessels and is fronted with "a ship's mast" that "had been rigged up and bore a flag," with windows "clear as water and as bright as day" and lined inside with "pictures of ships, and men fighting" (80). The home has been transformed from a private, family-oriented domestic space into a public, commercial symbol. No longer needing a source of income, Keawe spends his days on the balcony of his house-ship watching the "schooners plying up the coast for wood and ava and bananas" (81). In the past, on this same plot of land, his uncle had eked out a living growing "some coffee and ava and bananas" (79). This list of trading commodities, repeated with a difference—"coffee" is replaced by "wood"—indicate the changed relationship to land use. Whereas his family's land is primarily "black lava" and thus poor for farming, the volcanic soil of his uncle's estate had nevertheless permitted a small-scale sustainable crop like coffee to flourish, enough for modest, local trade; enough, Keawe thinks on first inheriting, to "keep me in comfort" (79). Now this land lies fallow, and the crops that his uncle once grew for the family are supplied by farms elsewhere. The ships that might have once carried his uncle's goods now function as picturesque additions to a lovely view. The sustainable, local, small crop intended to support a single family, coffee, is replaced by wood, an unsustainable product that contributes to deforestation, the product needed to build more large, modern, empty houses like Keawe's. The small-scale production of the family farm is now pushed offshore, into a different market, and placed within a less sustainable, foreign system. The land now serves as a backdrop for the consumer product

instead of a means to support the family. Home transitions from an idea centered on land and how it can perpetuate multi-generational family life to an oversized, gaudy, unsustainable, unlivable display case facing outward, positioned as though it were just another means to transport consumer goods to and from the islands.

The story thus suggests that there is no space unaffected by modernization, even one of the most sacred sites to native Hawaiians, the ancestral burial grounds, which happen to be located on the cliffs below Keawe's family's land.<sup>10</sup> As he rides back and forth on his horse (which is itself a colonial import) from one point to another, he disturbs the peace of his resting ancestors: "his horse flew up the path of the mountain under the cliff of tombs, and the sound of the hoofs, and the sound of Keawe singing to himself for pleasure, echoed in the caverns of the dead" (84). The vibration of the new son of Hawaii riding atop the colonial horse, living in the arch-symbol of colonial investment capital, rattles the earth beneath him and the most sacred, most remote space, a deep cave in an inaccessible cliff on a once-isolated coast. Keawe's private bourgeois fantasy—seemingly innocent, seemingly individual—plays out over the dead bodies of his ancestors, desecrating even the most sacred space.

The small body of secondary writing about "The Bottle Imp" has long been interested in the competing economic and romantic plots.<sup>11</sup> The early reviewer A. T. Quiller-Couch thought that it

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<sup>10</sup> Keawe's consumerist dream is realized at the site of one of the most sacred spots for Hawaiians, as his property just so happens to also be the resting site of the Hawaiian royal family's bones. Keawe's house sits high where "below, the black lava fell in cliffs, where the kings of old lay buried" (80). After western contact and the breakdown of the Hawaiian *tapu* system, the sacred burial site was relocated from the royal mausoleum, Hale-o-Keawe (Jolly "Explanatory Notes" 270). Rumors, which Stevenson seems to have picked up on, suggested that the royal bones were hidden along the black lava coast in caves. Though a small detail to the readers "nearer home," the importance of this detail to Pacific islanders would have been significant and would have been apparent from first reading Keawe's name, which is both the name of the original burial site, Hale-o-Keawe, and also the name of the last monarch to be buried there.

<sup>11</sup> Rod Edmond likes that the "tale ends neatly, as such tales should," but argues that "the allegorical meaning of the bottle has to be suspended for the romance plot. . .to be happily resolved" (191). Vanessa Smith sees the romantic plot as covering up "those complex economic relationships motivating the tale of the bottle," but understands that the drunken boatswain is the bottle's "appropriate owner: a figure inhabiting the space between Western and Pacific systems of exchange; the unredeemed subject of the narrative" (V. Smith 185-6). McLaughlin sees the genres overlapping, too, and thinks that the bottle creates the possibility for a certain kind of romance (and thus weds romance to economy), which is utilitarian: "[the story] affirms that the romance of the home depends upon the utilitarian

was the best story in *Island Nights* because “the last page ends the tale, and the tale is told with a light grace, sportive within restraint, that takes nothing from the seriousness of the subject” (414). Yet no criticism has emphasized that the story’s seemingly happy ending distracts from the suspicious economic forces that led Kokua to Keawe. Keawe falls in love with Kokua as he gradually comes upon her at the beach. In a reversal of the literary tradition within western representation of the Pacific wherein a man happens upon a bathing young woman slowly undressing, Kokua becomes more and more clothed the closer Keawe gets to her (83). The fact that she is a beautiful, unknown woman on the coast who appears to him in a vision echoes Stevenson’s fascination with the *aitu fafine* figure, or the beautiful woman who one only sees while alone and that comes to bring ruin upon unwitting men (Jolly “Explanatory Notes,” 267). Though Keawe falls in love immediately, Kokua is silent, only biting the straps of her hat. It is not until she learns that Keawe is the owner of the great house that she explicitly consents to their courtship (84). Once he learns that he has a leprous patch, Keawe is racked with despair and will do anything to make it so that he can marry Kokua, yet once he has her, he does not enjoy being married. These suspicious origins for the couple’s love are inconsistent with their willingness to send themselves to hell for the other’s sake. They repeatedly try to give the most valuable gift to each other, trading souls and damnation as if they were themselves commodities. Kokua says, “What! you loved me, and gave your soul, and you think I will not die to save you in return?” (91). Keawe thinks, “His wife had given her soul for him, now he must give his for hers” (100). Even this kindest gift is marked with a tit-for-tat trade, though ideally without depreciation (unlike the bottle), and thus colors these expressions of love and sacrifice with economic exchange. While it may seem that the economic and romantic plots are in

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calculations of means and ends, and in this particular case upon finance...in other words, the domestic romance of the tale becomes inseparable from the sober calculation of consequences” (McLaughlin 179). Robbie Goh suggests that the plot cannot reconcile the competing interests of a story about “money as the fetishized demon-god of modern existence” and also a modern romance, and that this is not a “naïve refutation” of money’s role in changing the modern world on Stevenson’s part but instead “an uncanny mimicry of monetary form itself” (64).

competition with one another, the romantic plot is always being folded into the economic plot, and the economic influence of western development undergirds the most intimate relationship between two Pacific Islanders.

One moment at the end of the story presents a possibly redemptive alternative to what seems like an inevitable economic and ecological catastrophe. Kokua uses an old homeless man as an intermediary in order to purchase the bottle herself so that she may save her husband and by doing so, sacrifice her own salvation. In order to convince him of her intentions, she sits down and tells him the story herself. “Sit down here...and let me tell you a tale,” she says, reframing the story as one Pacific Islander telling a story to another, a reclaiming of Pacific oral tradition (95). In the midst of this transaction, the old man in the shadow declines to prosper from the bottle, not wanting “a favour from the devil” (96). Unlike its previous owners, he has no motivation for exchanging the bottle except his good will for another person, further proven by his offer to keep it when Kokua hesitates before buying the bottle back, essentially offering to go to hell himself for a stranger. The old man is the moral center of the story. He is the character who operates outside of state-sponsored exchange and instead within a gift economy wherein he offers his own soul to a stranger, and he is motivated to do this because he has listened to another Pacific Islander tell her own story. He represents the voice of the consequences of modernity. Homeless and nomadic, he is one of Bauman’s “vagabonds” that I discuss in the introduction. Kokua refuses his offer to sacrifice himself, but his offer makes her wonder aloud to her husband Keawe, “Is it not a terrible thing to save oneself by the eternal ruin of another?” (97). Her question conjures up not only the history of colonial investment and its relation to the unchecked development and modernization that was happening throughout Oceania in the late nineteenth century, but also the ecological threat to the islands wrought by modernization and the consequent decline of traditional practices. What the old man is offering is a human sacrifice, someone who will offer his own suffering in order to



provide for the pleasure of everyone before him and also for civilization in general, a Christ figure emerging from the dark machinations of global capitalism, a literal *deus ex machina*.

And yet despite its serious theme, no one in this story pays a price in the end. Instead, a different kind of *deus ex machina* comes in the form of a drunken white foreigner—a *haole*—who is not subject to the same logic as the rest of the story; he is going to hell already. The *haole*'s glib acceptance of his condemnation takes away the problem that has been driving the story, that someone in the future must pay for the pleasures of the present, and replaces it with a less threatening romantic plot that can be tied up nicely, thereby shifting the story's emphasis. This sudden twist feels more like the abrupt, clever conclusion to a sea yarn than a serious conclusion to a mythic, supernatural tale. There is no savior here, only an interruption. The story has depicted Pacific traditional practices and Pacific ecology as under threat, but it will not allow a space of mourning for their demise. Pacific Islanders cannot save themselves. Instead, a traveling, witty westerner—the sea yarn—intervenes and transforms a story that might have been about Pacific Islanders taking back the implications of human sacrifice into the set up for a punch line. Because the story promises to entertain, it enacts what it critiques: when things get too real there will always be a punch line. There will be easy, fast pleasure to distract from the final consequences of our actions. There will be a western hero to save us in the end. Is not this the injunction of late capitalism? Enjoy!

## Unhappy Endings in “The Isle of Voices”

“The Isle of Voices,” like “The Bottle Imp,” represents a globally connected, modern Pacific and offers an environmental critique of modernization and neocolonial development. In the same way, it undoes this critique by tying up the plot neatly. “The Isle of Voices” is the story of Keola, an aimless young man dependent on his powerful, wealthy father-in-law, Kalamake, who never works

but always has plenty of money. One day, Kalamake reveals the magical source of his income: He burns mysterious leaves upon a mat and takes Keola to a far-away island where, on the beach, they become invisible and collect shells that turn into silver dollars. Because his father-in-law's wealth is so easily acquired, Keola decides that he is now entitled to be even lazier and ask for more money. This angers Kalamake, so he drops Keola far out into the open ocean in a leaky boat, turns himself into a giant, and walks home over the ocean floor as though he is wading through a pond. Keola is rescued by a passing schooner and even joins the crew briefly, but a nasty first mate makes him jump ship and swim to the nearest shore. On land, Keola realizes that he has somehow ended up on the same island, the Isle of Voices, that his father-in-law visits. Keola despairs until he meets a group of islanders who migrate to the island seasonally. By joining with them and taking a new wife, Keola ensures that he will be able to leave the island at the end of the season and thus forego any future contact with Kalamake. Threatened and disturbed by the strange, unintelligible voices and fires on the seaward side of the island, where Kalamake and other foreigners come to collect money invisibly, the island natives stay always on the lagoon side. Keola explains that these voices are foreigners who use the leaves of a special plant native only to this island, and that if they cut down these special trees, the voices would go away. Soon after, his new wife informs him that her people are really cannibals who plan to eat him before they leave at the end of the season. In order to avoid being eaten, Keola decides to expose himself to die on the dangerous seaward side, where, after a few days, he witnesses a bloody battle between the "bodiless voices" of the foreigners who have come to collect money and the locals, who, per Keola's suggestion, are cutting down their trees in order to get rid of the invaders (119). His first wife, Lehua, comes to the island to save him, and at the last minute, they burn some remaining leaves and return to Molokai, leaving Kalamake stranded, as it is too far for him to walk home and there are no more leaves to burn. They inherit his fortune and donate part of their inheritance to the missionary fund.

Despite its supernatural plot, the story is steeped in a realism that displays Stevenson's knowledge of the complex political history of Hawaii in the late nineteenth century. During this time, American business interests were becoming increasingly powerful, leading to the coup that deposed Queen Liliuokalani in 1893 and the subsequent annexation of Hawaii to the United States. Through the figure of Kalamake—the violent, respected, overbearing, protective father-in-law—Stevenson depicts the cultural and political conflict in the Pacific at this time. On one hand, Kalamake is connected to and representative of tradition: “it was rumoured that he had the art of the gift of the old heroes” (103). When he drops Keola in the open sea, turns himself into a giant, and walks the ocean floor, the story recalls the Hawaiian legend of Hina wherein Kana, Hina's son, does the same (Jolly “Explanatory Notes” 276).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, like Keawe in “The Bottle Imp,” Kalamake is a modern man who lives in a big western-style house and makes his money without work (104). His name is a combination of two Hawaiian words: *kālā* which means “dollar” or “money,” and *make*, which means “death,” but also “barter and exchange” (Jolly “Explanatory Notes” 275, “make”). By linking death with monetary exchange, his name invokes the connection between European contact (and thereby trade) and the introduction of western diseases that decimated the indigenous population. Kalamake's house functions as a place to display his wealth and modern tastes: “the parlour, which was a very fine room, papered and hung with prints, and furnished with a rocking-chair, and a table and a sofa in the European style . . . so that anyone could see it was the house of a man of substance” (104).<sup>13</sup> The description calls to mind the Iolani Palace, Hawaii's royal palace built in a Victorian architectural style by the last king of the Kamehameha house, King Kamehameha V, who reigned from 1863-1872, and who also significantly increased

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<sup>12</sup> Roslyn Jolly has suggested that Stevenson read this account directly from King Kalakaua's notebooks during one of his many visits to the Iolani Palace in 1889. These notebooks would later become *The Legends and Myths of Hawaii: The Fables and Folklore of a Strange People* (Jolly “Explanatory Notes” 276-7).

<sup>13</sup> Jolly has pointed out that the description of Kalamake's house (as well as Keawe's great house in “The Bottle Imp”) closely resembles Stevenson's description from *In the South Seas* of the house of Nahinu, the Hawaiian judge who served as Stevenson's host while he and Fanny were on the Kona coast (“Explanatory Notes” 272, 276).

tourism to the island. The Iolani Palace was filled with luxurious objects that demonstrated both the financial independence and the sophistication of the Hawaiian monarchy, a political act at least partially meant to signal the strength and autonomy of the Hawaiian kingdom and thereby deter encroaching foreign interests. Kalamake's wealth is kept in a locked desk and watched over by a portrait of Kamehameha V and also one of Queen Victoria, who had shared a friendship with the Hawaiian royal family (Hackler 101-2). The inclusion of the twin portraits demonstrates that these seemingly conflicting worlds were already interrelated and overlapping. The story itself, like Kalamake's fortune, is presided over by both the Pacific Islanders for whom the story was initially intended and also the audience "nearer home" to whom it was finally presented.

In this story, the Pacific is the center of the globe, and Pacific island readers are privileged. Though the story is accessible to British readers, many details, like the Dickensian spin on Kalamake's name, would have resonated only with readers who were fluent in Hawaiian or another closely related Pacific island language. In addition, the story presents inter-island Pacific travel by Pacific Islanders, an unusual depiction in western representation, as the indigenous people on the Isle of Voices travel between it and their main home island each year in cycle with the toxicity of the fish population (114). Instead of presenting the Pacific region as a series of isolated islands with expanses of water between them, this story depicts Oceania as a place within greater networks of trade and familial relations, not only between individual islands and a "mainland," a view that the contemporary Pacific island writer Epeli Hau'ofa has called a "sea of islands" (as opposed to "islands in a sea") (29) or what Édouard Glissant calls a "poetics of relation." Though far removed, the Isle of Voices is not desolate, but is instead a link in a well-connected, populated, relatively accessible chain. Given that the history of Pacific Islander navigation is often misrepresented as "blowing" around in the open ocean in dugout canoes, instead of as a studied, intentional tradition

that reflects a high level of technological mastery,<sup>14</sup> the presence in the story of inter-island travel is remarkable. In “The Isle of Voices,” the region as a whole is one through which Pacific Islanders travel easily and regularly. In contrast, western schooners blow about, guided by their *Findlay* nautical directory, an enormously thick, collaged guidebook, constantly “updated” with pasted in supplements and with sailors’ marginalia, but still inaccurate (113, Jolly “Explanatory Notes” 277). Keola thinks to himself, “These white men, although they pretend to know where they are sailing, must take their chance like other people” (114). As Stevenson’s privileged audience, the Pacific is at the center of the world, and the characterization of Pacific Islanders as mobile, connected, and skilled navigators reinforces this understanding.

The story also places the Pacific economy at the center of global trade. At the end of the story, as Keola witnesses the “hundreds and hundreds of persons” collecting “millions and millions of dollars” off the beach, he thinks, “And to think how they have fooled me with their talk of mints. . .and that money was made there, when it is clear that all the new coin in all the world is gathered on these sands!” (119). In this thought, Keola puts an unnamed Pacific island at the center of the world economy, emphasizing that money is not “made” in mints but in the exchange of natural resources and biopower, the acquisition and control of which has fueled colonialism and continues to drive imperialism and neocolonial globalization. He links environmental exploitation with economic gain in a colonial/imperial context. The foreigners who come to the island to collect the shells-turned-silver-dollars are not just Americans and Europeans: “All tongues of the earth were spoken there; the French, the Dutch, the Russian, the Tamil, the Chinese,” and, of course, between Kalamake and Kokua, the Hawaiian (119). The fact that other Pacific Islanders are participating in

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<sup>14</sup> Captain Cook, after coming upon two lost Polynesian crews, first suggested that unpredictable storms aided discovery: “[the ships off course] will serve to explain, better than the thousand conjectures of speculative reasoners, how the detached parts of the earth, and, in particular, how the South Seas, may have been peopled” (qtd in Sharp 16). For a mid-twentieth-century example of this myth’s long endurance, see Sharp’s *Ancient Voyagers in Polynesia*. The development of the Polynesian Voyaging Society in 1973 and the journey of sailing vessel *Hokulea* in 1976 from Hawaii to Tahiti using traditional Polynesian navigation methods did much to prove the intentionality of pre-contact Pacific navigation.

ecological and economic exploitation interrupts a simplistic, Manichean understanding of colonial contact. The economy is available to “whatever land knew sorcery” (119). The shell-dollars are literally picked up on the beach, and the international travel to collect them depends on another natural resource native only to this specific island, the leaves of the unknown “such and such a tree” (105). The story makes explicit the environmental underpinnings of global modernity: that it is not an immaterial, abstract event, but a process fueled by natural resources that appear to be readily available to whomever is lucky enough—or powerful enough—to come across them first.

For all the work this story does to disrupt the hackneyed plot in western literature about the Pacific—by confusing the signs of modernity and tradition, by privileging a Pacific Islander audience, and by centering global geography and economy on the Pacific—the story still makes many of the same moves of imperial representation. That is to say, there are still cannibals in this story. However, because most of the characters are Pacific Islanders interacting with one another, these stereotypical interactions are often turned on their head, collapsing the division between savage/civilized and thereby satirizing these conventions. When Keola encounters a nearly naked woman in the forest, the woman who will become his second wife, the text does not linger on her body as expected. She is only “a young woman who had nothing on her body but a belt of leaves” (106). This description is in marked contrast to first encounters like those in Pierre Loti’s *Rarahu*, Gauguin’s *Noa Noa*, or even Stevenson’s “The Beach of Falesá,” which is told from the point of view of an Englishman.<sup>15</sup> Yet even as the story defies stereotypes, it does not presume mutual

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<sup>15</sup> Pierre Loti devotes nearly an entire chapter to his blazon of Rarahu:

Rarahu's eyes were of a tawny black, full of exotic languor and coaxing softness, like those of a kitten when it is stroked; her eyelashes so long and so black that you might have taken them for painted feathers. Her nose was short and delicate, like the nose in some Arab faces ; her mouth, rather too thick and too wide for a classic model, had deep corners deliciously dimpled. When she laughed she showed all her teeth, somewhat large teeth of brilliantly white enamel, not yet polished by the wear of years but showing the striations of young growth. Her hair, scented with sandal-wood oil, was long, straight and rather harsh, falling in heavy locks on her bare shoulders. Her skin was of the same hue all over, from her forehead to the tips of her toes; a dusky brown, verging on brick-red, like that of old Etruscan terra-cotta pottery. Rarahu was small, beautiful in proportion and mould; her bosom was purely formed and polished; her arms as perfect as an antique. Round her ankles a

understanding or respect between the two characters. After all, due to the magic leaves' invisible powers, the gazed-at woman literally cannot see him. It does not even assume that they have a shared culture or language. They are foreigners to one another. Keola's greeting, "You need not be so frightened; I will not eat you," makes light of the stereotypical contact between the traveler from the West and the native, a gesture that is made further ironic by the fact that later in the story her people do have plans to eat him (106). Here there is neither the common humanist romantic plot where their mutual attraction overcomes their cultural estrangement, nor the other common humanist plot where their shared oppression makes them allies against the European. This is an encounter that seems to be outside of both of these systems, at least temporarily. The plot moves forward by depending on conventions that the story simultaneously undermines, working against a body of imperial representations of the Pacific even as it reproduces them.

The paradox of the expected plot moving in a direction that both fulfills and undermines convention is further complicated by the distance between the narrator and the story he is narrating. At times, it is as though the story is reminding its readers that the author writing it does not have all of the information he needs to fill it in properly. When Lehua warns Keola not to cross her father,

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pattern was tattooed blue to imitate anklets; across her lower lip were three faint blue lines like those of the women of the Marquesas; and on her forehead a still paler outline of tattoo suggested a coronet. The feature most characteristic of her race was the small space between her eyes which like the eyes of all Maoris were by no means deep-set. When she was laughing and gay this gave her face the mischievous shyness of a marmoset; when she was grave or sad, there was something about her which can only be described as Polynesian grace. (Viard)

In *Noa Noa*, Gauguin seems to enjoy that the women at whom he is looking do not like it:

Suddenly an abrupt turn, I saw a naked young girl leaning against a projecting rock. She was caressing it with both hands, rather than using it as a support. She was drinking from a spring which in silence trickled from a great height among the rocks.

After she had finished drinking, she let go of the rock, caught the water in both hands, and let it run down between her breasts. Then, though I had not made the slightest sound, she lowered her head like a timid antelope which instinctively scents danger and peered toward the thicket where I remained motionless. My look did not meet hers. Scarcely had she seen me, than she plunged below the surface, uttering the word, "Taëhaë (furious). (56-7)

In "The Beach of Falesá," Stevenson has his western narrator, the working-class trader Wiltshire, repeat the conventions of the encounter when he meets his future wife:

I saw one coming on the other side alone. She had been fishing; all she wore was a chemise, and it was wetted through. She was young and very slender for an island maid, with a long face, a high forehead, and a shy, strange, blindish look, between a cat's and a baby's. (7)

she lists the names of other people who had: “Think of this person, and that person; think of Hua, who was a noble of the house of representatives” (108). This sentence omits the real names that Lehua presumably said, suggesting that the person who has overheard and is retelling the story does not have either the necessary interpretational skills or the privileged access to make the complete story intelligible for his audience. When Keola and Kalamake make their first visit to the island, Kalamake commands Keola to “Go. . .into the borders of the wood, and bring me the leaves of such and such a herb, and such and such a tree. . .” (105-6). The “such and such” implies that this quotation is not in fact a quotation at all. The “such and such” replaces the real names of the native species that the person telling the story, presumably a foreigner, did not catch. The indigenous name, both of person and of species, eludes the storyteller; it is represented incompletely, as a placeholder to be enfolded into the rhythm of a sentence, to be used by and yet also to resist the representation. In this way, the story will not let a reader forget that stories are always already mediated, that every author is both outside and subjective, and that there is an indigenous presence that cannot or will not be represented.

The syntax of the story also calls attention to its having been mediated. Linguistically, the story presents itself as a piece of translation whose original language was not English, such as when it describes Keola’s time on the isle as “the time of Keola in that place was in two periods” (114). Its first sentence reads like an archaic genealogical record, “Keola was married with Lehua, daughter of Kalamake, the wise man of Molokai, and he kept his dwelling with the father of his wife” (103). The appositive phrases and nonstandard uses, noting that he was married “with” Lehua, instead of “to” Lehua, and saying that he “kept his dwelling” instead of “lived with” Kalamake, recall translations of ancient texts, not late nineteenth-century sea yarns. Vanessa Smith has shown how “the story displays the hallmarks of ancient composition” (183). However, even as it invokes ancient forms and myths, it juxtaposes them with modern conventions of genres that have never



represented Pacific Islanders sympathetically, like sea yarns and adventure tales. Kalamake's shape-shifting into a giant is a direct retelling of the Hawaiian legend of Hina, yet this mythic retelling is interrupted by a schooner that hoists Keola aboard and gives him "gin and biscuit and dry clothes" (112). This is the story of a Polynesian mortal who turns into a god, but, from another point of view, it is just the story of a crummy first mate too big for his britches and a man stranded on an island who barely escapes being eaten by a tribe of cannibals. Yet "The Isle of Voices" does more than just mash up ancient tradition with the modern Pacific. It takes the form of a story that entertains colonial readers while putting Pacific Islanders at its center and at the same time distancing the authority of the white male narrator. By doing so, the story critiques the tradition that it is a part of—the sea yarn/cannibal tale—while it orients itself as a new kind of contemporary Pacific myth. Whether or not this imitation is flattery or appropriation—a distinction that I think would be impossible to make—matters less than the fact that the tension of the story struggling to become what it can only represent (an authentic Pacific myth) is embedded into the narrative.

Jason Harris argues that the story is a "postcolonial fairy tale" that ends happily and shows that "an islander may acquire wealth by marketing natural resources" (Harris 390). In one sense, this reading holds up: Keola and Lehua's marriage is restored, Kalamake is left in exile on the Isle of Voices, and the happy couple are thereby the inheritors of his fortune. However, near the end of the story, Keola and Lehua, two influential Pacific Islanders, attempt to explain their history to a white missionary who dismisses it as "rigmarole" (122). The missionary instead assumes that they are the ones who have been coining money and threatens to turn them in to the authorities if they do not donate generously to the missionary fund. Vanessa Smith understands these coins as "[a]mbiguous signifiers, both true and false, valuable donation and worthless forgery" that "expose the missionary's divided colonial loyalties" (191). For Keola and Lehua, however, the coins are only the means by which they are to be taken seriously by the foreign economic and cultural forces in the

Pacific—the donation is what makes the missionary “believe” their story. To be taken seriously required denying their history and myths, or what really happened on the Isle of Voices, for the “rational,” economically minded logic of the west. Because there are no written Pacific island histories pre-contact, and because missionaries first developed most written forms of Polynesian languages, the denial of Keola and Lehua’s supernatural, oral history by a missionary who then blackmails them for a donation interrupts the “postcolonial fairy tale.” The happy ending—a marriage, safety, wealth—dissolves as soon as one scratches at it. In this way, it functions like a nineteenth-century novel, restoring order and upholding convention, no matter how ridiculous, oppressive, or corrupt this order might be. There is a happy marriage, but there is also on the Isle of Voices a broken marriage (Keola and Kokua, his second wife) and a broken family (Lehua and Kalamake). There is a peaceful island, but there is another island destroyed and ravaged, dozens dead in conflict, a native species decimated, and a once powerful man, Kalamake, who ambivalently represented tradition and modernization now stranded, like so many other men have been in western fiction since *Robinson Crusoe*, on just another nameless, desolate Pacific island in the middle of a nowhere that we thought the story had told us was a somewhere. The representation of the Pacific as a modern place whose environment was vulnerable to western intervention is trivialized as backstory to the marriage plot and the continued wealth of Keola and Lehua that depends on their concession to a white man who ignores their history.

## **Reading Public, Weeding Private**

Both “The Isle of Voices” and “The Bottle Imp” provide moments that critique the ramifications of modernity in the Pacific without fetishizing an imagined pre-contact past. Through their insistence on portraying the details of then-contemporary life in the Pacific, the stories center their narrative on indigenous experience and force readers to see that the Pacific and Pacific

Islanders are integrated into global modernity, thereby refuting the vision of Oceania as a timeless dream world that western fiction and tourism created and would continue to reinvent throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At the same time, these stories illustrate how unchecked modernization has degraded traditional relationships to land, family, and local ecosystems, linking neocolonial involvement with environmental degradation. In the end, however, both stories pull the rug out from under their critique, offering the final power (and punch line) to an immoral westerner in order to conclude the story successfully with a satisfying yet superficial resolution of the romantic plots.

Despite their witty, tidy, comedic conclusions, both “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices” largely failed to connect with their intended Pacific Islander audience. In the end, this new form of storytelling was no sensation in Samoa or in the larger Pacific, but the stories did find success when they were published alongside “The Beach of Falesá” in *Island Nights Entertainments* (1893). “Falesá” tells the story of a British copra trader’s clash with another trader, who uses the unnamed island’s system of *tapu* (taboo) to trick the protagonist into marrying a *tapu*’d woman, thereby sabotaging his possibilities for trade. Stevenson resisted its inclusion, writing to his publisher that “the B. of F. is simply not to appear along with ‘The Bottle Imp,’ a story of totally different scope and intention” (qtd in V. Smith 167). Stevenson called “Falesá” “the first realistic South Sea story,” and wrote that “everyone else who has tried [to depict the region realistically], that I have seen, got carried away by the romance and ended in a kind of sugar candy sham epic” (qtd in Edmond 172). “Falesá” is written to correct the representation of the Pacific for western readers; “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices” to give Pacific Islanders a representation of themselves in the form of western literature. Though Stevenson resisted the similarities between the three stories, they share an insistence on placing the Pacific within the context of contemporary global modernity, thereby undermining the “sugar candy sham epic” tradition. Before publication of

“Falesá,” Stevenson recognized the risk in this experimentation. In a late letter, he admitted that “there is always the exotic question” and “the very trades and hopes and fears of the characters, are all novel and may be found unwelcome to that great, hulking, bullering whale, the public” (qtd in Edmond 172). The phantom of the “bullering” public, a term that suggests both “roaring” and yet also “foaming up in waves,” influenced the experimentation of this seemingly isolated writer on the other side of the globe (*OED* “buller”). Stevenson’s writing while he was in Samoa can be characterized as a persistent negotiation between his urge to experiment and to please, to correct and to satisfy, to teach and to entertain.

Over time, this pressure took its toll, and Stevenson took less and less joy in writing toward the end of his life. Because of his increasingly fragile respiratory health, Stevenson’s life depended on staying in the amenable Pacific climate, and thus, indirectly, on pleasing the “bullering whale” of the British reading public. In Samoa, Fanny and he may have lived simply at first, but plans for their life there quickly became grand, and the costs of building their own great house, largely fueled by the demands of his proper Victorian mother, were significant, as had been the costs of cruising through the Pacific in the years prior. The mounting financial pressures were compounded by the continually increasing number of dependents, none of whom brought in any money themselves. There were more than fifteen people at Vailima at any given time. Because the farm had yet to pay for itself, Stevenson’s writing funded their livelihood, from Mrs. Stevenson to Fanny’s son and daughter from her first marriage (and their spouses and children), to the Samoan maids and farm workers and beachcombers who worked at Vailima. The income to fund these large expenses did not come from Stevenson’s more experimental work. It was work like the sequel to *Kidnapped*, *Catriona* (or *David Balfour*), that paid for Vailima, the farm, and Stevenson’s continued stay in Samoa, on which his health entirely depended (V. Smith 10-11). Thus, there is a sense in which Stevenson’s

life, like his art, was under the pressure of the forward-driving plot, the fiction demanding to be written, to be pushed to market, to please readers “nearer home” in Britain.

For a man deeply ill, knowing that he was dangerously close to death several times, this forward-driving, linear pressure must have been quietly ironic, an irony increased by the small, unsuccessful family farm outside waiting for the cocoa trees to flower and pay for themselves. Louis began to envy Fanny’s work outside; she was free from the pressures of the fickle reading public. Fanny was unsympathetic to Louis’ experiments. She was annoyed with Louis’ evolving style and complained that Louis was using “the most enchanting material that anyone ever had in the whole world” and turning it into “a sort of scientific and historical impersonal thing” when “with my own feeble hand I could write a book that the whole world would jump at” (qtd in Jolly “Introduction” 39).<sup>16</sup> At the end of his life, had his health improved, Stevenson would have taken Fanny’s invitation to switch roles. He began to prefer her work over his: “I would rather do a good hour’s work weeding sensitive [plants]. . . than write two pages of my best.” More than just a diversion, weeding became a kind of shadow occupation for his writing: “*Nothing* is so interesting as weeding” (qtd in Harman 410). Unlike writing, weeding offered a temporary experience outside of words. He enjoyed the “awful silence” he encountered, and the “the knowledge that all my efforts are only like the performance of an actor, the thing of a moment.” In the dense tropics, weeding sensitive plant was work that was quickly undone, as the plant grew back quickly. Sensitive plant, or *mimosa pudica*, is a pantropical invasive species, unusual in that it is seismonastic, meaning that its leaves quickly retract and close when they are disturbed by shaking or movement. That is to say, sensitive plant responds to human touch. Thus, even as Stevenson saw his actions as an impermanent stamp upon a supra-human world, he was unwittingly working to undo a human interjection into this small

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<sup>16</sup> Fanny’s diary from her time in Samoa, *Our Samoan Adventure*, was eventually published in 1955, after it was found in an archive at the Stevenson museum in Monterey, California.

Samoaan ecosystem.<sup>17</sup> Instead of being frustrated by the futility and impermanence of his work, he felt comforted to know that for all his efforts “the wood will silently and swiftly heal them up with fresh effervescence” (qtd in Harman 409).<sup>18</sup> In weeding Stevenson took respite in an experience outside of words (an “awful silence”) in which he experienced a temporary “performance” wherein he understood and relished the futility of human acts within a longer time scale. He was able to feel that his action, his work, was only a “thing of a moment,” the opposite of the work of art that endures—the opposite of the Keatsian urn, but also the opposite of the need to produce the next thing and send it out to market.

Weeding provided Stevenson an alternative to the linear, forward-driving experience of time that the pressures of the market and the pressures of his health created. In his weeding out an invasive species, however, he was unwittingly working toward removing human interference from the ecosystem. This kind of work puts one in relation to a different kind of time, not only the longer time scale that recognizes human intervention as a “thing of a moment” but also a cyclical time, wherein crops grow and seasons change, where work is completed for a season and then must be done again. This experience came to him not by going out into virgin forest and feeling himself removed from human civilization. Instead, he was working on a small farm, a space very much human. In weeding, Stevenson appears to have accessed what Pacific island writer Epeli Hau’ofa discusses as “ecological time” or “circular time” which is:

. . . tied to the regularity of seasons marked by natural phenomena such as cyclical appearances of certain flowers, birds, and marine creatures, shedding of certain leaves,

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<sup>17</sup> Down the hill, however, Fanny was planting “an importation from America called ‘buffalo grass,’” one of the most serious invasive species on the island today, a plant that “when it does grow, grows well, and eats out all the weeds” (Fanny Stevenson 4). The confusion of what is and is not native and what is and is not productive reflects both the Stevensons’ presence in Samoa and Louis’ writing while at Vailima.

<sup>18</sup> This not-so-new experience of time would have been at odds with Stevenson’s earlier interest in thermodynamics. It is worth noting that *effervescence* has a chemical resonance. The *OED* defines it as: “(Without necessarily implying heat.) The action of bubbling up as if boiling; the tumultuous rise of bubbles of gas from a fluid; *esp.* as the result of chemical action” (*OED* “effervescence”). In this phrase, Stevenson indicates his own personal shift from a thermodynamic-centered understanding of the ecosystem, of entropy and degeneration, to an ecological exchange of chemical elements.

phases of the moon, changes in prevailing winds and weather patterns, *which themselves mark the commencement of and set the course for cycles of human activities* such as those related to agriculture, terrestrial and marine foraging, trade and exchange, and voyaging, all with their associated rituals, ceremonies, and festivities. (461, my emphasis)

Hau'ofa proposes a philosophy of time directed by the non-human. It is at odds with forward-driving teleological modernity and “its unquenchable thirst for growth propelled by its mighty technologies” that is “the major factor for the global environmental degradation” (461). It is a mode of time that resists the apocalyptic plot, the end of the world, what was for Stevenson the degeneration of mankind through entropy and decay, and is for us now the end of the world through global warming. Circular time reminds us that the final plot for mankind is always death, but that need not be the entirety of one's experience of life, or one's relationship to other people, to history, or to the earth. In this sense of time, the catastrophe of indigenous population decline due to colonialism is still a catastrophe, but one that is not unsurpassable by those who remain. Like the young narrator at the end of *The Time Machine*, it assumes that “[i]f that is so, it remains for us to live as if it were not so” (102). It, too, teaches us how to stay with a dying world.

## Chapter 3

# Partial Views in Lady Annie Brassey's *A Voyage in the Sunbeam* and Katherine Routledge's *The Mystery of Easter Island*

"I want very much to catch an albatross, in order to have it skinned, and to make tobacco-pouches of its feet and pipe-stems of the wing-bones, for presents"  
--Lady Annie Brassey, *A Voyage in the Sunbeam*

More than a decade before Stevenson wrote "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices" or H. G. Wells wrote *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*, Lady Annie Brassey decided to publish an edited collection of letters she had originally written for family and friends recording her and her husband's voyage in the yacht *Sunbeam* during 1876 and 1877 (Bolton 304-305). *A Voyage in the Sunbeam: Our Home on the Ocean for Eleven Months*, published in 1878, recorded the Brasseys' trip circumnavigating the globe, the first tourist voyage to do so. The ship set off from England, crossed the Atlantic, sailed through the Straits of Magellan and across the Pacific to Asia, and finally headed home through the Suez Canal on their way back to England. Energetic, adventurous travellers, the Brasseys made arduous excursions one after the other on a tight schedule meticulously controlled by Lord Brassey. The *Sunbeam* was equipped with what was then a novel technological advancement—a steam engine small enough to fit aboard and which allowed the vessel to use coal to power itself through windless regions (Leonard 73). This engine enabled the Brasseys to keep to their strict itinerary. Though originally supplied with coal from England, access to coaling stations en route partially determined the *Sunbeam's* course. *A Voyage in the Sunbeam* records Lord and Lady Brassey's



ambivalent feelings about their dependence on coal to fuel their trip; Lady Brassey, in particular, is haunted by its threat of combustion. In the first half of this chapter, I discuss how Lady Brassey's fascination and fear of coal's unharnessed energy shapes her overwhelming experience at the Kilauea volcano on the island of Hawaii. Brassey's anxiety about uncontrolled natural energy can be understood as a rational respect for the raw power of fossil fuels and their potential destructive force. Brassey is in awe of coal's power, energy, and potentially destructive heat, just as she is in awe of the power, energy, and potentially destructive heat of Kilauea. Simultaneously, her recognition of Kilauea's power is in harmony with indigenous Hawaiian understandings of volcanic energy, a point of view that contrasts to the cynical detachment that characterized touristic writing about the volcano and continued to define tourism at Kilauea well into the twentieth century.

In the second half of this chapter, I pivot to discussing another woman who—both intentionally and unintentionally—offers an alternative response to mastery, that is, how western travel literature has characterized both indigeneity and human relationships to environmental decline and energy sources. Forty-one years after *Voyage*, Katherine Routledge published *The Mystery of Easter Island* (1919). After years of doing anthropological work in Africa, Katherine and her husband, Scoresby, decided that they wished “to see the Pacific before we died, and asked the anthropological authorities at the British Museum what work there remained to be done” (3). The British museum directed them to Easter Island (Rapa Nui), as there had yet been no British archaeological excursions to study the giant statues, or *moai*, on the island (Van Tilburg 66). The Routledges had a sailing vessel built and christened it the *Mana*, which they named in honor of the Polynesian word that connotes spiritual power and good luck. Like the *Sunbeam*, the *Mana* was equipped with “auxiliary motor power,” though advances in internal combustion allowed their engine to be powered by petroleum-derived kerosene instead of coal (5). The excursion set off in 1913, taking a route similar to the *Sunbeam's* decades before. Their plans were interrupted by the

outbreak of World War I, and *Mana* could not sail home until 1915, forcing the Routledges to remain on Rapa Nui for almost a year and a half, instead of their intended six months (Van Tilburg 81). As a record of the first archaeological expedition to the island, *Mystery* has been received as a seminal anthropological and archaeological text of Rapa Nui, and Katherine Routledge is remembered, rightfully, as a competent, deft observer.<sup>1</sup> I discuss how her failed attempt to communicate with a leper who is the last known translator of Rapa Nui native script, *rongorongo*, illustrates her uniqueness among imperial travel writers to accept her inability to master and explain what is inscrutable to her. At the same time that she intentionally withholds a final interpretation of native Rapa Nui script, she unintentionally offers a way of looking at the history of deforestation of Rapa Nui that productively reframes the contemporary popular explanation for the deforestation and decline of the indigenous population. This vision challenges the popular theory that whitewashes the violent history of colonialism on the island by blaming native Rapa Nui for their own demise.

Both Brassey and Routledge took similar routes to the Pacific, and both excursions depended on then-advanced technology powered by fossil fuels. However, their styles and dispositions are markedly different. Brassey is effusive, verbose, and easily overwhelmed; Routledge is reserved, concise, and unshaken. Brassey travels as a tourist and a Victorian lady, Routledge as an amateur anthropologist and modern woman. Despite their differences in position and time, both women's accounts demonstrate that one can choose silence instead of posturing, and both are reluctant to explain or theorize what they cannot understand or interpret. Reading their accounts together in the context of a longer history of travel to and western literary representations of Oceania makes us question how we think about the representation of indigeneity and environmental

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<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Routledge's life, see Van Tilburg's *Among Stone Giants*. For a discussion of Routledge's behavior toward her colleagues and crew, see Van Tilburg's "O. G. S. Crawford and the Mana Expedition to Easter Island (Rapa Nui), 1913-1915."

destruction and also undermines the voyeuristic expectations of travel narratives. Brassey's fascination with unharnessed energy, which had begun with anxiety about recoaling her ship, finally overwhelms her at the volcano, and instead of narrating her private, personal thoughts and impressions, as she does in other chapters, her account obscures and keeps them hidden, thereby withholding access both to intimate spaces and to public, touristic ones. In doing so, *Voyage* ceases to offer the intimacy that the genre promises. Likewise, Katherine Routledge's inability to communicate with the leper and uncover the meaning of the inscrutable script disappoints the expectations that *The Mystery of Easter Island* will reveal mysteries instead of adding to them, resisting the assumption that travel literature is a means to access what is otherwise remote and off-limits. Because neither author offers a final, totalizing conclusion, both leave readers distanced from the objects that the accounts promise to expose and make understood. I argue that this incompleteness is not a symptom of women's tentativeness or insecurity, but an ethical way to engage with difference that resonates across time. To marvel at what one does not understand and to be comfortable with being overwhelmed without trying to explain, theorize, or ironize is an ideal space from which to listen nonjudgmentally. Both *A Voyage in the Sunbeam* and *The Mystery of Easter Island* model how *not seeing* offers an ethical way for a text to engage with indigeneity and environmental destruction.

It is remarkable that this productive model of listening and representation comes out of a genre that has been characterized by its arrogance and blindness.<sup>2</sup> Jamaica Kincaid adds to this characterization in *A Small Place* (1988) with her figure of the "ugly tourist." Kincaid identifies European and American tourism as an extension of colonialism, and these "ugly tourists" "make a leap from being that nice blob just sitting like a boob in their amniotic sac of the modern experience to being a person visiting heaps of death and ruin and feeling alive and inspired at the sight of it"

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of the history of travel writing as it relates to colonial contact, see Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*.

(16-17). The ugly tourist, who is “not an ugly person ordinarily” becomes ugly *because of travel*, because of the circumstances of contact with another, poorer, formerly colonized culture. Kincaid addresses these ugly tourists directly: “this ugly but joyful thought will swell inside you: their ancestors were not clever in the way yours were and not ruthless in the way yours were” (17). Kincaid identifies the tourist’s privilege of freedom of mobility as in direct contrast to “most natives in the world” who “cannot go anywhere. They are too poor...too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and...too poor to live properly in the place where they live” (Kincaid 18), a division that resembles Zygmunt Bauman’s “tourists” and “vagabonds” (Bauman 85). Brassey and Routledge are tourists in every sense that Pratt, Kincaid, and Bauman describe. They are especially privileged, unusually mobile, and often travel ugly. Brassey reports matter-of-factly about the indigenous people who live at Tierra del Fuego: “They are cannibals, and are placed by Darwin in the lowest scale of humanity” (123). Routledge, though less overtly discriminatory, makes easy generalizations about all Rapa Nui from limited observation, as when she states confidently that “Their own native organisation was peculiarly lax, no kind of justice being administered, and they have never had for any duration the civilising effect of religious instruction or civil power” (141). With their comfortable, spacious yachts, both women’s accommodations prefigure what Kincaid might call the “amniotic sac of the modern experience” (16) or what Bauman, referring to modern-day chains of Holiday Inn or Sheraton hotels, describes as an “extraterritorial enclave” with “reassuring sameness amidst variety—impermeable and invulnerable” (Franklin 212). Of course, neither Brassey nor Routledge stay in a Sheraton, and the danger of sea-travel and the relatively limited touristic networks during their voyages made their trips more dangerous and rough than a simple pleasure cruise. However, both ships were luxurious, both voyages travelled freely because of their imperial privilege, and both women, at least initially, recorded racially inflected observations of natives that reinforced the imperial social hierarchy at the time. Voyages like theirs, at least in part, helped

popularize and define global oceanic tourism, and so it is necessary to pay attention to the ways that these accounts add to and deviate from the colonial-tourist frame. Brassey and Routledge travel within a network of privilege—a burgeoning network of tourist travel that was tethered to trade routes that had developed over centuries of colonial contact and occupation and that coincided with access to fossil fuels (for Brassey, coal; for Routledge, kerosene) to keep themselves mobile. In reading their accounts, we can see the relationship between colonial contact, the rise of global oceanic tourism, and fossil-fuel dependence.

## Coal as a Necessary Evil

By throwing coal on the fire, the crew of the *Sunbeam* controlled the speed of their trip, though the course was in some part dependent on and directed by the availability of coaling stations. Coal gave the *Sunbeam* freedom, yet it also tethered it to a network of places where one could resupply. Throughout *Voyage*, Brassey is preoccupied with coal, its availability or its running out, as well as its potential energy and its capacity for harm. The route of the *Sunbeam*, we are constantly reminded, is dependent on access to new supplies. And “coaling” the ship is inconvenient and messy. Brassey prefers to be off-board during the process. In one entry, she explains her disappointment on returning to the ship and finding that “the miseries of coaling were not yet over” (70). While in port, the Brasseys regularly open up the *Sunbeam* to visitors, as even in areas by then conditioned to outside visitors, the ship’s dramatic proportions, advanced technology, and luxurious conditions draw attention, just as cruise liners do today in impoverished areas around the globe. Brassey is anxious that that the mess made by coaling has interfered with the presentation of the ship. Early on, while the ship is in Montevideo, Uruguay, she explains that “...there had been numerous visitors from the shore” and that she is embarrassed that “everything on deck looked black, while below all was pitch dark and airless, every opening and crevice having been closed and

covered with tarpaulin, to keep out the coal dust” (70). Though it may save them time ultimately, the process itself delays their schedule: “It took seven hours to complete the work, instead of two, as was hoped and promised” (70). Coal presents itself early on as a force to be managed in order to keep regularity and control over their voyage.

The decision of when to use their coal supplies creates contention between Brassey and her husband. She complains about his decision to fire up the engines on their way to Rosario, Argentina: “...half a ton more coal was immediately heaped on to our fire by the captain’s order—a piece of reckless extravagance, for do what they would, they could not make us gain five minutes” (76). At another point, the roles reverse; Lady Brassey wants to put coal on the fire, but Lord Brassey is reluctant. She complains “I have been trying to persuade Tom to steam out five or six hundred miles, so that we may make a quick passage and economise our time as much as possible” (172). Lord Brassey’s reluctance comes from his desire to conserve money but also because he sees using coal as a cheapened, less authentic version of “real” sailing. Brassey complains “he is anxious to do *the whole* voyage under sail” (172). In a letter to the *Times* after their voyage, Lord Brassey brags that their coal usage was minimal, fashioning himself and his voyage as more authentic: “We had, it is true, the advantage of steam. . .but we travelled 20,517 miles under sail alone, and the consumption of coal has not exceeded 350 tons” (443). Though they seem to disagree often, both Brassey and her husband share anxiety about how their coal use affects the presentation of their ship and their voyage to the outside world. The use of coal, while convenient, threatens to tarnish the cleanliness and purity of their tour.

As the trip progresses, Lady Brassey becomes more preoccupied about the trip’s dependence on coal and fears its loss. She considers how voyages in the past travelled “with no steam-power to fall back upon in case they were becalmed” (179). She worries that the supply will run out after they cross the Atlantic: “it is rather doubtful whether we shall even be able to renew our stock of coal”

(117). Yet shortly afterward in Chile her fears of scarcity prove to be unfounded, as “coal is found in such abundance, and so near the surface, that the operation of smelting is a profitable one (142). By the end of her voyage, the trip seems unthinkable without it: “It is depression to speculate what would become of us if anything went wrong in the engine-room department, and if we should be reduced to sail-power alone in this region of calmness” (368). Coal is both bane and boon to the ship. Though a relatively new convenience, it quickly becomes a necessity, and the acquisition and storage of it becomes an obsessive topic.

Brassey’s anxiety is fully on display in her description of an abandoned coaling vessel, the *Monksbaven*, that their yacht comes upon. The *Monksbaven* had been carrying smelting coal on a voyage around Cape Horn. This voyage was so dangerous that companies were forced to supply their own ships, as the cargo was too risky to carry aboard commercial steamers. The risk was that the coal stored below would spontaneously combust and set the ship afire; this happened frequently. By the time the *Sunbeam* comes across the *Monksbaven*, the ship’s cargo had been slowly burning for days. The cabins and galley filled with smoke, and the heat had forced the crew to bring their possessions onto deck, batten down the hatches, and live for days exposed to the open air, waiting for a passing ship to rescue them before the vessel beneath them erupted into flames. Brassey begins to narrate the account of the *Monksbaven*’s destruction reservedly, as a story that “may perhaps be interesting” (109). However, she devotes over five pages to the account, and includes two illustrations as well, indicating that she herself finds it fascinating. Of course, it would be a significant moment in any voyage for fifteen men to suddenly come on board, with little to no provisions, and to be fed and boarded for two weeks. Brassey’s description, however, is not centered on the days the men boarded with her. Rather, her account lingers on what had happened in the days before the *Sunbeam* encountered the *Monksbaven*: the silent, slow, impending danger of the slow-burning coal beneath the decks. She imagines how “the fire was gradually increasing in

strength beneath their feet, and they knew not at what moment it might burst through the decks and envelope the whole ship in flames” (109). A few pages later, she explains “the great danger of smelting coal, as a ship’s cargo” is not only “its special liability to spontaneous combustion” but also the inability to know where, how deep, and in what direction the fire is headed: “it may go on smouldering quietly for days, or at any moment the gas that has been generated may burst up the vessel’s decks from end to end, without the slightest warning.” Likewise, it could burn downward and create a hole in the side of the boat “so that, before any suspicion has been aroused, the water rushes in, and the unfortunate ship and her crew go to the bottom” (111-112). Brassey’s account returns again and again to the danger and threat of carrying coal on board the ship and the image of shipwreck and disaster. She meditates on the “poor little dinghy” that the men used to carry themselves between the two ships and which was abandoned after they boarded, seeing “something melancholy in seeing her slowly drift away” (107). She imagines the *Monksbaven*, “hove-to, under full sail” but abandoned, sailing nowhere, into nothing, about to be destroyed by the very thing that was making the Brasseys’ trip possible (107).

As the *Monksbaven*’s destruction demonstrates, Brassey’s anxiety about the threat of coal is well founded; at the same time, these fears speak to her larger obsessiveness about human control over natural resources. A ship full of coal burning beneath the traveller’s feet, slowly threatening destruction, serves as a dark metaphor for coal-powered travel as it would develop over the rest of the century. The *Monksbaven* is a kind of shadow ship of the *Sunbeam*. Though the cabins of the *Sunbeam* were not filled with smelt, there were at least twenty tons of coal on board. Their engines were powered by it, and their journey rested figuratively on a heaping bed of it. Brassey’s prose lingers on the precariousness of the *Monksbaven*’s predicament and exaggerates, slightly, the danger of the situation (the men would have been safe for a few more hours in their dinghies even though the ship did burst into flames shortly after they were rescued [106-7]). What is most puzzling about



this focus is that she concentrates on an incident that she did not witness herself. The *Sunbeam* came upon the *Monksbaven* days after the fire had begun, and, as Lord Brassey was intent to stick to his strict schedule, she did not see the ship eventually burn. Dwelling on the threat of fire, Brassey contemplated what it would feel like if the twenty tons of coal stored in the compartments of the *Sunbeam* beneath her parlor slowly, unnoticed, began to warm the soles of her shoes, threatening her life and her family. Her anxiousness about depending on coal and her anxiety about running out of it here intertwine with her fear of the potential energy in coal burning itself spontaneously. It may be excavated and harnessed for the industry, power, and pleasure of human beings, yet human control is temporary and unstable. The smelting ship's fire reveals what can happen when this energy doubles back upon itself and burns just to burn, pointlessly and destructively. The encounter with the *Monksbaven* lays bare the real relationship between tourism and fossil fuel dependence: fossil fuels enable the journey and the freedom of movement and yet are simultaneously the very thing that can kill them. Lady Brassey's anxiety about the *Sunbeam*'s dependence on coal and its potential energy to harm human beings references more than just her personal fear.

## Plagiarizing Kilauea

At the very center of her narrative, Brassey writes a substantial account of her reckoning with another natural force uncontrolled by human hands—the Kilauea volcano on the island of Hawaii. At Kilauea, Brassey meditates more fully on the vulnerability of exposing oneself to unharnessed energy, the threat of fire, and the feeling that the solid surface beneath one's feet may spontaneously erupt into flames. The Brasseys visited Kilauea on Christmas Eve 1875. She refers to it as the highlight of her trip: “If we had seen nothing but Kilauea since we left home, we should have been well rewarded for our long voyage” (240). After her attentive and descriptive account of her visit, which covers fourteen pages, *Voyage* shifts in the second half into more brief and measured

prose.<sup>3</sup> The journey to the volcano was strenuous, a horseback ride that lasted all day in rough conditions and in rain showers that soaked riders through their clothing. Visitors arrived exhausted and hungry. Many were amazed to find a hotel perched on the side of the crater, including Mark Twain, who visited in 1866 and quipped that “The surprise of finding a good hotel in such an outlandish spot startled me considerably more than the volcano did.” By the time Brassey arrived, ten years later, the Volcano House had grown to a large shelter with grass-curtained divisions that provided private bedrooms and eating quarters. Brassey was charmed by the civilized yet exotic accommodations, and “was amused to find, in the morning, that I had unconsciously poked my hand through the wall of our room during the night” (234). A feeling of magic and wonder, tinged with Orientalism, characterizes her long description of her trip, a sense that what seems permanent may in fact be permeable, a sense that one’s hand could “unconsciously” go through a wall, or that the crust of the earth could rupture and explode.

At the end of the nineteenth century, and especially during the time that Brassey visited, the volcano was in an especially active period with rapid geologic changes. As such, each monthly steamer from Honolulu brought a new crop of tourists into a landscape that was constantly moving and reforming itself dramatically. Views changed regularly. The lava lake from one year would be nonexistent the next. At the volcano, geologic time sped up. Changes in landscape were interpretable within the span of a visit. Brassey experienced wonder when, on Christmas morning, she awoke in her room at Volcano House, and looked out her window to a frightening scene: “a river of glowing lava issued from the side of the bank we had climbed with so much difficulty yesterday, and slowly but surely overflowed the ground we had walked over” (239). Her wonder at the rapid change and near miss instigates her to wake her sleeping husband beside her. She tells her readers “you may imagine the feelings with which we gazed upon this startling phenomenon, which,

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard attributes the change in prose to exhaustion due to the hurried pace of the second part of the trip (72).

had it occurred a few hours earlier, might have caused the destruction of the whole party” (239). Those feelings that she invites readers to imagine are not entirely obvious, however, as she largely seems invigorated by her proximity to the volcano and its threat. The evening before, gathering crystals, she burns her gloves and her boots (235). She explains that she “had for some time been feeling hot and uncomfortable” and sees that “not two inches the beneath the surface, the grey lava on which we were standing and sitting was red-hot. A stick thrust through it caught fire, a piece of paper was immediately destroyed, and the gentlemen found the heat from the crevices so great that they could not approach near enough to light their pipes” (238). Overwhelmed with heat and exhaustion after a day of hiking in the heat in corsets, long skirts, and heeled boots, after “collapsing several times and fainting away twice,” she had had to “allow myself to be ignominiously carried up the steep precipice to the ‘Volcano House’ on a chair.” Despite her being put to bed immediately, the next morning she wakes “perfectly refreshed” (238). Brassey pushes herself to exhaustion in order to put herself as close as possible to the fire and the overwhelming heat and fumes. Instead of fatiguing her, it refreshes her, and the threat of imminent danger thrills her. She finds herself in bed each night exhausted and overwhelmed, but wakes refreshed and invigorated, and the verve with which she reports this change to her readers borders on being indecent, even inviting them into her marital bed to listen and imagine what she felt. Aboard the *Sunbeam*, Lord and Lady Brassey had bickered about rations of coal, and Lady Brassey had worried about being exposed to its destructive heat, yet at the volcano, she relishes the nearness of a much more destructive natural force and source of heat alongside her husband. At Kilauea, she is flooded with an excess of energy that she can witness, be overwhelmed by, and revel in with pleasure.

In the presence of the volcano, she finds herself temporarily unable to speak and to write. She laments that “no words could adequately describe such a scene” though she knows that the job ahead of her is to describe (237). Once she makes an effort, she feels that she must apologize for

the mere “faint impression” that her pages of description deliver (239). By making these statements, Brassey inserts herself into a longer history of writing about Kilauea, which requires that one say the scene is indescribable before attempting to describe it. Brassey had read Isabella Bird’s *Six Months in the Sandwich Islands* (1875) before her trip, and she read J.W. Boddam Whetham’s *Pearls of the Pacific* (1876) while she was staying in the Volcano House. Both had been recently published. Bird and Whetham had read accounts before theirs as well, most famously Mark Twain’s 1866 account of his visit to Kilauea in his letter to the *Sacramento Times*. In Bird’s *Six Months*, she explains how, in preparation to see the volcano, “I had been making up my mind for disappointment since we left the crater-house, in consequence of reading seven different accounts, in which language was exhausted” (54). Even with her self-preparation, Bird finds herself “speechless,” describing the sight as “the most unutterable of wonderful things.” She finds that “the words of common speech are quite useless” since the crater “is unimaginable, indescribable” (54). Whetham too, after several pages of description, complains “How unsatisfactory, therefore, must be an after-attempt at verbal description of such phenomena.” He takes up another common tactic, to ascribe defter powers of description to other writers by saying that to describe Kilauea accurately “requires, too, a more cunning pen than mine” (111). By announcing herself dumb in the face of the volcano, Brassey enters her account into a long-standing literary tradition of writing about Kilauea and of writing about the sublime. However, her decision to hide behind the accounts of others does more than merely communicate that she is overwhelmed by the volcano.

Brassey borrows heavily from both Bird’s and Whetham’s imagery, and she outright plagiarizes Bird’s account. She admits that she feels her “description is so utterly inadequate” and that Bird and Whetham’s are so good that “were it not for the space, I should be tempted to send you in full the experiences of previous visitors” (239). The discussion of “space” and the direct address of “you” point toward the epistolary origin of her account. This origin and the original

small, forgiving audience may help explain why Brassey felt emboldened to take imagery from Whetham and Bird and even steal snippets of their accounts to embed in her own. Bird had compared the sensation at the crater's edge to being onboard a sailing vessel: "We were able to stand quite near the margin, and look down into the lake, as you look into the sea from the deck of a ship, the only risk being that the fractured ledge might give way" (56). Brassey borrows this imagery, describing lava "dashing against the cliffs on the opposite side, with a noise like the roar of a stormy ocean" and observing that "waves of blood-red, fiery, liquid lava hurled their billows upon an iron-bound headland" (236). In the crater, Bird sees that "eleven fire fountains were playing joyously" (55), Brassey "seven fire-fountains playing simultaneously" (237). Whetham had described the crater as "like the full, heavy, suppressed breathing of some chained monster striving to get free from the molten torrent that lapped around it" (106). Brassey writes that the lava "suggested the idea that some imprisoned monsters were trying to release themselves from their bondage" (237).<sup>4</sup> In order to manage her excess of feeling and her inability to express it, she plagiarizes Bird's prose and borrows both Bird's and Whetham's imagery to shape her own narrative.

In order to better understand Brassey's imitation of other writers and omission of her own description of the crater, it is helpful to look more closely at the point of view of tourism presented by the authors she relied on. Though their accounts were published only within a year of one another, Bird and Whetham fashion themselves as two markedly different kinds of tourists. Both Bird and Whetham see themselves as superior to other visitors, but their criteria for what makes them stand out could not be more different. Bird finds superiority in having a moving, emotional,

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<sup>4</sup> It is unknown whether or not Brassey read Twain's account, but she certainly uses an image similar to his. Twain writes of the crater that, "I thought it just possible that its like had not been seen since the children of Israel wandered on their long march through the desert so many centuries ago over a path illuminated by the mysterious 'pillar of fire.'" Upon first seeing the crater, Brassey describes that it "hovered before and above us like the Israelites' pillar of fire" (233). This image is less suspect than her copying of Whetham's and Bird's, though it is possible that she read Twain's account before her visit, as Whetham had done. Though Whetham relies heavily on Twain, he makes no mention of a "pillar of fire" in his account.

immediate relationship with the volcano, Whetham in glib distance, lighthearted irony, and invoking what he perceives as the same affect in Mark Twain's account, thereby authorizing himself by mimicking a more established writer before him. Bird is put off by the ironic verse and irreverent drawings she finds in the Volcano house registers, describing them as "an immense quantity of flippant rubbish, and would-be wit." She declares, "It is wonderful that people can parade their snobbishness within sight of Hale-mau-mau [crater at Kilauea]" (57). Whetham, too, mocks the registry entries, but he mocks their ignorance and sincerity, specifically that each person feels that his or her experience is grander than anyone else's had ever been before, "Each visitor, in turn, had apparently seen a more splendid volcanic display than his predecessor, and had thought fit to write down his impressions in the most high-flown language, invariably accompanied by the most atrocious spelling" (101). Whetham derides not the irony and insincerity, as Bird did, but its opposite—the innocence, earnestness, and lack of self-awareness of the registers.<sup>5</sup> His own account of the volcano uses overblown, bombastic description—"blood-red rocks" that were "vomited high into the air" and then "fall back hissing into the awful gulf"—intent on wringing out a metaphor and thus belying his refusal to see the volcano in an unmediated way (107). For example, though staying in a room at the Volcano house with a window overlooking the crater, he prefers to keep his drapes shut. The light from the volcano had kept him awake at night (107). The difference between Whetham's and Brassey's preferred point of view is significant. Whetham closes off the ability to see from a point of view that has not already been authorized by a more powerful man. Brassey spends all of her evenings exhausted, unconscious, overwhelmed, and excited in her room, peering

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<sup>5</sup> Twain's account greatly influenced Whetham, and there is little that is not borrowed in some way from it. He suggests that Twain's "capital burlesque" of the registers would prevent people from writing in them in the future, as "a perusal of [the registers] might deter these composers from again defacing good writing paper" (101). Whetham mimics Twain's observations, including the registry entrants' need to one-up those who had written before them as well as Twain's more serious, biblical imagery. Twain's account is remarkable for how it recognizes and lovingly mocks the tradition of Kilauea's representation at the same time that it offers original visual imagery and a sincere account of how he was moved by his visit. Whetham picks up only the mocking tone, and his own account parrots this removed position without including a sincere impression.

at the crater from what Mary Louise Pratt would call her “room sized empire” (160). Though Brassey relies on both Bird and Whetham to fashion her account of her immediate experience at the crater, she ultimately prefers Bird’s sincerity and disdain for irony to Whetham’s distanced glibness.

It is ironic, then, that Brassey, who seems to value sincerity and immediate experience, plagiarizes Bird and copies Whetham’s imagery instead of providing her own unmediated response to her experience at Kilauea. She is able to describe her travel to the Volcano house, her hike through the crater, and even her fainting episode in her own words. When faced with the intensity of the crater itself, she resorts to propping up her description with others’ language. We might understand Brassey’s plagiarism as more than just lazy, unimaginative writing. Writing about Kilauea, which, at the time of her writing, was already a very popular tourist attraction, required referencing those who had written about the experience before. Twain wrote one of the first published tourist accounts, but even it is fully aware of the hundreds of others who had informally recorded their visit before him in the registers. By the time he writes to the *Sacramento Bee* in 1866, he already has to be cynical about his impression in order not to just repeat the stupefied visitors trying to one-up each other in the Volcano House registers. Brassey’s copying of her sources can therefore be understood as an extreme example of how fundamentally imitative travel writing is as a genre and how tourism from its beginning has been defined by imitation—seeing the exact same thing those before had seen, being moved in the “right” way, and, for travellers travelling places outside the nation, reporting back on the natives in ways that authorize esteemed accounts that had gone before.<sup>6</sup> Understanding Brassey’s preference for Bird’s sincerity and the uniqueness of it

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<sup>6</sup> Jack London’s homage to Herman Melville in *Cruise of the Snark* (1911) illustrates this phenomenon well. *Cruise of the Snark* collects London’s journalistic writing as he and his family cruised the Pacific. London seeks out the Taipi valley on Nuku Hiva island in the Marquesas, made famous as the valley in *Typee* (1846), in order to fulfill a childhood dream of “finding another Fayaway and another Kory-Kory,” referring respectively to *Typee*’s protagonist’s ever-topless lover and his island valet (105). London prefers Melville’s island to the real one: “‘Taipi the chart spelled it, and spelled it correctly, but I prefer ‘Typee,’ and I shall always spell it ‘Typee’” (104). Even though Melville’s novel only obliquely mentions cannibalism, London interprets this passage as fact that “two generations ago, [Melville] witnessed the bodies of slain Happar warriors, wrapped in palm-leaves, carried to banquet at the ‘Ti” (107). Because London was funding his

among the published body of accounts of Kilauea explains her heavy reliance on it. It is possible even to read Brassey's plagiarism of Bird (somewhat) reparatively: as a clumsy homage, a lazy invocation of sisterhood.

It is clear that Brassey is deeply moved by her visit to the crater, and not only because she fainted. She spends many more pages narrating the details of her visit and her observations than she does throughout the rest of the work. Brassey feels her way through an experience that has already predetermined by the conventions of tourism while she manages an excess of feeling outside of what can be contained by the language that is appropriate or accessible to record such an experience. In *Bird*, she finds another woman who shares a sense of being overwhelmed, who, overcome herself after her crater visit, proclaims, "I can hardly write soberly after such a spectacle" (52). Both Bird and Brassey eschew the cynicism that had come to define descriptions of Kilauea by the time they both visited. The cynicism of a writer like Whetham belies the fact that predetermined touristic language prevents access to an immediate relationship with beauty, terror, and awe. Frustrated, Brassey resorts to plagiarism of Bird, who uses sincere, direct prose, all the while complaining of its limitations. In this way, *Voyage* draws a private curtain across Brassey's thoughts and feelings. Her hiding behind the accounts of others is, partly, an inability or reluctance to enter her own experience into this tradition. This failure or reluctance might be interpreted as, at least in part, an unwitting resistance to the touristic-colonial gaze that assumes that humans control both natural resources and natural forces. In a genre that promises always to reveal, *Voyage* does not allow access to private thoughts. By doing so, it subverts cynicism in encountering otherness and in representing overwhelming experiences.

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trip by sending home these accounts for publication in *Pacific Monthly* and *Harper's Weekly*, he no doubt felt pressure to witness what was expected of him and to report home "correctly."

As a tourist today in Hawaii, it is easy to find copies of London's *South Sea Tales* or Bird's *Six Months in the Sandwich Islands* in the gift shops of national parks and local museums.



In an entry dated January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1865, Mr. L. L. Torbert wrote in the Volcano House register, “What a pity the heat, in part, of old Kilauea cannot be divided among the sugar planters for making steam.” Torbert looks at the volcano and thinks about how the excess energy can be bridled for human needs; Brassey looks with different eyes. While on board ship and at the volcano, Brassey has a fear and respect for unharnessed energy. The same anxiety she had had about the coal beneath her feet onboard the *Sunbeam* transfers into fascination with her proximity to danger at the volcano. In *Voyage* coal, like the volcano, burns just to burn, outside of human control. This way of thinking challenges the jaded point of view of a writer like Whetham, who is unimpressed by the raw energy of the volcano and focuses instead on being a cynical, and therefore in his mind, superior, tourist. In thinking about humans’ relationship to unharnessed energy over the span of the anthropocene, Brassey’s awe and fascination seems more appropriate. We can see over time that the energy held in fossil fuels has done more than power steam engines to make trans-oceanic voyages; it is warming the earth. That is, we now know that the energy within fossil fuels, like the energy within the volcano, has never been within human control, and the distancing cynicism in a writer like Whetham prefigures what Timothy Morton refers to as “the dominant ideological mode of our age.” On the other hand, a writer like Brassey (and her greatest influence, Isabella Bird) models “the impossibility of maintaining cynical distance” and the “dissolution of the notion of *world*” (*Hyperobjects* 24). Brassey is disoriented and confused. She faints, she obscures, she hides. She does not feign clarity of sight but instead represents beauty and terror through her partial vantage point. Her account demonstrates the impossibility of seeing as a tourist in any way outside of what has already been represented, but argues, in its own strange way, that one should look nonetheless.

## Silence and Listening After Kilauea

Brassey's withholding of interpretation plays out in a different, more apparent way in her interaction with a pregnant native woman on her way to the volcano. Like most visitors on their way to the crater, the party stopped at the "Halfway House" for refreshment before continuing on. While there, she sees this event:

A woman dressed in a pink *holokeu* [modest day dress] and a light green apron had followed us hither from the cottages we had first stopped at, and I noticed at the time that, though she was chatting and laughing with a female companion, she did not seem very well. Whilst we were at lunch a sudden increase to her family took place, and before we were ready to start I paid her and her infant a visit. She was then sitting up, apparently as well as ever, and seemed to look upon the recent event as a very light matter. (233)

Brassey does interpretive work here. She assumes that, because the woman is "chatting and laughing," she is not in much pain. She assumes too the "increase" is "sudden," even though the woman may have been in labor for hours. Her use of "apparently" and "seemed" in the final sentence suggests that the birth and recovery are easy for the mother, and they indicate that Brassey is aware that she is placing her interpretation on the event. However, this is the only interpretation she provides. There is a slight, primitivist suggestion here too that native women are in some way more equipped for childbirth. Though it is hinted at, Brassey never explicitly theorizes about native women's capacity, nor does she do what the majority of other travel writers about the Pacific do in these circumstances, which is explain why something that she sees is so. She sees it, records it, offers a thin interpretation, and then moves on.

Her thin interpretation does not mean that she is not moved. On her return, the party stops again at the Halfway House, and she attempts to visit the new mother in a nearby cottage, but the woman has gone out. Brassey records "we afterwards found her playing cards with some of her

friends in a neighbouring hut” (240). On this second visit, post-Kilauea, she offers even less explanation or judgment of the “young mother whose case had interested me so much,” only describing her as “cheerful” (240). It is clear in her attention to this young woman—seeking her out while they were merely stopping over for a few hours and writing about her twice in her account—that she found her resilience after labor and freedom to move around impressive, yet Brassey does not say so. She merely offers description and the slightest gesture toward interpretation and leaves it to the reader to complete the judgment or to come to her own conclusions. Part of the reason that this is possible is the genre she is writing in. As a Victorian upper-class woman whose original audience was her close family and friends, she is able to presume shared values and the assumption that she and her audience would reach the same conclusions without them being overtly expressed. Yet, as in this moment, those conclusions are not always entirely clear, especially since Brassey encounters this woman at least partially outside of a touristic space. In the ways that she enfold[s] the woman into her social realm—visiting her, describing her as being at a card party—she does not make of her a primitive example. Bauman has described how the tourist “meets the natives in the shops at the other side of the counter, in the restaurants bringing dishes from the kitchen” or “watch[es] the natives as a spectacle—selling their ‘otherness’ to tourists, making their living by selling their culture as spectacle” (213). Brassey first encounters this woman as a tourist. Brassey is a lady having lunch in a place intended for travellers, yet she afterwards seeks out the woman in the woman’s own space, where she is not attending tourists. Because this is a scene that is entirely new to her, one that has not been represented in the accounts of Hawaii she had read before visiting, she is able to write her own version, and yet it includes silence too. Though her silence can be interpreted as a presumption that her interpolated audience already knows the conclusion to reach, there is also a suggestion here of the possibility of listening and witnessing without needing to arrive at a conclusion. Here Brassey is comfortable listening instead of explaining, and sitting with the

discomfort of difference, allowing herself to be impressed, without needing to rationalize and explain it in order to control it.

The kind of experience Brassey and her party shared at the crater and that Brassey had herself in her visit with the young mother, would become, over the course of the next few decades, less and less accessible to other visitors. As it attracted more and more visitors, their movements were restricted in the interest of safety. There were fewer burned gloves and walking sticks, fewer fainting women and fewer opportunities to be overcome by smoke inhalation. Kilauea remained popular, but transitioned into a background for good photos. The Volcano House was remodeled a few years after Brassey's visit, and the permeable grass walls were replaced with clapboard ones. The experience of danger and of being overwhelmed by unharnessed natural energy became less available, and the sincerity embraced by Bird and copied by Brassey was overshadowed by a gradually increasing tone of irony over the course of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whetham and his ilk prevail. Tourists begin "toasting" postcards in the cracks of the lava. By the 1920's, there is a "Kilauea Golf Course" with the Halemaumau crater as the nineteenth "hole." For the increasing number of visitors, the crater is fashioned less as a place to inspire wonder and awe and more of a kitschy relic, non-threatening to humans and cordoned off behind fences and paved pathways. Today, in the gift shop, one can purchase children's Hawaiian shirts covered in images of exploding energy and fire, the same sight that had threatened, excited, and terrified Brassey from her window a century before. One can still stay in the Volcano House, which has been rebuilt and remodeled numerous times, but today, the large white rooms largely serve as a place to briefly shelter hundreds of cruise ship guests waiting to begin their guided tours.

The evolution of tourism at Kilauea speaks to a larger fiction of controlled environmental threat within literature and travel writing from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an aloofness that eclipses the tragedy of human beings creating their own destruction. Here, they are

flooded with energy and black burning rock spewing seemingly from the center of the earth, and it is overwhelming. When faced with the vision outside their window and the reality that they are not in control of this power, some, like Boddam Whetham, choose to distance themselves with irony and rest easy (with closed drapes) in the tradition of making fun of other people who also visited but felt something more. Bird and Brassey let themselves be overwhelmed, and, even though it cannot always be expressed, this position is ethical in that it allows for space outside of tourist-colonial interpretation. Though Arrhenius discovered that the use of coal was having an effect upon the global ecosystem at the end of the nineteenth century, it would not be until the middle of the twentieth century that anthropogenic global change would be widely accepted by scientists (Chakrabarty “Climate” 199). Knowing what we know now, we can today read Brassey’s anxiety about her supply of coal running out as a fitting metaphor for humans’ dependence on fossil fuels. Likewise, we can interpret the smelting ship, the *MonksHAVEN*, as a metaphor for capitalist consumption, a party about to be consumed by the resources by which they want to voyage profitably. Looking back at images of early female guests knitting by the fire at the edge of the crater, we see domesticated fuel consumption as the scene of safety and warmth, humans unaware that they were already burning themselves up, eventually preventing human life from being possible on the earth. The fire and the heat of the future, and the resultant floods and storms, will not be—are not—as cheery and innocent as the one these early visitors sat around.

Overall, Brassey’s account elicits a feeling that there is something unknowable and inexpressible, a sense of attraction and deep pleasure in being overcome by the violent and threatening conditions of entering the volcano and, at the same time, a feeling of uneasiness and wonder. The object of this fascination is the uncontrolled energy she sees in front of her, but she did not know *how* uncontrolled and threatening the energy around her, in the form of coal, truly was. Thus, withholding interpretation and being silent allows her account of being overwhelmed to

resonate beyond her contemporaries. Brassey does not—cannot—see what is right in front of her, even as she studies it carefully. Within a colonialist tradition of travel writing that assumes an outsider’s objective, totalizing position, Brassey’s hesitation to be authoritative offers an unlikely, but apt model of confronting overwhelming environmental catastrophe and human’s vulnerability to the mismanagement of fossil fuels.

## “Imperfect Observation”: Routledge and the Deforestation of Rapa Nui

In 1913, Rapa Nui (Easter Island) had infrequent visitors, yet Katherine Routledge travelled in the wake of hundreds of writers before her.<sup>7</sup> The majority of these writers saw in Rapa Nui what they had seen in the Pacific as a whole: a civilization in decline, wracked by disease, and on the verge of collapse. These travellers gazed out mournfully over the imminent loss of a precious, untouched, original human experience made inaccessible due to modernity. Though Routledge had read many of these accounts, in *Mystery*, she approaches her subjects with a matter-of-fact curiosity and brevity that is atypical and refreshing. The difference in her writing style is evident in how differently from Brassey she writes about her visit to the Kilauea crater, which the *Mana* stopped at on its way back from Rapa Nui. In contrast to Brassey’s verbose description of Kilauea, Routledge says simply, “It is a fascinating spectacle which could be watched for hours” (325). She is moved, but, unlike Brassey (or Bird), her writing is concise and efficient. At the same time, her brevity does not imply she is ironic or detached. Instead of paragraphs of flowery description and extended metaphors, she says only “No photograph gives any idea of the impressiveness of the scene, particularly after dark” (325). Routledge is a traveller moving in a different age and in different

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<sup>7</sup> These include the accounts of the Dutch navigator Jacob Roggeveen, (the first known European to visit Rapa Nui), the Spanish captain Don Felipe Gonzalez de Ahedo, English explorer Captain James Cook, and Captain Beechey of *HMS Blossom*.

circumstances. She writes to readers who may have already seen photographs or read descriptions of what she sees: “Instead of the long ride described by Lady Brassey, visitors, landing at the port of Hilo, are now conveyed in motors to a comfortable hotel, on the edge of the crater” (325).

Routledge and her readers may not be ladies like Brassey, but they have read her. Her understated, concise style and her assumption of prior knowledge signal her as a new, modern travel writer, a woman who writes candidly, but with measured description, who does not feel tethered to tradition, a person poised to explain Pacific history to the modern west.

From the beginning, Routledge is clear that she has no perfect vantage point. She admits the limitations of what she calls “imperfect observation” (201). Instead of seeing herself as an outsider peering down at a separate and distinct other culture, she sees her and her party’s presence in Rapa Nui as a part of a longer history of human influence upon the landscape:

The cairns put up by us to mark the distances for rifle fire from the camp were indistinguishable from those of prehistoric nature made for a very different purpose. The result is that the tumble-down remains of yesterday, and the scenes of unknown antiquity blend together in a confusing whole in which it is not always easy to distinguish even the works of nature from those of man. (211)

The neat division of prehistory and modernity is collapsed, like a stack of rocks, into a “confusing whole.” On Rapa Nui, the past and the present are not so easily distinguished, nor are the results of human influence versus those done by “works of nature.” What is old and what is new? What is a ruin and what is a part of the landscape? What is human? Observation, for Routledge, is not scientific but subjective, at least for the present. Though she understands that the “confusing whole” and “imperfect observation” are precursors to inquiry, she writes as if she believes in the possibility of a future in which “the mysteries [will] have been solved,” wherein “it will no doubt be easy to see where they have been founded on fact, and where error has crept in, and essential points

distorted or forgotten” (277). She predicts there will be a future without mystery, but, curiously, Routledge does not assume that her writing will be a part of it.

From the title, we might expect *The Mystery of Easter Island* to be another Orientalized tale, stocked with inscrutability and soon-to-vanish prehistoric ways of life. What is remarkable about her writing is that, though it is primed with mystery, it does not follow the expected path that we see in so many other accounts of Pacific contact. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Rapa Nui population was in crisis, having fallen to 250 after years of exposure to western diseases and slave raids. Many of the elders that she interviewed died during her time on the island, including Tomenika, the leper who Routledge hoped would help her interpret *rongorongo*, or native Rapa Nui script. Throughout *Mystery*, Routledge is confronted with material that would have fed perfectly into the history of imperial representation of the Pacific as a place forever on the verge of extinction, yet she maintains her reserved and matter-of-fact style. She resists the fall into these tropes and shows that she is comfortable forestalling a story and leaving a conclusion indeterminate and open. Her approach gives her access to a different way of collecting information and a different, productive frame through which to look at history and culture, especially in light of later revelations and controversy surrounding the deforestation of Rapa Nui. Routledge may have seen her work contributing to a future full of knowledge of the past—a future that takes place “when the mysteries have been solved”—but instead, I argue here, in the present today, when the mysteries will never be solved, we might look to *Mystery* as a model for how to approach what cannot or should not be interpreted. Specifically, we might read Routledge to see how interpreting environmental catastrophe comes to bear on indigenous history.

Routledge de-mystifies Rapa Nui by representing it as very much a part of the global present. Instead of telling another tale of the desolate, vanishing civilization on a remote island in the middle of the Pacific, Routledge undermines the genre she is writing in by orienting the island within the



context of World War I. The expedition realizes that something is amiss when a fleet of German war ships, including the *Dresden*, anchor themselves offshore and will not share newspapers (152-3). The *Dresden*, running out of coal, chooses to shelter in the Juan Fernandez Islands, and once leaving, is attacked and scuttled in the Battle of Más a Tierra, the first naval conflict of World War I. Thus, the Routledge expedition's archaeological work takes place with global naval conflict in the background, sometimes literally. The result is that the narrative cannot fetishize Rapa Nui as a place removed from the rest of the world. Instead, it is incorporated into a larger story of modern conflict and political scrambling. Rapa Nui becomes a stopping point, an island in the middle of the sightline of global war, enfolded in its doings and its consequences. The war's presence in *Mystery* not only makes Rapa Nui less remote, but also ironizes the idea that western civilization civilizes or that it is more evolved. Routledge tells her readers, "It must be remembered that there was no reason to suppose that [the war in Europe] was otherwise than civilized warfare, the idea that anyone could or would injure non-combatants on neutral soil never seriously occurred to me" (158). The narrative decision to include her own partial vision of the development of the war disorients readers, and hints at a larger question that will preoccupy the rest of the narrative: in global modernity, who are the internecine warriors mismanaging and depleting their resources through violent conflict?

Routledge challenges the expectations of her genre with her abbreviated, direct writing style, by resisting the remote island fetish, and by anchoring the history of Rapa Nui in the contemporary moment. In addition, she demonstrates that she is invested in and attuned to listening in a way that demonstrates she is comfortable in not knowing the whole story. It is clear that Routledge had read other accounts of travel in the Pacific, but, in most cases, she does not seem to expect to see what others before her have. One of the clearest moments of this tendency is when she asks a group of Rapa Nui about a particular cave, and they tell her the story of Ko Tori, the last known cannibal on

the island. For a would-be ethnographer interested in collecting information for the British museum, this interaction would be an opportunity to confirm previous reports. She begins in this way, asking the men questions that would help determine when cannibalism had last been practiced: “‘Did your grandfather know him,’ was asked, ‘or your father?’” (226). In response, the men shock her by revealing that one of the men sitting with her there had known Ko Tori and helped carry his bones for burial. In other words, the practice was something much more immediate than she realized. Though at first her “heart sank” with this knowledge, she is quickly relieved to learn that the men are teasing her. She finds “to my great relief” that the party began to laugh, “gasping between sobs” and “suffocating with mirth” because “Ko Tori goes in a basket to England” (226). Here, they briefly pull the wool over her eyes, suggesting that modern Easter Islanders are aware of the representation by westerners and are in on the joke. Routledge records another moment where Rapa Nui tease her about westerners’ assumptions. When her “husband pointed out the good results which would accrue from planting some trees in village territory,” she records one man’s “ingenuous reply:” “Kanakas no like work, Kanakas like sit in house” (141). Instead of offering reasons for why her husband is correct, instead of instructing, or judging, or analyzing, she listens and records. Her matter-of-fact style, her disinterest in reproducing an Orientalized Pacific, and her propensity to listen and record what she hears distinguishes her account from most imperial travel writing about Oceania.

## **Not Seeing the Forest for the Trees**

The deforestation of Rapa Nui was unknown to Routledge when she visited, yet its shadowy presence in her account suggests the possibilities of representation when one listens differently and attentively. At the time that Routledge visited Rapa Nui, the landscape looked much like it does today, covered in scrub brush and rolling hills. What Routledge did not know is that up until the

late eighteenth century the island had been densely wooded. The explanation for the deforestation of Rapa Nui is a controversial issue within current archaeology. The conventional understanding, made popular by anthropologist Jared Diamond in his popular book *Collapse* (2005), is that the Rapa Nui mismanaged their local ecosystem, cutting down large indigenous palms in order to transport the large *moai* (statues) on a series of wooden rollers. This theory reasons that, as the palms became more scarce, the Islanders could build no new canoes, and so they lost their ability to fish and travel to other islands. By the time the Spanish arrived in the late eighteenth century, the island was in further decline (106-8). Recently, two professors at the University of Hawaii, Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo, have read the archaeological record differently and proposed that the deforestation of Rapa Nui was caused largely by the introduction of rats brought from European ships. Hunt and Lipo interpret the gradual deforestation of Rapa Nui as a story of survival by a group of people faced with ecological crisis (53-4). There is no consensus among established anthropologists and archaeologists, though it seems that a significant majority disagree with Hunt and Lipo's reading.<sup>8</sup>

Hunt and Lipo offer an interpretation of Rapa Nui history that interrupts the idea of the foolish natives who do not know how to manage resources. Their theory offers a contradictory reading of human presence on the island, one of survival within the landscape that undoes the old tale of western intellectual dominance. For Diamond and others who share the conventional reading, the decline of Rapa Nui's ecosystem is a cautionary tale for the rest of the world, an anthropocene horror story that Diamond says "haunts my readers and students" as "the parallels between Easter Island and the whole modern world are chillingly obvious" (119). The problem with

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<sup>8</sup> Critics of Hunt and Lipo argue that their work takes liberties with data, and their research does not accurately reflect the archaeological record. See Diamond's response to their work, "The Myths of Easter Island: Jared Diamond Responds." For Hunt and Lipo's counter-response to Diamond, see "The Easter Island Ecocide Never Happened: Response to Jared Diamond." For an earlier version of Diamond's argument, see Bahn and Flunkey's *Easter Island, Earth Island*. For another work that emphasizes colonial interference instead of native mismanagement of sources, see Boersema's *The Survival of Easter Island*. For a good example of the archaeological objections to Diamond's argument, see Peiser's "From Genocide to Ecocide: The Rape of Rapa Nui" *Energy and Environment*.

this reading is that the reasons for deforestation obscure the primary reasons for the *depopulation* of Rapa Nui, which had largely to do with slave raiding and western diseases, not ecological decline. In Hunt and Lipo's version, Rapa Nui is a positive example for how to endure inevitable ecological change in an ecosystem altered by colonial intrusion, and it sees ecological degradation both alongside and as an extension of colonial exploitation. For Hunt and Lipo, Rapa Nui was depopulated by slave raids, western diseases, and deforestation due to western ships bringing rats. Whether or not one accepts their controversial theory that rats caused deforestation, one must accept that the primary causes for population decline and the suppression of Rapa Nui traditional culture were directly caused by western exploitation. What Hunt and Lipo offer is a way out of the colonized reading of Rapa Nui as only a cautionary tale, as merely a site of a dissipated race forever in decline.

Given Routledge's attentiveness and fastidiousness in recording her experiences on Rapa Nui, it is all the more surprising that there is a huge blind spot in her vision in regards to Rapa Nui deforestation. She simultaneously notices the ghost of the presence of wood all around her, yet she accepts as fact the previous western accounts that the island had never been wooded. The desire for wood preoccupies her account. One of the first things Routledge records, as they are making their way into the harbor, is the "despairing voice" of the ship's cook who says, "I don't know how I am to make a fire on that island, there is no wood!" (124). The ship's crew is greeted by one of the only westerners on the island, Mr. Edmunds, who manages the sheep farm that comprises the majority of held land. He begins their conversation with an ominous and slightly disturbing discussion of the lack of wood on the island, telling the story of a shipwreck whose crew washed up on Rapa Nui. He muses that "it is maddening to think of that cargo drifting about in the Pacific," as the wrecked ship was made of wood. He jokes that he hopes that "next time a ship breaks up with a deck-load of timber, she will have at least the commonsense to do so near Easter Island." As if he cannot

contain himself, Edmunds tells Katherine and her husband “I wish you no ill, but the yacht would make a splendid wreck” (128). The sentiment, however much in jest, has sinister overtones and introduces early on how precious and rare wood is on the island even in the early twentieth century. The irreverent greeting subtly introduces the struggle for possession of wood with catastrophe and death.

The connection between wood and survival serves as another backdrop of *Mystery*. Global war and the fight for control of resources loom just over the horizon. On the island, the need for wood shadows the party’s task of uncovering Rapa Nui’s land and its history. While the expedition is out mid-day, the crew becomes scorched with no place to take shelter in the hot tropic sun, “...the neighbourhood was scoured for miles to find the smallest atom of shade” (167). The crew must learn to adapt to life without firewood: “The lack of firewood was met by using oil; when, late, we had to economise in that commodity, it was supplemented by collecting dried manure. The natives use brushwood or anything they can pick up” (137). First using an imported commodity as a substitute—oil—the expedition then turns to a local (though not native) resource—sheep manure. Routledge describes how native Rapa Nui use brushwood as fuel, yet it is unclear why the expedition does not follow suit. Nor does she explain what “anything they can pick up” could possibly refer to. It is as though there is something else that should be there, but is not.

Routledge is an attentive, empathetic observer, and she attempts to read the history of the landscape even before landing. As they sail into harbor, she also notices that “not a vestige of timber or even brushwood was to be seen” (124). Later on, she is more explicit: “Forest growth has probably never consisted of more than brushwood and shrubs, and to-day even those have disappeared” (133). Routledge bases her assumptions on previous accounts by other travelers. She describes how the first Europeans to visit the island, during the expedition of the “Dutch Admiral named Roggeveen,” “left us short descriptions. There were, they say, no big trees, but it had a rich

soil and good climate” (200). Even as she describes the accounts of previous travelers, she reminds readers that “...all the visits were of very short duration, and that the old voyagers were not trained observers” (205). She even suggests that many were simply parroting what they had read, tourist-style: “...in most cases the narrators have read those of their predecessors and go prepared to see certain things” (205). She recognizes that to visit a place is to see it through the eyes of those who have been before you, yet, in this case, despite having evidence otherwise, she reads the landscape through the authorized accounts of early explorers and travelers.

Though she sees the landscape through the eyes of former travelers, there is evidence laced through her account that the island had once been wooded. As she describes the geography of the island early on, she explains that “The place is geologically young. . .there are no ravines, no wooded precipices, no inaccessible heights, but round the whole coast erosion is at work” (131). The simplest explanation for erosion is deforestation, but instead she reads it as evidence that Rapa Nui is “young.” She reads it this way even though she also records evidence that erosion had sped up in recent history, suggesting that it is the result of a rapid ecological change: “An old man, whose testimony was generally reliable, stated, when speaking of the figures on the outside of the mountain, that while those nearer the sea were in the same condition as he always remembered them, those farther from it were now more deeply buried than in his youth” (183). Information arises that would lead one to believe that the island had once been wooded, and she records this information even if she does not reach this final conclusion. Instead, she defers to the accounts of those who had written histories before her who describe the island as though it had always been barren.

As her daily work changes, her misreading of the island’s landscape becomes almost absurd, as she literally begins to concentrate each day on pieces of wood, wooden tablets on which *rongo rongo* glyphs are written as well as small wooden sculptures of human figures. The tablets and the small

wooden statues are the sole objects, besides the large stone *moai*, that remain of traditional Rapa Nui art. Wood, therefore, is largely the medium that houses the remains of their civilization and culture, their art and writing. Routledge devotes chapters to both wooden carvings and “the script,” yet she never questions or even acknowledges that these articles are made with wood on an island without any. If she believes that “Forest growth has probably never consisted of more than brushwood and shrubs” (133), it is curious why she does not consider where the wood needed for their art and writing came from. When she describes the history of *rongo*, she records that “It is said that the original symbols were brought to the island by the first-comers, and that they were on ‘paper,’ that when the paper was done, their ancestors made them from the banana plant, and when it was found that withered they resorted to wood” (244). If wood is such a precious resource, it would not be something to “resort” to or something more commonplace than banana leaves. In this case, Routledge’s work is characterized by both considerable attentiveness and yet also inexplicable blindness to what is right in front of her.

On one hand, not seeing the history of the island is a failure of interpretation, yet, on the other hand, there is way to read this blind spot reparatively, as a means to open up other ways of seeing. We might read this absence as a productive innocence, an unwittingly wise position that grows out of her openness to listen to and resist Orientalizing Pacific Islanders. Because she does not see Rapa Nui’s deforestation in its history, her vision of the island and its history is not an ecological cautionary tale for the modern world, as Diamond and his ilk espouse. Rapa Nui can be something else, something besides what experts, including Routledge, decide that it is, something potentially more determined by Rapa Nui themselves. Routledge’s benign ignorance need not, therefore, be defined as negligence. It comes from a place of withholding the final reading, the final claim, the assertion that is supposed to come, finally, based on the careful collection of evidence. Her response resists how other western visitors to the Pacific and other travel writers generally have

come to define the genre. Her way of seeing lacks the typical wild conjecture, the appropriation, the idea that the Other is somehow mystical because it is untranslatable. For this reason, she is able to see the Rapa Nui not as prehistoric ignorant people, but as fellow humans struggling to live amidst the ruins of their older way of life.

For Routledge, Rapa Nui live within her time, and she sees their art and writing existing within modernity. Rapa Nui are fellow artists and fellow writers alongside herself. Nowhere is this clearer than in her encounter with a leper, Tomenika, who Routledge is told is the last known reader and, assumedly, translator of *rongorongo*. Face to face with a dying native who contains the last thread of knowledge of a lost culture corrupted through contact with the west, Routledge finds herself at the center of a familiar plot line within western representation both of the Pacific and of colonial spaces in general. She has made it just in time to witness the very last iteration of writing before it dies out completely. Tomenika's leprous body adds an element of danger to her story. But in the midst of this potentially hackneyed plot, Routledge's description interrupts expected conclusions. Though the encounter is primed to be a morose meditation on modernity's corruption of innocence, her matter-of-fact prose deflates these expectations. She decides she must go, and asks herself "But how could one allow the last vestige of knowledge in Easter Island to die out without an effort?" The next sentence takes the wind out of this inflated rhetorical question and brings it back to practical matters: "So I went, disinfected my clothes on return, studied, must it be confessed, my fingers and toes, and hoped for the best" (212). She turns between grand description and practical, terse prose, too, when she explains that, despite continued effort, she and Tomenika are not able to communicate with one another. Routledge is frustrated: "It was tantalising to feel how near we were to their translation and yet how far" (243). Finally, she gives up and realizes that there is nothing more she can do to try to translate, nor will there ever be another person who can:



As the last interview drew to a close, I left the hut for a moment, and leant against the wall outside, racking my brains to see if there was any question left unasked, any possible way of getting at the information; but most of what the old man knew he had forgotten and what he dimly remembered he was incapable of explaining. I made one more futile effort, then bade him good-bye and turned away. It was late afternoon on a day of unusual calm, everything in the lonely spot was perfectly still, the sea lay below like a sheet of glass, the sun as a globe of fire was nearing the horizon, while close at hand lay the old man gradually sinking, and carrying in his tired brain the last remnants of a once-prized knowledge. In a fortnight he was dead. (253)

On the surface, it appears that this description is yet another moment within a longer history of witnessing rapidly vanishing Pacific culture, another scene of lost contact, of knowledge slipping over the horizon. She ponders the “old man gradually sinking” at the same time as she looks at the sun. She uses words like “last remnants” and “once-prized.” The description, not surprisingly perhaps, ends with his death. However, though the *rongorongo* script is inscrutable, she does not use this frustration as an opportunity to wax poetic on the inscrutability of the native, to say that there is something essentially inaccessible. By emphasizing her own actions, how she “rack[ed] her brains” and “made one more futile effort,” the account connects the failure of communication as an act between two people, not a condition of contact. In the end, it is she who turns away, and she does so reluctantly. After she turns, unable to read the tablet, she turns to the landscape and the sea and attempts to read them instead. Consider how her reluctance to theorize wildly or to use the script as a marker of abject otherness varies in comparison with how Paul Gauguin uses *rongorongo* in his painting *Merahi metua no Tehamana* (*Tehamana Has Many Parents*).<sup>9</sup> Even when she is face to face with

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<sup>9</sup> In this painting, Gauguin paints his “wife” Teha’amana in front of a background with *rongorongo* script. Teha’amana was Tahitian, and the title of the painting is also corrupted Tahitian, so the presence of Rapa Nui *rongorongo*, especially its connection with ancestral charts, is being used only as a symbol of inscrutability.

an arch symbol of the Pacific Islander in decline—the leper who cannot speak, on the verge of death, the sole inheritor of culture and tradition—she resists slipping into the expected tropes of her genre.

Routledge models an ethics in making the choice to “turn away” from what she could not understand rather than conjecture wildly, as so many before her had done and would do so afterward. Her resisting the formula that insists on explanation or fetishization leaves open an understanding and a respect for Rapa Nui people and history that is not accessible otherwise. Routledge is unable to disentangle what seems to be an ancient script from the modern corruption of it, and this frustrates the idea that the ancient script is somehow “pure” and made more so through being inaccessible.<sup>10</sup> Today, written *rongorongo* remains untranslated, and there is substantial debate within contemporary linguistics about whether or not the script arose before or after western contact.<sup>11</sup> Unsurprisingly, there is much at stake in these debates for Rapa Nui self-identity and cultural pride, just as there is in anthropological debates about the causes of deforestation. Is this writing, as the most skeptical linguists assume, the mere scribbling of innocents imitating their knowledgeable future masters? Or is this a tradition alongside western literature, evidence of intelligent spontaneous eruption of a script that is no longer accessible to anyone because of the

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the political implications of “heroic stories of language preservation” that “conceal the complexity of language loss, its causes and consequences” see Gikandi “The Fragility of Languages.” *Rongorongo* is also used to refer to spoken native Rapa Nui language, which is very much alive today and spoken by Rapa Nui, though its current iteration shows its integration with modern Tahitian. *Rongorongo* is unusual in that it inverts the usual condition of dead languages; it is spoken, but can no longer be read.

<sup>11</sup> Although Dutch explorers and Spanish galleons visited the island multiple times in the late sixteenth century, the script was not discovered by Europeans until 1866. However, a “deed of cession” exists where in Rapa Nui signed their names after a visit by the Spanish. If *rongorongo* did arise precontact, it would be determining evidence that there are multiple sources for human writing, a fact made all the more incredible because it is the only form of writing in the Pacific precontact (Robinson *Writing and Script* 48-51). Because these signatures do not resemble the *rongorongo* on the existing tablets, many linguists have suggested that the Rapa Nui were merely imitating western writers and that this early contact inspired them to develop a writing system of their own (Robinson *Writing and Script* 48-56). Some linguists even suggest that it is proto-writing and not a fully developed written language (Robinson *Lost Languages* 223-26). Because there are only two dozen tablets in existence, one of which is from the side of a Spanish galleon and another an oar, and because there will likely never be more found, and because the Rapa Nui language today is significantly integrated with Tahitian, most linguists assume that the likelihood that the tablets will ever be translated is slim (Robinson *Lost Languages* 230-241).

rapid decline of the intelligentsia due to slave raids and colonial exploitation? What is at stake in this debate is the assumption that if *rongorongo* is now inscrutable to white men in the academy, then it has always been inscrutable to everyone else, including native Rapa Nui—including Tomenika. Taken a step further, believing that Rapa Nui is merely derivative of European writing assumes that only white men can really read, that only white men can really see. By refusing to Orientalize their native script, Routledge lets Rapa Nui author their own texts. She herself bears the failure of translation. Rapa Nui are not the backdrop onto which she projects her own image of Oceania, as in Gauguin's *Tebaamana*, but are instead fellow writers striving to be understood by themselves and by others.

As a record of an excursion meant to supply information for the British museum, it is surprising the extent to which *Mystery* challenges deeply entrenched colonial hierarchies. What is civilization and what is its decline? What is remote and what is centered? What is prehistory and what is modernity? Her unwitting attention to wood's absent presence on the island demonstrates how her mode of inquiry helps break down simple divisions. Even before she arrives on Rapa Nui, when the couple has their wooden ship *Mana* built, Routledge notes that "the building of wooden walls is nearly extinct" as "ships are now built of steel" (6). Wood here is associated with an older technology, one that has been replaced but that the Routledges still prefer. Later on in her account, however, wood is associated with first contact and the bringing of civilization to Rapa Nui, as the Spanish "planted a cross" made of wood they dragged up the hill upon first arriving (202). Wood functions as both a powerful symbol both of civilization and also of a forgotten prehistory, and the two symbols merge and diverge throughout the text, signifying the past and the present. If Routledge believed that there had never been wood on the island, this wooden cross, which may or may not be the same wooden cross that she sees over the "Kanaka burying ground" (149) would be the introduction of large lumber. This would indicate Rapa Nui's integration into a global system of

trade, into modernity. Wood is associated with outside contact at the same time that it is associated with prehistoric tradition, as it is the medium through which pre-contact Rapa Nui history and culture are preserved. Routledge's intentionally withholding a final interpretation of *rongorongo* and her unintentional blind spot in regards to the deforestation of Rapa Nui work in tandem throughout *Mystery* to open space for different ways of interpreting Rapa Nui indigenous history as it relates to colonial contact's influence on environmental decline. By withholding and by not seeing, she models what it might look like to understand Rapa Nui as an island connected to the world, one whose history and cultural artifacts generate questions, but not a place that is only a cautionary tale or a mysterious, unknowable other. *Mystery* demonstrates that not to lift the veil is not to fetishize its existence; it can be a way of reading too. It says that there are some things that are not for you. The world is not a map laid out for one's pleasure, waiting to be discovered and known. Not every bone needs to be exhumed.

Both *A Voyage in the Sunbeam* and *The Mystery of Easter Island* model of way looking at overwhelming environmental, cultural spaces that resists the confident, totalizing, colonial view from above. Though Lady Brassey and Katherine Routledge traveled in a privileged network deeply entwined with colonialism, both women's reluctance to give a final conclusion or feign access to private spaces, including indigenous spaces, subverts the expectations of imperial travel narratives as documents that expose and provide intimate knowledge of what is otherwise off-limits. Brassey has an immediate, private relationship to the volcano, characterized by an excess of feeling, and this overwhelming feeling is connected to her withholding her own interpretation of what she sees and experiences. What Brassey does not say, or does not say herself, lays bare what it means to look at something beautiful, something moving, through the limitations of looking as a tourist. Likewise, Routledge intentionally withholds a final, definitive reading of *rongorongo* in her encounter with

Tomenika, resisting the easy fall into fetishizing the inscrutability of the native. At the same time, she unintentionally records and ignores evidence that Rapa Nui was thickly wooded before colonial contact, and her blind spot unwittingly engages contemporary debates about the reasons for Rapa Nui's deforestation as it relates to indigenous history. By not seeing, Routledge unknowingly extends the way she intentionally engaged with otherness in her encounter with native Rapa Nui. Both works privilege a partial point of view, one disorienting and confusing and obscured by legacies of travel accounts before them. They are comfortable with not possessing or offering perfect clarity of sight, only suggestions toward it. They argue, however, that we should still look nonetheless.

This comfort is not akin to burying one's head in the sand nor to willful ignorance. Both accounts' intentional withholding of final conclusions, theories, or interpretations of difference model an ethical approach to cultural exchange; yet, in thinking about how colonialism and tourism have depended on and affected the global environment over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the absence of a final conclusion can be understood in a broader, different light. Their withholding is a smaller part of a larger absence of interpretation. Reading both texts today, one sees the blind spot that is the environmental devastation already begun and facilitated by dependence on fossil fuels. Reading both texts as imperial tourist accounts of the beginning of what would become global environmental catastrophe brings to the surface the fact that, in the age of the anthropocene, we cannot always see what is right in front of us, even though we concentrate on it carefully.

## Chapter 4

# “Look on—make no sound”: Joseph Conrad’s *Victory* as Ecofeminist Petrotext

*‘I wonder, Lena,’ Heyst said . . . ‘whether you are just a little child, or whether you represent something as old as the world.’*  
--Victory

The protagonist of Joseph Conrad’s *Victory*, the shabby Swedish Baron Axel Heyst, lives on a solitary island amidst the ruins of an abandoned coal mine as if it were an Eden.<sup>1</sup> A gentleman-hermit, Heyst’s demeanor toward those beneath him—the island’s indigenous population, the sole remaining Chinese immigrant laborer on the island, and, later, his young English lover—mimics the benevolent arrogance of the European corporation that had sprung up, folded, and vanished from the island, leaving its ruins. *Victory* links gentlemanliness with the values of the capitalist-colonial machine, thereby undermining the benevolence of these values and revealing them to be inhuman positions. Much like the coal on the island, Heyst’s English lover, Lena, is treated as commodity—stolen, traded, shipped, and sexually enslaved. By seizing power from Heyst, Lena makes herself into an agent and takes herself out of circulation, though it costs her her life. Her victory leads to the restoration of the island ecosystem, the return of the island to its indigenous population, and the preservation of the coal beneath the earth. Lena’s resistance to the inhuman conditions of her enslavement demonstrates both the claims of ecofeminism—that the oppression of women is fundamentally related to the oppression of the natural world—and also the claims of material

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<sup>1</sup> The description of Samburan as a quasi-Eden is rampant in Conrad criticism. Eugene Hollahan calls Heyst and Lena “Edenic lovers” (359). Suresh Raval describes *Victory* as a “Conradian reworking of the Eden myth” (422). Bruce Johnson writes that “...the entire set of allusions to the Judeo-Christian myth is in any event meant to be analogical and basically to reverse the key conception of that story” (167)

ecocriticism—that the exchange of fossil fuels is intimately tied to human struggles for power and agency. This dissertation has argued for recognizing how limited and partial views of environmental destruction are ethical ways of seeing that counteract a colonial, arrogant, cynical, distance from above. Lena embodies this alternate point of view, and her unique place within global circulation in the novel offers an ideal place from which to understand feminist resistance to the intimate, human face of global capitalism and its dependence on fossil fuels.

## Why Read *Victory* Now?

*Victory*, once a major work within the Conrad canon, gradually fell out of favor over the course of the twentieth century. F.R. Leavis, in *The Great Tradition* (1948), included it, along with *The Secret Agent*, *Chance*, and *Under Western Eyes*, as one of Conrad's most important works, referring it "the one [novel] that answers most nearly to the stock notion of his genius" (220). Mid-century Conrad criticism established *Heart of Darkness* as the center of the "major phase" of Conrad's career, which came to be characterized as a long period of "achievement and decline."<sup>2</sup> In this shift, the late work was denigrated, one critic suggesting that "the time [had] come to drop *Victory* from the Conrad canon" (Guerard 275). In the first chapter of the new *Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, Andrew Purssell explains how these mid-century choices, which were focused on psychoanalytic readings of male characters, set the tone not only for Conrad criticism over the next few decades but also for the construction of the canon of English literature more generally. Purssell identifies the "American context and received interpretation of Conrad's novella" which, by focusing solely on white male protagonists' psychological experiences, invited justified critique like that launched by

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<sup>2</sup> See Moser's *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline*. In 1980, Gary Geddes was one notable voice of dissent, suggesting that the late work is experimental and presents "ironic romance" not soft "decline." See *Conrad's Later Novels*. Geddes' influences include Morton Zabel's "Joseph Conrad: Chance and Recognition" and John Palmer's *Joseph Conrad's Fiction: A Study in Literary Growth*.

Chinua Achebe in his seminal essay “An Image of Africa” in which he calls out Conrad as a “bloody racist” who turned Africans into “the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind” (Achebe 9). By the close of the century, feminist critics had begun to challenge the white male-centered readings, though the achievement and decline narrative endured. In *Conrad and Women* (1999), Susan Jones identifies the persistence of this mythic career arc and explains how the fashioning of Conrad as a “writer for men” “sanctioned the neglect of the *late* works” and argues that these late works are illustrative of Conrad’s “complex relationship” with his women characters (29). As scholars in the last twenty years have begun to locate Conrad historically and to read his work within its contexts of production, a bevy of feminist and postcolonial readings of Conrad have emerged. However, these new ways of reading Conrad have continued to focus on *Heart of Darkness* and works from Conrad’s “major phase,” and have paid less attention to Conrad’s later novels, including *Victory*. As work in the environmental humanities rises, *Victory* finds itself, what with its being set atop an unmined coal seam off the coast of Borneo in the Java Sea, newly relevant. *Victory* exemplifies what material ecocritics refer to as a “petrotext,” or a work of fiction that represents the interconnection between human agency and fossil fuels as “nonhuman *agents*” (Sullivan 417). *Victory* is ripe for this analysis. And, as a novel also about an indigenous population being resettled by a foreign corporation, an intelligent and cunning Chinese immigrant laborer seizing control over his white master, and a desperate young woman who comes to dominate her oppressors, it is likewise overdue for criticism that interweaves feminist and postcolonial concerns alongside an environmental critique.

Criticism has largely ignored the importance of the specific location of *Victory*. In *The Great Tradition*, Leavis writes that “. . . *Victory* is neither about the Malayan jungle nor about the sea” (209). Yet reading the human drama within the context of the significant changes in the trade economy of the Malay archipelago at the end of the century clarifies many narrative choices and brings to light



several underlying themes. *Victory* is as much about the Malayan jungle and the sea at the turn of the century as it is about anything. One of the biggest changes happening at the end of the century was that advancing steam technology, associated with large foreign corporations, replaced a culture of sailing, which was largely practiced by local, small-scale traders. As this happened, trained sailors were forced into different jobs. Moreover, as larger vessels travelled greater distances at greater speeds, the necessity for coaling stations arose (Francis 162). Instead of needing to bring the supply along with them, steaming vessels travelling from Europe to Asia could stop at a coaling station in Borneo or Singapore (Francis 162-3). Access to coal meant that large spaces could collapse and be enfolded into a single, trans-Pacific economy. Additionally, after the passage of the Acts of 1856 and 1862 entitled limited liability corporations to act as “a society of persons,” foreign commercial ventures in the region increased dramatically (Francis 161-2).<sup>3</sup> The invasion of foreign companies threatened existing trading culture on a different front. High-risk and fraudulent investments were common, and many of these ventures folded rapidly. *Victory*’s protagonist, the eccentric Swedish baron Axel Heyst, lives alone amidst the ruins of one such company, the Tropical Belt Coal Company, that had risen and fallen quickly. Though he had been its “manager in the east” for its flash in the pan, when “actually some coal [was] got out” he now lives alone, with his Chinese servant, Wang, in an abandoned bungalow on the site of the failed mine and coaling station (22). Heyst’s decision to attach himself to one of these companies, and his choice to continue to be physically present among its ruins, can be read as a choice to isolate himself in multiple ways from other traders in the region. His hermitage is one enabled by a particular moment in the history of trade and development in the Java Sea.

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<sup>3</sup> Francis elaborates further that “between 1856 and 1862 nearly 2,5000 companies were formed” and “by the end of the century some 5,000 companies were being formed annually.” He emphasizes the widespread “activities of fraudulent company promoters and the taking of excessive risk” (164). Mary Poovey explains that “of the seven thousand companies formed between 1844 and 1868, only. . .42 percent, still existed in 1868” (qtd in Francis 164).

From the opening paragraph of the novel, it is clear that Heyst's decision to live on Samburan has been determined and enabled by the region's changing dependence on coal.<sup>4</sup> The novel's opening introduces this intimate connection:

There is, as every schoolboy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as "black diamonds." Both these commodities represent wealth; but coal is a much less portable form of property. There is, from that point of view, a deplorable lack of concentration in coal. Now, if a coal-mine could be put into one's waistcoat pocket—but it can't! At the same time, there is a fascination in coal, the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel. And I suppose those two considerations, the practical and the mystical, prevented Heyst—Axel Heyst—from going away. (3)

Wealth held in coal is precarious. Because of its "deplorable lack of concentration," coal is "less portable" than a traditional commodity like diamonds. It is impractical in personal possession. After the failure of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, Heyst stays on the island, thereby acquiring the wealth of the coal by default, essentially by squatter's rights. Heyst continues to live, hermit-like, in the ruins of the Tropical Belt Coal Company because of "two considerations," one "practical"—the fact that his wealth is not portable—and the other "mystical," the draw of the coal itself—its "fascination." Like the rest of the modern world according to *Victory*, Heyst is "fascinat[ed]," or under its spell. On its first page, *Victory* announces itself as a novel about coal—and about man's dependence on it.

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<sup>4</sup> Francis shows how "the historically specific commercial context resists the narrator's amused detachment" and concludes "that Heyst the philosophizing wanderer should apparently achieve a measure of self-realization as the manager of a coal-mine is not merely ironic, nor to be explained as an aberration" (162).

Heyst ends up in Samburan because he has decided to master the negative philosophies espoused by his late father, a misanthropic, cynical philosopher who “had written a lot of books” (32). Two of his father’s admonitions in particular haunt the text: “he who forms a tie is lost” and, his father’s final words, “look on—make no sound” (165). After his father’s death, Heyst decides to remain untied and to “drift,” traveling throughout Indonesia for years, “flitting from tree to tree in a wilderness” (31). One day, he disobeys his dead father’s admonitions by crossing the street to see if a distant acquaintance needs help. This sets off a series of events that lead eventually to his becoming, briefly, the CEO of the Tropical Belt Coal Company. It fails quickly, but Heyst remains on the island, living contentedly in isolation among the ruins of the company, eschewing most human contact and interaction. This changes when, on a brief trip off the island, he encounters Lena, a desperate young English woman travelling with a women’s orchestra from hotel to hotel. Afraid of an unwanted sexual encounter with the hotelier, Schomberg, at whose hotel they are staying, Lena convinces Heyst to steal her away from the troop and take her back to his hermitage on Samburan. On the island, she and Heyst begin a romantic affair until a gang of three men, directed there by a jealous Schomberg, arrive who have come to rob Heyst of his nonexistent fortune (his wealth, remember, is held in non-portable coal). Soon after, Heyst discovers that his gun has been taken from his unlocked desk drawer by his Chinese servant, Wang, and he is therefore unarmed. After one man in the gang tries to assault Lena, she decides that she will seduce him in order to steal his knife so that she and Heyst will have protection. She does this as a way to prove her love to Heyst, who, while affectionate towards Lena, remains his father’s son; that is, cynical and distant about the possibility of love and human connection. Though Lena is successful in obtaining the knife, she is caught in cross fire and is fatally wounded. In the end, Heyst admits that she is the only one in the world who could have saved him. Unable to handle the overwhelming emotion,

Heyst sets his bungalow ablaze and commits suicide, destroying their bodies and the remains of the Tropical Belt Coal Company at the same time.

The victory in the novel is Lena's, that much most critics agree on.<sup>5</sup> By sacrificing herself, she makes Heyst realize that he is capable of feeling love. At the end of the novel she asks, "Who else could have done this for you?" and Heyst says "No one in the world" (380). The novel seems to say that in a corrupt world, love has the power to transcend reason, even if it leads to destruction. Heyst's father's haunting words, "he who forms a tie is lost," may be true, but their truth does not change the fact that it is not only unavoidable but also desirable to be "lost" in the sea of human connections. Thinking about *Victory* as a story about a failed foreign corporate venture within a changing trading culture in the Java Sea at the turn of the century, one driven by increased human reliance on fossil fuels, encourages us to ask in what other ways Lena, herself traded like a commodity, might be victorious. In light of material ecocriticism and ecofeminism, what other readings open up? How does Lena's claiming power relate to the "industrialized human *power* in this new geological era" that "is enabled by the access to and use of concentrated forms of *energy* driving our technologies, global transportation systems, and modern agricultural practices" (Sullivan 414)? In other words, in this weird love story, what's coal go to do with it?

## Inhuman Gentlemen

The novel is deeply cynical toward the hype of corporate involvement with trade in the region. The Tropical Belt Coal Company is founded on speculation, grows through overblown rhetoric, and folds almost immediately as soon as the first coal is extracted. Through promotional materials assembled for the "edification of the shareholders," the company rewrites the history of

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Jones, for example, writes of "Lena, who achieves the 'real' victory of the novel" (Jones 29). See also Batchelor's *The Life of Joseph Conrad*.

trade in the region by exaggerating the centrality of the island Samburan and the role of Bornean coal in the global economy:

Samburan was represented as the central spot of the Eastern Hemisphere with its name engraved in enormous capitals. Heavy lines radiated from it in all directions through the tropics, figuring a mysterious and effective star—lines of influence or lines of distance, or something of that sort. Company promoters have an imagination of their own. (22)

By using thick lines and bold letters, the imaginative promoter manipulates investor's perceptions. He is a storyteller, secure in the fact that the farther away it is, the easier it is to tell a tale. The novel explains, "there's no more romantic temperament on earth than the temperament of a company promoter" (22). The company's "offices in London and Amsterdam" are part of the ruse, as they "may have consisted—and probably did—of one room in each" (20). The worth of the Tropical Belt Coal Company has been established not by its success in extracting and trading commodities, but by the efficacy of its extravagant language and promotional materials. These materials disguise the risk as a secure prospect that would bring progress and technology to the region. Even the "soberest minds" of the local traders, usually skeptics, were "shook" (22). They, too, begin to believe the hype that the company would usher in an "era of steam" (20). Heyst is given credit for these changes; they are called "a great stride forward—Heyst's stride!" (20). Under the guise of progress and prosperity, the company is moving not only to radically change the economy of trade in the region but also to make the particular skills, culture, and tradition of sailors largely irrelevant, thereby affecting their livelihood. Large-scale shipping would mean "the end of the individual trader, smothered under a great invasion of steamers" (23). The narrator explains, "We could not afford to buy steamers. Not we." (23). Full of hype and founded on speculation, the company folds quickly. The novel indicates its surprise that "actually some coal [was] got out" (22), for the primary work the company accomplishes is to disseminate a myth about progress and possibility in the

region, a story that, presumably, attracted just enough capital to make a few people temporarily wealthy.<sup>6</sup>

In *Victory*, neither foreign corporate interests nor advanced steam technology bring progress to the Java Sea, but, because these propositions are fashioned as inevitable moves forward, the machinations of speculative investment and—most importantly—the human consequences of these efforts seem like natural consequences, and no human is held personally responsible. When the Chinese immigrant laborers are shipped off the island, they are described mechanically, though there is a hint of cruelty in their treatment: “A crowd of blue-clad figures with yellow faces and calves was being hustled down into the boats of the chartered steamer lying well out, like a painted ship on a painted sea; painted in crude colours, without shadows, without feeling, with brutal precision” (168). The lack of feeling and the “brutal precision” reveal the inhuman treatment of human beings by offshore, absent corporate interests. The men meeting in the single-room offices of the T. B. C. C.—the men responsible for the livelihood of the Chinese laborers, the vitality of the local traders’ vocations, and the freedom of movement of the indigenous Alfuro population on Samburan (who have barricade themselves on the other side of the island)—never appear in the novel. They are never even mentioned. The corporation is a faceless, inhuman entity; it is anarchic, reckless, absent, and irresponsible. At the same time, in its posturing, it has fashioned itself as a seemingly benevolent paternal figure offering an opportunity for advancement and progress that is then taken away with no explanation.

In how it is an absent, genteel, reckless figure, full of ideology but empty of meaningful action, the Tropical Belt Coal Company resembles Heyst’s father, whose parting advice “look on—make no sound” haunts Heyst throughout the novel as he finds himself unable to find a fulfilling life

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<sup>6</sup> Francis suggests that *Victory* references the case of The Eastern Archipelago Company’s mine in Labuan, a famous incidence of “ambition and fraud.” Labuan, like Samburan, was intended to be both a mine and a coaling station, and relied heavily on immigrant Chinese labor. The company’s shareholders “benefit[ed] from limited liability,” and the company was eventually “liquidat[ed] on grounds of fraud” (165-6).

as a hermit and instead makes a connection with Lena. *Victory* is suspicious of the civilized paternity of the corporation, masquerading as genteel progress but in fact unsympathetic to the human consequences of its interference, and it is suspicious, too, of the asceticism of Heyst's father's philosophies that have encouraged Heyst to live removed from meaningful social exchange and human connection. Heyst is unable, finally, to follow his father's advice to witness without becoming involved. His loaning money to Morrison and his rescue of Lena lead to his death. No person in the novel is able to realize this advice to "look on—make no sound." The Tropical Belt Coal Company does, however, acting as a faceless entity that never speaks officially to those whom it employs and has promised work to. This association between Heyst's father and the corporation connects the inhumanity of the corporation with the inhumanity of living as a hermit, and also indicates the novel's suspicion of the edifying benefits of civilization, especially gentility and gentlemanliness.

For this reason, Heyst's striving to follow his father's advice by removing himself from social exchange and human connection is not, in fact, the shunning of society and a more primitive approach, but is instead the culmination of corporate interests run amok, the most civilized thing in the world. Heyst believes that he lives alone on Samburan, and he brings Lena there to live in his version of paradise. Because he has enough provisions leftover from the Tropical Belt Coal Company to live in perpetuity and because he has no desire to acquire wealth, he needs no contact with the outside world. Heyst tells Lena when they first approach the bungalow, "I told you I hadn't even a dog to keep me company here" (172). His statement is undermined as soon as it is said, as he says it while he introduces her to Wang. In Heyst's imagined paradise, Wang is less than not human, he is not "even a dog." The fantasy of isolation and rough conditions are immediately placed in front of proof of their falsity, a literal servant to make tea and keep company. The vestiges of western civilization and technology are all around him—in the food he eats from tin cans intended

for the men of the company who never materialized, in the empty bungalows he lives in that were once company offices, and in the wharf, the water pipes, and the cleared land. Heyst says that he is alone, but he is merely the sole white man living on the island. Before the mines were built, the island had been inhabited by an indigenous population, the Alfuro, who fled, “frightened,” to the far side of the island and “blocked the path over the ridge by felling a few trees” (169). Thus, his solitude has depended on the relocation and work of others—indigenous people and imported immigrant labor—who cannot themselves live freely in such a paradise. His master/servant relationship with Wang continues the relation between the western company and imported Chinese labor of the Tropical Belt Coal Company. His simple life is powered almost entirely by the energy from food grown thousands of miles away and put into tin cans by foreign factory workers. No matter how far outside of society he believes himself to be, like a modern-day ecotourist,<sup>7</sup> Heyst’s tropical paradise both is made possible by and reenacts the machinations of capitalist-colonialist business ventures.

In *Victory*, gentlemanliness, often accompanied by a seemingly polite, deferential, false humility, is the human face of the capital-colonial machine. The prescient drunk in the first chapter who exclaims “Heyst’s a puffect g’n’lman. Puffect! But he’s a ut-uto-utopist” establishes early on that thinking in a human-centered way is at odds with the conventions of colonial polite society (8). As a Swedish baron, Heyst lives the life of a shabby gentleman on Samburan. He keeps a Chinese servant who cooks his food and cleans his house. His father’s books and furniture, shipped from

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<sup>7</sup> Before he settled on Samburan as the head of the T. B. C. C., Heyst had “drifted” throughout the region for years. The novel explains:

He was not a traveller. A traveller arrives and departs, goes on somewhere. Heyst did not depart. I met a man once—the manager of the branch of the Oriental Banking Corporation in Malacca—to whom Heyst exclaimed, in no connection with anything in particular (it was in the billiard-room of the club): ‘I am enchanted with these islands!’ (6).

This exclamation “fastened” him with the nickname “Enchanted Heyst” for years (7). Despite the narrator’s distinguishing Heyst from a “traveller,” he moves throughout the region continuously as one. (In this sense, he has much in common with Stevenson). Heyst’s “enchantment” with the region echoes Morton’s critique of contemporary environmentalism’s notion of “the need for a re-enchantment of the world” (*Ecology without Nature* 10).



England, fill the empty company bungalow. A portrait of his father “that severe profile ignoring the vanities of this earth” keeps watch over the action that takes place inside (268). In his friendly but distant manner toward the other men he encounters while he is off the island, Heyst’s demeanor honors his father’s advice to “look on—make no sound” while at the same time endearing him to everyone except Schomberg. Davidson, a local trader who sails past Samburan to check on Heyst every few weeks, repeats “He’s a genuine gentleman” when he talks about Heyst to other people (32). Even when he is explaining to the other traders that Heyst took Lena away from the traveling choir and back to his island, he concludes the story with the caveat that “on reflection, he was by no means certain that it prevented Heyst from being a perfect gentleman” (41). On the same page, while speculating about how Heyst could have thought that Lena would be comfortable in the rough conditions of Samburan, he interjects “He was a gentleman” into his story, as if to rationalize and overshadow the other seemingly ungentlemanly behavior he is describing (41). What does it mean, then, to be a gentleman in this novel? If it is a role that one can be “puffed” at, it has more to do with behavior than with a man’s birth. Yet, at the same time, identifying a man as a gentleman, as Davidson does in reference to Heyst, excuses behavior that may seem ungentlemanly otherwise (like “stealing” a young woman and taking her back to live in rough conditions on an island). Being a gentleman is a tautological condition: one is identified as a gentleman based on one’s behavior, but all behavior is gentlemanly if one is a gentleman. Heyst, the perfect gentleman, is like a perfect human face, or “manager in the east,” for the Tropical Belt Coal Company, which is otherwise inhuman. The corporation, too, is polite, seemingly generous and advanced, and acts freely without consideration for future human consequences. In *Victory*, both the gentleman and the corporation are powerful entities that are presumed to use their power responsibly, both feeling entitled to land and resources—and, often, people—otherwise occupied.

*Victory* is as skeptical of the idea of being a gentleman as it is of the unchecked power of European corporate involvement in colonial spaces. Mr. Jones, the gentleman from “higher spheres” than Heyst, is wicked and corrupt in a way that only a gentleman can be (357). Mr. Jones is effeminate, lazy, depleted, and immoral. He is a caricature of a *fin de siècle* dandy, a darker, older, more corrupt version of Basil in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. He lounges “tightly enfolded in an old but gorgeous blue silk dressing gown” (352). He has “beautifully pencilled eyebrows” (359). He speaks with “languid irony” (354), looks “very languid as he leaned against the wall” (355), “insist[s] in a languid voice” (356), and “recover[s] his manner of languid superiority” (356). He is depleted—“His vitality seemed exhausted. Even his sunken eyelids drooped within the bony sockets” (359). And he has a strong aversion to women. As Ricardo explains, “He would give any woman a ten-mile berth. He can’t stand them” (120). When he learns that Lena is on the island (a fact that Ricardo, who betrays him, hid in order to get him there), he displays “shocked incredulity” and “frightened disgust” (362). The caricature of late-century homosexuality has been attended to by several scholars.<sup>8</sup> His effeminacy seems to signal a kind of depletion of morality, a symbol of civilization refined away into nothingness, in the same vein as the Eloi in Wells’s *The Time Machine*. Just as Davidson affirms Heyst’s social status, Ricardo, Mr. Jones’ “secretary” and henchman, does the same. He repeats to Schomberg how Mr. Jones is a gentleman (123, 125). In trying to intimidate Heyst he asks, “You can see at once he’s a gentleman, can’t you?” (341). Rather than acting himself, Mr. Jones has led Ricardo, a working man, to do his immoral work for him, and the two of them together have enslaved Pedro, a Colombian man who Ricardo calls a “murdering brute” and “slaughtering savage,” to carry out their most violent deeds (218). The relationship between the three men enacts a miniature version of the colonial social structure: a gentleman at leisure, a lower class white man who runs the day to day business, and a dark, dehumanized colonial

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<sup>8</sup> See, most notably, Ruppel’s *Homosexuality in the Life and Work of Joseph Conrad*.

subject to do the physical labor. Here is the shadow of Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban dropped into the Java Sea. Heyst realizes that “this outlaw from the higher spheres was an absolutely hard and pitiless scoundrel” (357). Mr. Jones is gentility at its ugliest: diminished, immoral, and broke.

Blinded by the security of his social status, Mr. Jones relies on ideologies of racial, class, and gendered privilege to assess the threat of others, and he uses the information again and again to make incorrect judgments. He speaks to Heyst as a peer: “It’s obvious that we belong to the same—social sphere” (354). Because he thinks Heyst is a gentleman too, he assumes not only that Heyst is armed (he is not) but also that he has a fortune—a portable fortune—that he can be robbed of (he does not), which is the sole reason Mr. Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro have come to Samburan. In his underestimation of Wang, Heyst’s Chinese servant, Mr. Jones demonstrates how this arrogance can make one vulnerable. After Wang takes Heyst’s gun, Heyst warns Mr. Jones and Ricardo that he is now armed, an admission that makes Mr. Jones and Ricardo suspicious of Heyst. Mr. Jones cannot see Wang as a significant threat, as Wang is from a different race and therefore, in Mr. Jones’ imagination, incapable of out-smarting him. He explains to Heyst, “Do you believe in racial superiority, Mr. Heyst? I do, firmly” (358). Mr. Jones severely underestimates how powerful and dangerous Wang, in fact, is. Mr. Jones’ ignorance makes him vulnerable, but his secureness that he is not ignorant endangers him most. As the sole character of the “higher spheres,” he is the representative of corrupt civilization itself, enabling polite violence from a willfully blind position, or, as Mr. Jones tells Heyst: “I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit” (355).

Suresh Raval has suggested that, in keeping with Conradian tradition, Mr. Jones is Heyst’s dark double (419). The two characters resemble one another strongly in how they think of their participation in violence. Heyst counters his inherited gentility with his inclinations toward being, in the words of the drunk sage early in the novel, a “ut-uto-utopist” (8). He is reluctant to act violently with Mr. Jones and Ricardo, even in self-defense and to protect Lena. Even when Mr. Jones’ gun is

aimed at him and he has the opportunity to act, thereby protecting himself and Lena, he cannot do so: “If I want to kill him, this is my time,’ . . . but he did not move” (362). (Heyst’s reluctance to act is so pronounced that early critics referred to *Victory* as “the *Hamlet* of the South Seas” [Panichas 35]). In pondering why he is so hesitant, Heyst muses that he “date[s] too late” for violence, as though, as an enlightened man, he believes himself to be evolved beyond those lower class men around him who act, like Ricardo or Pedro (339). Heyst covers up his class prejudice with the evolutionary explanation that he “dates too late.” Pedro, the brutal Colombian, is younger than Heyst; does he therefore “date too late” too? In his civilized language denouncing violence, he echoes Mr. Jones, who explains his aversion to violence this way: “it is because of my origin, my breeding, my traditions, my early associations” (359). Both Mr. Jones and Heyst profess to abhor violence, yet both men, in their reluctance to act, ultimately rely on others to be violent for them. The difference between the two men, however, is that Mr. Jones acknowledges that Ricardo and Pedro do his dirty work, whereas Heyst does not see how his relationship to Lena comes to resemble theirs, as she, finally, as an act of loyalty, decides to be violent on his behalf. Whereas Mr. Jones is openly wicked, Heyst obscures (even from himself) his domination of others behind a mask of good-natured gentlemanliness.

Heyst takes a friendly, mockingly deferential tone toward those over whom he has power. This tone is most pronounced in his relationship with Wang and Lena, but it first arises in the beginning of the novel when Heyst smokes on his verandah overlooking a smoking volcano. The way that the novel positions Heyst in relation it reveals how he sees himself in the world:

His nearest neighbour—I am speaking now of things showing some sort of animation—was an indolent volcano which smoked faintly all day with its head just above the northern horizon, and at night levelled at him, from amongst the clear stars, a dull red glow, expanding and collapsing spasmodically like the end of a gigantic cigar puffed at

intermittently in the dark. Axel Heyst was also a smoker; and when he lounged out on his verandah with his cheroot, the last thing before going to bed, he made in the night the same sort of flow and of the same size as that other one so many miles away. (4)

The nonhuman “neighbour” emphasizes Heyst’s hermitage in a playful way, as if all Heyst needs for company are “things showing some sort of animation.” The earth itself seems to puff and smoke alongside Heyst, the two companions keeping silent company in a (seemingly) desolate place. The comparison equates Heyst with the volcano, making his cigar as big as a crater. To the human perspective, they are equal, but the slightest shift in view would, of course, reveal that one is much bigger and more threatening. The “indolent” neighbor is not so indolent late on in the novel, as a sputtering of ash causes an ominous storm. Lena is frightened, but Heyst reassures with language that minimizes the power and threat of the volcano. He explains that the volcano, “our neighbour,” “sometimes clears his red-hot gullet like that” (182). Heyst repeats the title, explaining that “our neighbour is generally well behaved” and “He’s a good-natured, lazy fellow of a volcano” (182). This language—“well behaved,” “good-natured,” “lazy”—would not be out of place in the mouth of some ineffective colonial official in an imperial romance describing the perceived threat of a native uprising. The veneer of friendly intimacy masks Heyst’s arrogance toward what, in certain circumstances, might pose a significant threat to his life.

Heyst’s gentlemanly false deference extends toward Wang, whom he calls his “boy” (168). He does not consider his presence when he explains to Lena that he lives on the island alone. When Lena tells Heyst that Wang looked like the waiters at her hotel, Heyst agrees that “One Chinaman looks very much like another” (171). Before Heyst and Lena come back to the island, Wang burns the field in front of the bungalows making “a broad, clear space, black and level” on which the novel’s drama will unfold (172). This welcomes Heyst and Lena back to a place both desolate and yet fertile, and it prefigures the fiery end of their union. Wang has cleared the land in order to plant

some seeds he had found in the storeroom leftover by the company. He “had surrendered to an irresistible impulse to put them into the ground” (171). The novel vacillates between describing Wang as a creature of instinct with “an irresistible impulse” and a cunning, resourceful businessman intent on survival. In the next sentence, it explains “He would make his master pay for the vegetables which he was raising to satisfy his instinct” (171). Instead of recognizing Wang’s business acumen or seeing that Wang’s decision is effectively taking Heyst’s property and selling it back to him, Heyst is only “amused at the thought that he, in his own person, represented the market for [the garden’s] produce” (171). In light of how little money—“portable wealth”—Heyst holds, his amusement and his patronizing stance are naïve. Unlike Heyst’s dependence on absent, foreign corporations to provide money, Wang fosters what is essentially the beginning of a small, local, independent business, a small means to make Heyst part with the very little money he holds. Heyst watches Wang work “as if the growing of vegetables were a patented process, or an awful and holy mystery entrusted to the keeping of his race,” Orientalizing what is simply a way to earn money and supplement their diet (171). Wang’s small economy is thriving where the giant corporation could not.

By the end of the novel, it is clear that Wang is the sharpest, most clear-sighted, benignly cunning character. Firstly, he the only person on the island who survives. (Mr. Jones drowns; Ricardo is shot; Pedro is murdered by Ricardo; Heyst commits suicide; and Lena is shot). Moreover, he survives with his integrity intact, never having to resort to violence in order to stay alive (though he does threaten Heyst at one point in order to make him listen). Heyst does not recognize him as a threat and leaves his desk drawer unlocked, thereby allowing Wang to take Heyst’s only revolver to arm himself after Mr. Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro show up. Wang acts in a way that is self-interested and self-protective, and, unlike Heyst, he is willing to act when violence is needed, though, unlike Mr. Jones and company, he avoids it if at all possible. Heyst, Mr. Jones, and Wang had all come to

Samburan in order to obtain money (Heyst as manager of the Tropical Belt Coal Company; Mr. Jones by robbing Heyst of nonexistent wealth; Wang as a laborer in the coal mine). None succeed in making money off their original intention, but only Wang is able to pivot to earning in a different way. Wang creates another, sustainable economy in place of a failed, European-centered fossil fuel venture. Armed with Heyst's gun, free to cross the border of felled trees between the ruins of the company and the indigenous settlement, and dependent only on himself for survival, Wang reveals himself to be the most powerful character. In this sense, the victory in the novel must at least partially belong to Wang. In the same way that he misjudges the power of the volcano and of Lena, Heyst does not recognize him as a threat.

## **Lena's Rescue, Lena's Abduction**

Heyst's imagined good-natured stewardship of Lena resembles his attitude toward the volcano and Wang, but it ultimately takes a more sinister turn. The brutality of Lena's circumstances and of Heyst's contribution to them are quickly apparent from his first interaction with her. Thus, his gentlemanly deference reads darkly from their first encounter, when Heyst meets Lena as a member of a girls choir performing in Schomberg's hotel. Schomberg, whose success as a hotelier is attributed to his working as a "white man for white men" (93), hires an orchestra of women—"fairly battered specimens"—who work in conditions akin to modern-day trafficking (59). For room and board, they travel around the globe, often unaware of where they are. Lena "really had no definite idea where she was on the surface of the globe" because the "orchestra was generally taken from the steamer to some hotel, and kept shut up there till it was time to go on board another steamer" (76). Lena had joined the orchestra in desperate conditions, as a last resort after her family members died. She has no family to return to in England, and no means of returning there even if she did. In narrating the story, Davidson says it outright: "I suppose these women are not much better than

slaves really” (39). During breaks in their performance, the women are required to go out into the audience and chat with men, encouraging them to buy drinks and increase their bar tabs. This is how Heyst meets Lena (who at this point is still called Alma). Although he has entered the room reluctantly, only because he could not avoid hearing the orchestra in his bedroom, and although he senses something “cruel, sensual, and repulsive” in the music performed, he joins the men in the audience (66).

Lena’s conditions are made especially brutal by the threat of sexual abduction that simmers throughout her account of her life as well as the descriptions of others who refer to her. As the youngest, prettiest member of the group, Lena is sexually vulnerable, and there is a strong suggestion that her chaperone, “a woman with no conscience” is trying to pimp her out to Schomberg (90). Lena is kept apart from the other members of the orchestra, boarded in the main house with the choir director and his wife and close to Schomberg. Schomberg has recently cornered her and tried to assault her (82). Heyst picks up on one aspect of the brutality in Lena’s conditions when he thinks he sees the choir master’s wife, a “hard-bitten oldish woman” pinch Lena’s arm in order to make her go out and talk to the men in the audience (59). In conversation with her, he resorts to the same playful, polite tone he uses with Wang or in reference to the volcano. Though he may seem to be an outsider—entering the hall reluctantly, noticing the brutality in the atmosphere, wanting to talk with Lena to protect her from the abuse by her master—he, in fact, gains the most from Lena’s imagined pinch: she goes out into the audience and speaks to him (and he buys her drinks) *because* she is forced to through physical violence. Thus Heyst is the direct beneficiary of what he consciously abhors. It is impossible to separate Lena’s real conditions from the conditions that offer her to Heyst as a pleasurable diversion he must pay for—and that he, like the other men and gentlemen in the room, are entitled to.



When Lena asks Heyst to rescue her, she says “*You* do something! You are a gentleman” (77). By doing so, she exposes how the friendly, aloof, reluctant-to-act gentlemen directly contribute to her lived violence. Lena counters Heyst’s playful banter with sincerity and an appeal to him to protect her as someone weaker than he. She makes it so that he must act, because only a person in a position like his has the power to stop her conditions. Yet, for a desperate woman with little agency, it is difficult to distinguish between a rescue and an abduction. Even the conditions of Heyst’s “rescue” are marked with an exchange of property and sexual violation. Heyst takes her away in the middle of the night, explaining that “I am not rich enough to buy you out. . .but I can always steal you” (77). Lena asks Heyst to rescue her from a potential sexual abduction from Schomberg, yet the rescue itself presupposes that Lena will be Heyst’s sexual partner, as she is going to live with him alone on an island, not being shipped back to her family in England. Everyone, including Lena, assume this to be true. When they meet in the woods before the rescue, the pretense is dropped: Heyst is “clasping her more closely than before” (80); Lena tells him “You’ll never be sorry” (82) and “I know what sort of girl I am” (82). Except for Lena (and perhaps Heyst), everyone assumes that this sexual relationship will be temporary and for Heyst’s entertainment. Davidson wonders “What’s he going to do with her in the end?” (44). Likewise, the narrator, in conversation with Davidson, predicts that one day Heyst will “be signaling to you again” to stop on shore. He says, “I wonder what it will be for,” to which “Davidson made no reply” (60).<sup>9</sup> Lena’s youth and beauty are her value, but without her virginity, she will be in even more desperate circumstances. After Heyst steals her away, Schomberg puts it in less polite terms, demonstrating the worst interpretation of her circumstances and a glimpse of the kind of judgment she is subject to outside of gentlemanly protection. He calls Lena “an infamous word which made Davidson start” (45) and refers to Heyst’s rescue as a “kidnap” (59). Added to this is that the clear circumstances of Heyst’s stealing

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<sup>9</sup> In an explanatory note, Robert Hampson quotes an earlier version was less vague, “Some day Berg [Heyst] will be signaling to you and seeing her off on board your ship with the utmost politeness” (352).

Lena are clouded by the fact that there is no hard evidence that Lena has been mistreated. After all, he did not actually see the choir director's wife pinch Lena, and Lena never confirms it outright. He thinks "lucidly after she left him" in the dining room that "it isn't actual ill-usage that this girl is complaining of" (73). This moment of lucidity calls into question what it is that Heyst is rescuing Lena from. She fears a sexual assault by Schomberg, but he has not assaulted her—yet. However, her voluntarily leaving with Heyst signals the end of her presumed virginity. Thus, Lena is being rescued from practical enslavement and the threat of an unwanted sexual encounter with a much older man in order to be taken into a different kind of practical enslavement and the surety of a sexual encounter with another much older man. The difference, of course, is that Lena may desire Heyst over Schomberg, yet to make a distinction between the two based on her agency when she has so little is at the very least complicated.

The benevolence of the rescue becomes even more problematic once they are on the island and Heyst takes control over Lena. He changes her name, as other men before him had done from "Alma. . .Magdalen too" to "Lena" (176). She speaks to him in highly submissive language, "Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all!" (177). Her liberation takes a strange disguise: "I can only be what you think I am" (177). It would make sense to interpret Lena's choice in subjecting herself to Heyst as the choice of a young woman newly sexually awakened who eroticizes her submissiveness were it not for the later scene of Heyst forcing Lena to have sex against her will. After the close of several chapters worth of conversation, Heyst becomes angry and disappointed in Lena when he finds out that she has believed untrue rumors Schomberg had spread about him. Lena cries, and Heyst finds it "a new seduction," as it is "another appeal to his tenderness." Lena tries to push Heyst away physically when he approaches her, but he overpowers her. In the concluding sentences of this chapter, the prose builds to an epiphanic moment: "The girl glanced round, moved suddenly away, and averted

her face. With her hand she signed imperiously to him to leave her alone—a command which Heyst did not obey” (203). In a novel where the concluding sentences of chapters crescendo abruptly, the last phrase “a command which Heyst did not obey” in its simplicity and in its cheeky inversion of power reads as erotically charged—the violation of a girl who thinks she is a queen. In this moment, the relationship between Lena and Heyst is laid bare. His rescue of her has entitled him to her body *against her will*. His being a gentleman is what she calls on in him to save her, yet it is also what allowed him to sit in the room and be entertained by her without thinking of the brutality behind her conditions. Moreover, it is what makes him assume that his actions warrant her repayment. His benevolence is what has made their sexual relationship possible, and Lena’s agency in it is irrelevant. He does not violate her sexually *despite* his gentlemanly benevolence, he violates her *because* of it.

Traded, shipped, stolen, Lena’s body is a commodity in circulation. Even in a context of rescue and benevolence, Heyst treats Lena as a resource to be enjoyed and lays claim to her body in the same way that he has laid claim to the unmined coal on Samburan. Unlike the coal, however, Lena is portable and, therefore, presumably more valuable, yet she is also a riskier investment because, as *Victory* warns, a woman can speak. Ricardo recognizes the threat; Schomberg does not. The hotelier asks, “Why notice them?...What can they do?” and Ricardo answers “Make a noise, if nothing else” (152). In *Victory*, to make a noise is to be human, to act against the inhumanity of the absent corporation and Heyst’s father’s dying advice to “look on—make no sound.” In Lena’s case, to make a noise is to be more than a commodity. The threat of the speaking woman is introduced early in the novel when Davidson tries to obtain information from Mrs. Schomberg. He treats her as if she is stupid, as an “automaton,” a “mechanism,” and a “dummy,” speaking with her only as “an amusing experiment” until he realizes that she (and only she) is in possession of the knowledge he has come to seek: that Heyst has run away with Lena (40). Amused, Davidson does not realize her power (like Heyst, who had been “amused” by Wang) and the threat she in fact poses. When he

finally recognizes that she is intelligent (and, simultaneously, that Heyst may not be a gentleman), the “mist seemed to roll away from before Davidson’s eyes, disclosing something he could not believe” (40). Davidson’s incredulity indicates how female intelligence in the novel is not understood as threatening by a system that trades women as commodities.

Davidson’s early example of foolishly underestimating a seemingly powerless woman is repeated in Heyst’s assessment of Lena’s intelligence later on in the novel. Heyst is equally as incredulous of the nuance of Lena’s thoughts about seeing the ocean and the island from a high vantage point. Unaware of where she is in the world, Lena is uncomfortable looking down on the land and sea:

That empty space was to her the abomination of desolation. But she only said again: ‘It makes my head swim.’

‘Too big?’ he inquired.

‘Too lonely. It makes my heart sink too.’ (180)

Lena is disoriented in this privileged, removed vision of the earth. Up until this point her view had been an extreme version of the women’s view from within, though, unlike Brassey or Routledge, Lena does not travel freely, have access to a map, or even know where she is on the earth, as she has been shipped from the locked gates of one hotel compound to another. For Lena, seeing the earth from above makes it inhuman—a scene of “desolation.” She reassures Heyst, “I am not feeling lonely with you—not a bit. It is only when we come up that place, and I look at all that water and all that light—.” She explains further:

‘It seems as if everything that there is had gone under,’ she said.

‘Reminds you of the story of the deluge,’ muttered the man, stretched at her feet and looking at them. ‘Are you frightened at it?’

‘I should be rather frightened to be left behind alone.’

...

‘The vision of a world destroyed,’ he mused aloud. ‘Would you be sorry for it?’

‘I should be sorry for the happy people in it.’ (180-1)

Heyst is impressed with Lena’s knowledge of the story of the flood (“‘Sunday School,’ she murmured”), yet what she sees here is more than just the reimagined story. Lena sees an earth without human life, subsumed by water. She interprets this vision from above as an inhuman one. Heyst connects it to a mythic, apocalyptic end, and she brings it back again to the human scale—the “happy people” affected by its destruction. Heyst zooms out, and Lena is disoriented and disturbed by this point of view, choosing instead to zoom back in on the human experience, especially her own relation to others within it. Lena’s discomfort with this totalizing view indicates how the novel aligns her with an earth that is amenable to human life, not one destroyed by or removed from human experience.

Just as Davidson realizes Mrs. Schomberg’s intelligence, Heyst recognizes Lena’s after this conversation. Davidson had seen the “mist... roll away,” and the novel repeats the image of clouds being parted, expressly connecting the two scenes. Heyst “detect[s] the veiled glow of intelligence, as one gets a glimpse of the sun through the clouds” (181). In this moment, Heyst senses Lena looking at him, instead of the other way around: “her grey, unabashed gaze forced upon him the sensation of something inexplicable reposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force—or simply an abysmal emptiness, reserving itself even in the moments of complete surrender” (182). The “something inexplicable” within her that “reserv[es] itself” in their love making is unintelligible to Heyst. He entertains conflicting possibilities—“stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force”—that clash with one another and do not reconcile. In the end of the novel, however, Lena’s paradoxical position is what makes her powerful. It is her passivity to Ricardo’s sexual advances that permit her finally to act, to seize Ricardo’s knife, an act that Heyst is never able

to perform. Yet Heyst cannot interpret Lena's intelligence or power. He turns his detection of the "veiled glow of intelligence" within Lena into an absence, a threatening "abysmal emptiness." It is emptiness only in the sense that Heyst chooses to see a void where there is in fact a presence. If he cannot understand it rationally, it must not exist. This is his greatest weakness and vulnerability: his incapacity to see how those he pretends to defer to are in fact more capable and more powerful than he.

## **Lena's Multiple Victories**

Heyst's naiveté about who and what constitute a threat is ultimately his undoing. By treating Lena inhumanly, Heyst leads to his own downfall, for it is her decision to prove her love to him, to prove to him that he is capable of real human connection, that leads to his death. Similarly, Wang is able to seize control of the island from an unsuspecting Heyst by taking his revolver that is kept unlocked in the desk drawer. Heyst's patronizing friendliness toward Wang and Lena extends to his characterization of the volcano, and by extension, the natural world, which, in his conversation with Lena on the hilltop, he indicates is a site on which to project his misanthropic fantasies of human decline and disorder. However, just as the novel slowly reveals that Heyst is at the mercy of Wang and Lena, it simultaneously depicts how he is exposed to the threat of natural forces too. In one of his regular visits, Davidson sees Heyst walk from the shore back toward his bungalow:

[Heyst] 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 in the living depths of the tropical vegetation, which is more jealous of men's conquests than the ocean, and which was about to close over the last vestiges of the liquidated Tropical Belt Coal Company—A. Heyst, manager in the East. (28)

The false prestige in Heyst's title "manager in the East" is made ironic by the fact that the simple act of jungle growing erases it. The tropics here make man vulnerable just like the ocean does, capable of making investments sink and men struggle to stay afloat. There is no evidence here of a "great stride forward for the islands" or an "age of steam." There is no "conquest" in the full meaning of that word, with its connotations of *conquistadores* and changing the landscape. Rather, Heyst's residence "has the aspect of an abandoned settlement invaded by the jungle" (5). Heyst's march is civilization in reverse, nature taking back what man has tried to take for himself.

As Heyst becomes unarmed, after Wang steals his gun, and he comprehends that he cannot protect Lena and is at the mercy of Ricardo and Mr. Jones, he changes his relationship to the natural world. In a moment of realization, he tells Lena, "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!" (327). In his efforts to realize his father's philosophies, Heyst has denied the material world, making it into an immaterial shadow, and thereby denying his body as a material thing too. He compares this intellectualization of nature to the processing of earth—to "refine everything away" is to make the earth "a shadow." At the end of the novel, when, unarmed and exposed, "He considered himself a dead man already," he returns to his body as a material object. He thinks of himself as "this fair, palpitating handful of ashes and dust—warm, living, sentient, his own—and exposed helplessly to insult, outrage, degradation, and infinite misery of the body" (332). As a man living alone, eschewing human contact and intimacy, he had patronizingly viewed the volcano, the most extreme example of untethered natural energy, spitting out ashes and dust as only a diminutive companion equal in force and heat to himself, one that is "well behaved," like a child. By the end of the novel, as he recognizes his vulnerability to natural forces and to other people and once he understands himself as a man who is "exposed helplessly" to feelings and experiences his father had taught him to deny—"insult, outrage, degradation, and infinite misery of the body—he feels that he has more in

common with the ash itself. He experiences himself as a “handful of ashes and dust.” By the end of *Victory*, the colonial, corporate, masculine gentleman is toppled off his place at the top, exposed as the arbiter of actions that are no more than brief intrusions into an entropic system intent on returning it all to ashes again. The grand efforts of men—be they corporations, philosophies, civilizations—are ultimately at the mercy of a relentless natural process of decay.

As a human being, Lena, too, is at the mercy of destructive natural forces. These forces work to erase the intrusions of man and to interrupt his seeming control over nature. Yet by doing so, they inadvertently work on behalf of those who are oppressed by civilization. Because these forces endanger those who sexually assault her and effectively enslave her, they at once imperil and yet also protect her. After Ricardo tries to rape Lena and she fights him off, the text offers this long description of Lena:

Suddenly the girl reeled forward. She saved herself from a fall only by embracing with both arms one of the tall, roughly carved posts holding the mosquito net above the bed. For a long time she clung to it, with her forehead leaning against the wood. One side of her loosened sarong had slipped down as low as her hip. The long brown tresses of her hair fell in lank wisps, as if wet, almost black against her white body. Her uncovered flank, damp with the sweat of anguish and fatigue, gleamed coldly with the immobility of polished marble in the hot, diffused light falling through the window above her head—a dim reflection of the consuming, passionate blaze of sunshine outside, all aquiver with the effort to set the earth on fire, to burn it to ashes. (285)

This passage presents Lena as a beautiful thing; it objectifies her in the same way that the men in the novel have. Made doubly desirable, she is at once another bare-breasted woman in a sarong on a tropical island and, at the same time, a fetishized “white body,” aestheticized as akin to a Grecian statue made of “polished marble.” The half-clothed young woman is frozen in time, the text



pausing to linger on how pretty she looks at the scene of her assault. But at the end of the passage, the text undermines its objectification by placing this beautiful tableaux within a larger context of a hostile natural world. After it offers up her body for our consumption, it orients her vulnerability and fragility as a part of a “dim reflection” of a greater force outside that is more threatening than the sexual assault of Ricardo and more threatening to all humans in general. The “passionate blaze of sunshine outside” is waiting impatiently—“all aquiver”—to be violent too, but indiscriminately so. Lena is here doubly exposed; her body is under threat of Ricardo (and Heyst, and all men who desire possession of her), but it is also vulnerable as a human being living in a fragile space wherein natural forces are anxious to reclaim the earth as theirs. Even though Lena is subject to these natural forces too, they are also the only forces that are working against those who oppress her. Thus, they are simultaneously her enemies and her allies. Because Lena is unafraid of death, however, and because she is willing to sacrifice her own life in order to convince Heyst of her love for him, the “consuming, passionate blaze of sunshine outside” works in tandem with her own desire to destroy the system that has made her into a commodity.

Lena is victorious in the end. She seduces Ricardo, obtains his knife, and proves her love to Heyst. By doing so, she asserts power over him, though it costs her her life in the end, as she is caught in the line of fire and hit by a stray bullet fired by Mr. Jones that was intended for Ricardo. Lena’s death leads Heyst, in his grief, to set fire to the bungalow, burning up all of his possessions as well as all evidence of the Tropical Belt Coal Company. In Davidson’s final report in the last chapter, we learn that Heyst is presumed to have died himself in the blaze—“He is—ashes, your Excellency” (383). Proving her love to Heyst is not her only victory, nor even her most important one. By claiming power, Lena makes herself human and pulls herself out of circulation, insisting that she is not a product to be exchanged among men, but instead an agent in and of herself who can act upon the world. Moreover, her victory finally results in the erasure of the Tropical Belt Coal

Company and capitalist-colonialist involvement in the island. By burning the earth, Heyst makes it fallow for new growth. The end of the novel depicts the ash of Lena's and Heyst's bodies spread across the former grounds of what the company promoter once hyped as the new center of world trade. When Davidson tells the judge that Heyst is "ashes," he elaborates more: "he and the girl together. I suppose he couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body—and fire purifies everything" (383). The site is now made fertile and purified by fire, in the same way that the experienced gardener Wang had cleared the land in front of the bungalows with fire before their arrival. The company signs, the cargo railroad, the bungalows, and all evidence of the commercial venture on the island are destroyed. The jungle can grow over this newly fertile earth. Davidson explains how even the traces of Heyst and Lena's body will be erased, "Let Heaven look after what has been purified. The wind and rain will take care of the ashes" (384). He explains that, with all westerners gone and no traces of their existence left that could not be erased quickly by natural forces, "I went away. There was nothing to be done there" (385). The final sentences of the novel emphasize this point: "Davidson, thoughtful seemed to weight the matter in his mind, and then murmured with placid sadness: 'Nothing!'" (385). Lena's actions lead to both her own ironic liberation and also the liberation of Samburan from the vestiges of faceless, inhuman, global capitalism. Earlier in the novel Mr. Jones had cautioned Heyst to be wary of women, saying "Can you understand their power?. . . It's enough to make the earth detestable" (366). By exercising her power, Lena makes the earth unfit for the kind of genteel capital-colonialism that gentlemen like Mr. Jones and Heyst have benefitted from.

Lena's vision of the earth is one that insists on seeing the human instead of apocalypse. She sees from a disoriented, partial point of view, rejecting the aerial view from above, which makes her "head swim." Lena's victory upsets the cynical, removed perspective embraced by Heyst, who had been influenced by his misanthropic philosopher father (who Davidson explains in the last chapter

“seems to have been a crank, and to have upset [Heyst’s] head when he was young” [382]). Heyst’s move to Samburan and his self-imposed paradisiacal, false hermitage (false because of Wang’s presence) reveals itself as the realization of capital-colonial economic processes very much tethered to civilization and human ties. In the end, *Victory* illustrates the foolishness of Heyst’s father’s advice to “look on—make no sound” and of his warning that “he who forms a tie is lost.” It demonstrates instead the impossibility of removing oneself from human interaction and deflates the assumption that to be “lost” in the ties of human interaction is a negative condition.

In *Inhuman Conditions*, Pheng Cheah argues for the importance of recognizing that the entities that appear to be outside or in opposition to rampant globalization are instead manifestations of it. Cheah’s understanding of humanity is, at first glance, bleak: “humanity and all its capacities are not primary, original, and self-originating but product-effects generated by forces that precede and exceed the *anthropos*” (10). For Cheah, these forces are largely economic. Therefore, there is no transcendent state of culture or humanity, and any idea of such merely reinforces an inhuman system. However, Cheah is not saying “humanity is a myth,” nor is he advocating, as Heyst’s philosopher father did, that one should find a way to exist outside of this dominating, totalizing system. Instead, Cheah identifies these connections so that scholars of the humanities see the “inhuman conditions” present in what we celebrate, fight for, or reverence as human. Seeing that “the very capacity for progressive action is generated by technologies of power” will create an “understanding of resistance and normativity that is no longer based on human transcendence.” The result is to be able to harness “the inhuman ways of achieving humanity in the contemporary world” (10). Without specifically mentioning fossil fuels, Cheah offers a way of understanding human agency that acknowledges that it is determined and influenced by non-human—*inhuman*—forces. He argues that despite these origins, humans must exercise their agency nonetheless, and that it is possible to act ethically from within these inhuman conditions. In *Victory*, Lena’s exercising

her agency from within this system results in her death, but it also results in the preservation of the island ecosystem and the end of western interference. Lena is a victor, but she is not the only one. Her victory is shared also with Wang, who can live peacefully with his wife and tend his thriving garden, the native Alfuro, who are now able to roam freely over their ancestral land, and the coal that remains unmined beneath an earth newly spread with ash.

# Conclusion

This dissertation has argued for the advantages of understanding gigantic time scales, distances, and energetic processes from a limited, obstructed point of view and the benefits of being overcome by looming environmental crises. It has argued that literary scholars working in the environmental humanities should take indigeneity, the postcolonial, and the claims of ecofeminism as central to both the history and the future of environmental critique and the environmental humanities. One way to do this is to recognize the long, global history of environmental thought within a history of colonial contact and exchange and to see that these processes were enabled by globalization, which in turn depended on fossil fuels and thus has contributed directly to anthropogenic climate change. Over the past four chapters, I have discussed how five different authors from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century represented, fought with, and embraced a point of view that disorients the totalizing, colonial view from afar, even as all of them wrote as citizens of the colonial center. Nevertheless, as much as the claims of this dissertation ask us to look differently at the past, they also point toward the future. What does this limited point of view look like on the ground today? How do contemporary environmental rights activists and indigenous people fight neocolonial perspectives that assume a complete view from a distance? In this conclusion, I will discuss the subjects of each chapter in relation to contemporary environmental and indigenous activism (and its intersections), including how these texts might be productively employed today in relation to contemporary environmental concerns.

In the first chapter, I argue that Wells's early work responds to the threat of impending climate change with models of human responses of loss to non-human timescales at the same time as it emphasizes the interrelationship between colonial and environmental degradation. I then

suggest that later in life Wells embraced the practical affect of the budding discipline of Ecology as a way to respond to feelings of grief over a lack of solutions to the problems he brings up in his early work; in doing so, I try to illuminate Ecology's lesser known, economically inflected origins.

Though human awareness of anthropogenic climate change did not become popular until the mid twentieth century, I argue that Victorians' response to their own fears of naturally occurring climate change can inform our time, especially in the ways that environmental threats are deeply entwined with imperialism. This relationship is especially legible in the nineteenth century, in that their environmental thought (Ecology being the greatest example) had not yet been obscured by mid-century American-centered environmental critique, which distances itself from any colonial taint.

Whereas Ecology in the twenty-first century is no longer the champagne-fueled, privileged discipline that it was in its earliest days at Oxford, some contemporary mainstream scientific debates around anthropogenic climate change propose intervention on a global scale, as opposed to observation and non-interference, that read as though they were airlifted from a hundred years ago. Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, famous for popularizing the term *anthropocene*, have advocated for human intervention into the global ecosystem in order to combat global warming. Specifically, Crutzen has proposed introducing large quantities of sulphur molecules into the atmosphere in order to reflect solar heat (Crutzen, "Albedo Enhancement," 211-219). The language they use to propose intervention would not be out of place in a late Wells work like *Science of Life*:

To develop a world-wide accepted strategy leading to sustainability of ecosystems against human induced stresses will be one of the great future tasks of mankind, requiring intensive research efforts and wise application of the knowledge thus acquired in the noösphere, better known as knowledge or information society. An exciting, but also difficult and daunting task lies ahead of the global research and

engineering community to guide mankind towards global, sustainable, environmental management. (Crutzen and Stoermer 485)

In another essay, Crutzen repeats this language, speaking directly about the importance of geoengineering climate:

A daunting task lies ahead for scientist and engineers to guide society towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene. This will require appropriate human behavior at all scales, and may well involve internationally accepted large-scale geo-engineering projects, for instance to ‘optimize’ climate. (Crutzen qtd in Bonneuil and Fressoz 49)

The language in these passages—the “daunting task” of scientists and engineers to “guide mankind” and “guide society” to “manage” the environment—resonates as suspiciously corporate. Crutzen’s decision to put scare quotes around ‘optimize’ only reinforces its corporate inflection. It also belies a tinge of self-importance masquerading as humanitarian rescue. Jeremy Davies has, generously, called these statements “utopian at best” in the way that they presume a shared point of view among all scientists globally and ignore “what would happen to those who remained unwilling to agree” (50).<sup>1</sup> Suspicion of both the man of reason and the supposed progressive claims of science and technology, which ecofeminist theory has been bringing to our attention for decades, is as apt in this current discussion as it is in reference to this history of science generally. It is telling, for example, that Crutzen regularly uses “mankind” to refer to “humankind.”<sup>2</sup> A little knowledge of Ecology’s history imagining a group of men managing the earth as though it were a bank, or of the history of the collusion of imperialism and conservation, or of ecofeminists’ objections to environmental

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<sup>1</sup> For a productive discussion of how the assumption in this position of shared victimhood among the first world and postcolonial people works vis a vis Chakrabarty’s “A Climate of History,” see Davies’ *The Birth of the Anthropocene*.

<sup>2</sup> For the observation that many popular climate scientists continue to regularly refer to all humans as “mankind,” I am indebted to Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s answer to an audience question after her talk at Washington University in October of 2017.

interference, or even of the problem of a group of largely white men imagining themselves as saviors of the world, should at least be a part of these conversations. An awareness of the long history of environmental thought, and its many collusions with imperial powers and indigenous/feminist resistance to them, is needed in contemporary environmental politics now more than ever.

In the second chapter, I discussed the intimate relationship between touristic access and colonial presence, and how celebration of seemingly progressive figures like Stevenson need always be understood within a context that acknowledges the inherent imbalance of power of western figures abroad. I explain how Stevenson's Pacific short fiction centers itself on indigenous concerns in Oceania at the end of the nineteenth century, especially how colonial presence has affected local ecosystems in terms of land use and traditional practices, yet I also argue that this fiction finds its endings undoing its progressive representations and ultimately satisfying a western market. However, what Stevenson's fiction does particularly well is demonstrate that, even in western representation, environmental degradation caused by colonialism is most legible in indigenous experiences: launching an ecocritical reading of works like his makes the centrality of these experiences to environmental thought apparent.

Ideally, Stevenson's fiction would be read alongside Pacific island authors. Otherwise, this discourse, even as we critique it, continues to perpetuate itself (Lyons 2). However, there are multiple practical and institutional obstructions to reading western representations in the context of Pacific Islander writing. Firstly, there are far fewer written records of Pacific writing from this period. Those that exist have often been preserved by westerners, especially missionaries. Additionally, contemporary writing by Pacific Islanders has been largely absent from global discussions of postcolonial literature. This is partly because Pacific island postcolonial literature, which has been growing steadily since the 1970s, has developed differently than in many other postcolonial regions, and "writing back" to the colonial center is much less central to Pacific island



literature than in other traditions. Instead, most contemporary Pacific literature ignores the history of western representation altogether, choosing instead of focus on issues like tourism and land theft.<sup>3</sup> For example, Albert Wendt, the most famous contemporary Samoan novelist and editor of several seminal Pacific island literary anthologies, admits that, besides *Treasure Island* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, he never could “get much into much else of Stevenson’s work” (10). This has perhaps made it less accessible to non-Pacific island audiences. Today, Pacific island literature remains one of the least studied postcolonial regional literatures. It is omitted from *The Norton Anthology* and *Cambridge Companions*, and it is, consequently, omitted from the syllabi of postcolonial and Anglophone literature classes. Not only are there are no English language Pacific island anthologies from major publishing houses, but the broad survey anthologies like *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, and *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* do not include a single Pacific island writer. Finally, the trend to conflate the region’s literature as that of the “Pacific Rim” orients the Pacific within the context of Asian and Asian diasporic studies (Sharrad 3). While there is no doubt that a significant portion of Pacific Islanders are descendants of Asian immigrants to the region, this title subsumes all Pacific Islanders, merging one already large region with an enormous one and effectively making Oceania a “hole in the doughnut,’ an empty space” (Hau’ofa 397). By reading works like Stevenson’s, especially in the context of Pacific self-representation, there is great potential to correct this understanding. Much is at stake, as right now contemporary tourism fills in this absence by replicating the most hackneyed tropes about Oceania

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<sup>3</sup> Consider also a poem by Arthur Thomas in the third *Mana Annual* (an early Pacific island writing anthology) depicts the stereotypical paradisiacal island with “Swaying palm trees,” “Long white beaches,” and “Smiling native girls/With strong bright teeth, Serving bright-coloured drinks” (4, 6, 10-12). At the end of the poem, he announces “This is not my vision of Paradise” (18) and offers up a counter-vision of a market with people from “. . .different ethnic groups;/Struggling for survival” (24-5). Celo Kulagoe’s “White—Land,” written in both pidgin and English, comments on the untrustworthiness of white men who are interested in native land, “He is here again/to help you,/help you in selling your land/. . .so that you may have lots of money” (11-13).

and Pacific Islanders. Yet it is critical that this imperial representation be paired with postcolonial authors' visions of themselves and their region.<sup>4</sup>

In the third chapter, I pivot to thinking about how women's partial view offers an alternative to the totalizing colonial view from afar. Brassey's obsession with the threat of unharnessed energy, evident in her anxiety about coal supplies onboard and her fascination with Kilauea, is in hindsight weirdly apt for a Victorian, for the rising use of the fossil fuels for travel and tourism that journeys like *Sunbeam* ushered in have since contributed greatly to global warming, which is threatening, unharnessed energy at its worst. Both Brassey and Routledge demonstrate that breaking with the conventions of the travel writing genre—which, as women, they were able to do more easily—allows one to combat cynicism and not have to posture as one with a perfect, unobstructed view. Routledge's comfort with forestalling definitive conclusions is an especially noteworthy exception to western representations of native people. Reading Routledge today in light of what is at stake in the contemporary debates about causes of Rapa Nui deforestation illustrates the possibilities of placing western representations ethically within contemporary contexts.

Native Rapa Nui today are still facing imperial and environmental problems, yet their self-representation is flourishing. Today islanders openly challenge the presumption that their ancestors are the characters in a tale of environmental mismanagement and decline. Like many other Pacific island populations who were affected by western diseases and slave raids, they too reject the myth that they are a vanishing race. The decline of their ecosystem is instead a twenty-first century problem, as the major threat is now the thousands of tourists who visit the island annually, for there is no functioning sewer system on the island and only a limited water supply. Trash disposal has

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<sup>4</sup> An ideal version of this project, for example, would have been able to read and access Hawaiian-language newspapers from the late nineteenth century to see if there is any mention of Stevenson's translated version of "The Bottle Imp," his tour, and his meeting with the Hawaiian king and queen; or to read advertisements for imported products and imported seeds, or advertisements for jobs on farms like Vailima or as house servants in Keawe's big house. In the classroom, these stories might be used as introductory texts to contemporary Anglophone novels by Pacific islanders.

become a critical problem, too (Bloch). The Chilean government's neocolonial administration of the island has privileged the tourist industry over native rights, and Chilean nationals have immigrated to this island in large numbers, now outnumbering native Rapa Nui. Over the course of the last decade, Rapa Nui have staged large protests against these intrusions and mistreatment. In 2011, a major clan occupied a new ecotourist resort that was built on their ancestral land and were bloodily evicted by the Chilean government ("Rapanui: International Community"), an action that was condemned by the United Nations (Anaya). Whereas popular anthropology uses the history of Rapa Nui as an ecological cautionary tale for the rest of the world—a new western myth about the foolish native—native Rapa Nui see the rest of the world bringing environmental decline to the island with them. (Recently, tourists have been asked to take their trash back to the mainland with them in their suitcases [Bloch]). These tourists use a tremendous amount of fossil fuels to get there, as it is one of the most remote places on earth, some 2,300 miles east of Tahiti and 2,500 miles west of Chile ("Easter Island"), while the consequences of global warming lap the shore. Due to higher waves and warming temperatures, the ceremonial *ahu* platforms on which the *moai* statues sit are eroding, and thus the *moai* are under threat of toppling over (Markham et al. 71).

The good news, however, is that the native Rapa Nui cultural revival is thriving and changing the global narrative about Rapa Nui's history. In the past few decades, native revitalization has led to the restoration of several *moai*. In 2011, Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo were able to successfully demonstrate their hypothesis (which they developed by listening to the explanations of native Rapa Nui) that the *moai* "walked" to their resting places from the rock quarry, instead of rolling on felled trees, as Jared Diamond and popular anthropology have proposed. Hunt and Lipo worked alongside dozens of native Rapa Nui and other Pacific Islanders to move an upright *moai* using ropes, essentially tilting it back and forth along its base slowly and patiently toward its platform ("Scientists Make Easter Island Statue Walk"). The popularity of such an event, which was covered

in *National Geographic*, indicates the vitality of Rapa Nui self-representation today, a welcome departure from the ominous future most western travel literature had predicted, and that Brassey and Routledge, in a small but significant way, challenged.

In the fourth chapter, I showed that the claims of ecofeminism—that the oppression of women is intimately tied to the oppression of postcolonial and indigenous people and to the exploitation of the earth—can produce readings of classic literary texts that intersect especially well with the claims of material ecocriticism, which maintains that human agency has been constituted by access to fossil fuels, and that we can read “petrotxts” to understand this relationship better. At the end of *Victory*, Lena’s decision to take herself out of circulation leads eventually to the erasure of corporate involvement in the island and the restoration of the island ecosystem. (Because Indonesia is currently the fifth largest coal producing nation in the world, Samburan today, more than likely, would have already been mined) (“Coal”). I suggested that Conrad criticism, having focused for too long on white male protagonists’ psychological experiences of their environments, is primed for ecocritical, ecofeminist approaches like the one that I offer. I hope that this chapter in its own small way illustrates the relevance of literary inquiry to environmental studies more broadly. Texts like *Victory* reveal the intimacies and stakes of intersectional oppressions that include exploitation of ecosystems, and we must read them in broad contexts that take into account the experiences of those who are marginal. The humanities have the advantage of being able to teach these intersections in ways that can captivate skeptics and validate those whose suffering is otherwise invisible.

In our current political climate, we see those who have power to effect change willfully denying the existence of the subjugation of women, the domination of racially-oppressed people, and the fact that environmental catastrophe is imminent. Now more than ever it is tempting to embrace passivity and futility, just as it is seductive to presume to see perfectly plainly. Now is

precisely when it would be most valuable to listen deeply to those voices from the past who were in many ways ignorant of their own conditions, yet kept looking and perceiving nonetheless. And it is also when those of us in positions of power or privilege should strain to listen to the vulnerable who we perceive least clearly. Reading these works is one way to listen. Reading these works in reference to contemporary indigenous issues, which this dissertation has just begun to gesture towards, would be ideal. These texts remind us that every view is a partial view, and that the future is still yet undetermined—at least in part—and that it still remains somewhat black and blank. They suggest that we can choose to act on global warming “*even if* we are not strictly ‘responsible’ for it, *even if* it will not come about (Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 183). We, too, can choose to stay with a dying world.

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