

‘India isn’t big enough for such as us’: Conrad and Kipling’s Fictions of Extraction

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Abstract

The British late nineteenth century represents the apex of intermingled visions of progress and exhaustion tied to extractive imperial pursuits. The prevalence of the colonial adventure narrative, associated with writers like Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, and H. Rider Haggard, represents both peak ideological embrace of colonial capitalism (and the attendant social domination and resource extraction) and the Victorians’ clearest diagnostic critique of such an unsustainable commitment. In this essay, I rethink the ecological valences of the colonial adventure text by analyzing Conrad and Kipling alongside seemingly disparate thinkers: from William Stanley Jevons to Karl Marx, Raymond Williams to Edward Said. As I argue, in the conjunction between an overtly masculine attachment to colonial adventures, resource extraction, and capitalist progress, Kipling’s ‘The Man Who Would Be King’, alongside Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, reveals cracks in the colonial social order, a vision of the limits of ‘national progress’ reliant on finite and exhaustible resources.

‘I won’t make a Nation...I’ll make an Empire!’¹

We not are dealing, in other words, with ‘lands of famine’ becalmed in stagnant backwaters of world history, but with the fate of tropical humanity at the precise moment (1870-1914) when its labor and products were being dynamically conscripted into a London-centered world economy.²

The British late nineteenth-century moment of writers like Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad represents both peak ideological embrace of colonial capitalism

¹ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Man Who Would Be King,’ in *The Man Who Would Be King: Selected Stories* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2011), pp. 98-126. (p. 118). Subsequent parenthetical citations refer to this edition.

² Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (New York, NY: Verso, 2002), p. 9.

(and its attendant social domination and resource extraction) *and* the Victorians' clearest diagnostic critique of such an unsustainable commitment. As Conrad's Marlow observes in *Heart of Darkness* (1899): 'To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. Who paid for the noble enterprise I don't know, but the uncle of our Manager was leader of that lot'.³ The 'bowels of the land', or for Karl Marx, 'the bowels of the earth',⁴ become a crucial site of imperial appropriation and exploitation. In the vein of postcolonial theory, Edward Said emphatically and poignantly articulates the imbrication between human and non-human life within the empire: 'Territory and possessions are at stake, geography and power. Everything about human history is rooted in the earth, which has meant that we must think about habitation, but it has also meant that people have planned to *have* more territory and therefore must do something about its indigenous residents'.⁵ Said's insight converges with Marlow's meditation on extraction, and we find, perhaps surprisingly, a connection to ecological thought – particularly in the metaphor of rootedness. For Said, history has roots and the earth contains imperial scars. The relation between power, expansion, and territory articulated here by Said provides a constellation for thinking about the intersection between dispossession and environment. In her effort to situate Said in connection to environmental thinking and ecocriticism, Naomi Klein writes: 'In short, Said may have had no time for tree-huggers, but tree-huggers must urgently make time for Said – and for a great many other anti-imperialist, postcolonial thinkers – because without that knowledge, there is no way to understand how we ended up in this dangerous place, or to grasp the

³ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Paul B Armstrong (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2016), p. 31. Subsequent parenthetical citations refer to this edition.

⁴ Marx deploys extractive figuration while unfolding the 'riddle of the money fetish' in *Capital, Vol. 1*: 'This physical object, gold or silver in its crude state, becomes, immediately on its emergence from the bowels of the earth, the direct incarnation of all human labour. Hence the magic of money. Men are henceforth related to each other in their social process of production in a purely atomistic way. Their own relations of production therefore assume a material shape, which is independent of their control and their conscious individual action. This situation is manifested first by the fact that the products of men's labour universally take on the form of commodities. The riddle of the money fetish is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish, now become visible and dazzling to our eyes'; Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1990), p. 187.

⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1993), p. 7. Subsequent parenthetical citations refer to this edition.

transformations required to get us out'.⁶ In explicitly pursuing the connections between environmental thought and postcolonial theory, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee offers a compelling rearticulation and extension of Said's concern with history, geography, and power through an expansive sense of 'environment':

I have understood "environment" as being the symbiotic network of the entire human and non-human fields of existence, I have collapsed the potentially distinct terms "history" and "geography" into "eco-". Further, since I mobilize this historical-materialist concept of the environment in order to read literary cultures from a particular stage in history, I have here raised the issue of aesthetics.⁷

Like Mukherjee, I pursue literary insights into the convergence of empire and environment with particular attention to the late imperial moment at the end of the nineteenth century. I argue that despite the seeming embrace of empire by writers like Kipling and Conrad, such a commitment is undermined by their narrative articulations of the vast damage wrought by the violent unearthing of resources and sacrifice of populations.

The work of Conrad and Kipling's texts are shaped by and shed light on a period of 'new imperialism' – highlighted by the Berlin Conference of 1885, while also corresponding to the discovery of diamonds in South Africa during the 1870s, and notably the beginning of the end of British global hegemony.⁸ Thus, this historical stage represents a crucial hinge for empire and global capitalism at large. I insist on the temporal disjointedness in tracing the prehistory and afterlife of compounding crises, the residual legacies of empire's extractions and the corresponding social and environmental upheaval.⁹ Extractive activities in the

⁶ Naomi Klein, 'Let Them Drown: The Violence of Othering in a Warming World', *London Review of Books*, 38.11 (June 2, 2016) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v38/n11/naomi-klein/let-them-drown>>

⁷ Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 19.

⁸ See, Giovanni Arighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*.

⁹ This approach resonates in some ways with Sukanya Banerjee's recent formulation of the 'transimperial'. She writes: 'While a transnational viewpoint looks above, below, between, and beyond the category of "nation," the transimperial, while certainly not valorizing "empire," nonetheless redirects attention toward rather than away from it. It underlines the Victorian Empire in all its freightedness and relationalities, keeping alive the asymmetries, tensions, and collaborations that hold multiple constituencies—human and nonhuman—together. It does so in ways that can temper the merely additive logic that the transnational sometimes entails, and

colonies – whether of coal, oil, silver, gold, or ivory – makes legible capitalist modernity’s most devastating fiction: a promise of progress made possible by the extraction of resources untethered from the corresponding realities of exhaustion. This constitutive contradiction emerges in its most crystallised form during the Victorian period. Sue Zemka articulates the pervasive appeal to progress within the nineteenth century when she writes: ‘The nineteenth-century *idea* of history was unthinkable apart from the *form* of progress’.¹⁰ What is the Victorian ‘*form* of progress?’ Perhaps such a singular pursuit veils the manifold ways in which the idea of progress becomes totalised (and totalising) as it is inscribed into bourgeois life. But, as Fredric Jameson provocatively asks, ‘What if the ‘idea’ of progress were not an idea at all but rather the symptom of something else?’¹¹ Bourgeois fantasies of progress, indicative of and registering the actuality of industrial capitalism, attempt to cover over the violence, degradation, and exhaustion of such practices. In a familiar passage from the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels frame such discourse of progress as ‘improvement’ within the context of bourgeois imperialism as it ‘draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization’ and ‘compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image’.¹² For Marx and Engels, compulsory ‘improvement’ toward ‘civilization’, an imperial project sold as progress, contains an extreme form of exhaustion: ‘extinction’. In this historical and theoretical constellation, we can begin to see the ecological consequences of progress and its limits.

In bringing together Kipling and Conrad alongside a range of critics and theorists, I pursue a Marxian eco-perspective attentive to postcolonial insights. Extending Marx’s analysis of the English countryside to the colonies, Raymond Williams identifies the resurrection of improvement narratives tied to imperialism:

it should do so without resorting to parochial chauvinisms.’ (‘Who, or What, is Victorian?’ 221).

¹⁰ Sue Zemka, ‘Progress’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 46.3/4 (2018), pp. 812-16 (p. 813).

¹¹ Fredric Jameson, ‘Progress Versus Utopia, Or, Can We Imagine The Future?’ in *Archaeologies of the Future*, (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), p. 281.

¹² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2002), p. 224.

What is offered as an idea, to hide this exploitation, is a modern version of the old idea of ‘improvement’: a scale of human societies which theoretically culminates in universal industrialisation. All the ‘country’ will become ‘city’: that is the logic of its development: a simple linear scale, along which degrees of ‘development’ and ‘underdevelopment’ can be marked.¹³

For Williams, such Conradian ‘idea[s]’ of ‘improvement’ and ‘development’ take on explicitly extractive connotations: ‘What the oil companies do, what the mining companies do, is what landlords did, what plantation owners did and do...The land, for its fertility or for its ore, is in both cases abstractly seen. It is used in an enterprise which overrides, for the time being, all other considerations’.¹⁴ We inherit from the Victorians and still inhabit a capitalist mode of production reliant on combined and uneven development rooted in extractive practices.¹⁵ Such social and economic forms are driven by commitments to perpetual growth, ‘which overrides...all other considerations’. But if there has been an influx of ecocritical (in a broad sense) work emerging within nineteenth-century studies, an insistence that in various ways the world of the present is very much still a Victorian one, I argue that William Stanley Jevons’ mid nineteenth-century paradigm of ‘national progress’ and ‘probable exhaustion’¹⁶ offers a compelling lens into an ever-reconstituting albeit persistent relation between the production and reproduction of not only atmospheres, but

¹³ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 284.

¹⁴ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 293.

¹⁵ As Nathan Hensley and Philip Steer suggest in their introduction to the collection, *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire* ed. Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2019), p. 3.

¹⁶ I borrow these phrases from the subtitle of Jevons’ influential pamphlet, *The Coal Question: An Inquiry Concerning the Progress of the Nation, and the Probable Exhaustion of Our Coal Mines* (1865). As Allen MacDuffie points out, ‘[f]or Jevons, progress itself was the problem’ and the domestic demand for energy meant that ‘national progress’ necessarily involved the outward reach of empire: ‘it was, in part, the insatiable demand for energy at home that drove England and other European powers into Africa, South America, and elsewhere in search of additional raw materials and energy deposits’ (55).

the infrastructural conditions¹⁷ (that is to say the material conditions) of altered environments. In what follows, I turn my attention to the structuring contradictions that arise from such commitments to ‘progress’ and ‘development’ as they emerge in two related texts within the canon of late Victorian colonial adventure narratives: Kipling’s ‘The Man Who Would Be King’ (1888) and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

I suggest that the late-nineteenth century, the literary moment of Conrad and Kipling (and others like H. Rider Haggard and later T.E. Lawrence), represents the apex of intermingled visions of progress and exhaustion tied to extractive imperial pursuits. This essay attempts to formulate a Marxian literary theory attentive to empire and ecology. In this endeavour, I follow the work of Edward Said and Raymond Williams, as well as scholars like Mukherjee and Rob Nixon.¹⁸ The roots of such a theory might be found near the end of *The Country and the City* in which Williams argues that after capitalist development:

our powerful images of country and city have been ways of responding to a whole social development. This is why, in the end, we must not limit ourselves to their contrast but go on to see their interrelations and through these the real shape of the underlying crisis.¹⁹

What Williams’ refers to as the ‘whole social development’ echoes Marxian deployments of the concept of totality, a term often misunderstood despite its

¹⁷ Worth noting here is Raymond Williams’ revision of an orthodox approach to the Marxian terms, base and superstructure, that insists on reading these spheres as autonomous and hypostasized. ‘Orthodox analysts began to think of “the base” and “the superstructure” as if they were separable concrete entities. In doing so they lost sight of the very processes—not abstract relations but constitutive processes—which should have been the special function of historical materialism to emphasize’; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 81.

¹⁸ In his *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* Rob Nixon points to ‘four main schisms...between the dominant concerns of postcolonialists and ecocritics’ (p. 236). This divide in some ways derives from the fact that ‘literary environmentalism was developing, de facto, as an offshoot of American studies’—associated with the ‘wilderness tradition’ (Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, etc.) and ‘Jeffersonian agrarianism’ (p. 235). Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). On Conrad and ‘the concept of wilderness’, see, Jesse Oak Taylor, ‘Wilderness after Nature: Conrad, Empire and the Anthropocene’, in *Conrad and Nature: Essays*, ed. Lisa Schneider-Rebozo, Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy, and John G. Peters (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), pp. 21-42. (p. 32).

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 297.

pervasiveness. Like Williams, Georg Lukács turns to literature in order to explore ‘the real shape of the underlying crisis’, or what he understands as the difference between the novel and the epic: ‘[T]he novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life’.²⁰ I follow both Williams and Lukács in exploring these concerns within a literary framework, while insisting that capitalism’s extractions are central to the fractures within capital’s totality and function as a driving force of the contradiction between progress and exhaustion.

In Rudyard Kipling’s short story, ‘The Man Who Would Be King’, the reader encounters the expansiveness of empire,²¹ a drive toward accumulation and the porousness of borders. We find this sentiment as two vagabonds, ‘Loafers’, Peachey Carnehan and Daniel Dravot reflect upon the finitude of a place like India: ‘We have been all over India, mostly on foot. We have been boiler-fitters, engine-drivers, petty contractors, and all that, and we have decided that India isn’t big enough for such as us’.²² For these two characters, a technocratic and machinic bent to their entrepreneurialism signals the promise of industrial progress. This promise is unsurprisingly rooted in careers like ‘boiler-fitters, engine drivers’ – professions tied to an industrialism premised on limitless expansion. But, Carnehan and Dravot come up against territorial limits: ‘India isn’t big enough for such as us’. In this instance, it is not only that the nation-state, through sovereign borders, produces a necessary limit, but also that the restrictions are imposed from outside: external limits set in place by the governing metropole. Breaking outside these bounds leads to a revised notion of sovereignty, that of self-proclaimed Kings:

The country isn’t half worked out because they that governs it won’t let you touch it. They spend all their blessed time in governing it, and you can’t lift a spade, nor chip a rock, nor look for oil, nor anything like that, without all the Government saying, ‘Leave it alone, and let us govern.’ Therefore, such *as* it is, we will let it alone, and go away to some other

²⁰ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974), p. 60.

²¹ Relatedly, Gayatri Spivak writes of *Heart of Darkness* (my other privileged text in this essay): ‘*Heart of Darkness* is committed to the narrative of nation as expanding space: that story is told in the broad strokes of male bonding and a loner escaping that bond.’; Gayatri Spivak, *The Death of a Discipline* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 77.

²² Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Man Who Would Be King,’ in *The Man Who Would Be King: Selected Stories* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2011), pp. 98-126. (p. 104). Subsequent parenthetical citations refer to this edition.

place where a man isn't crowded and can come to his own. We are not little men, and there is nothing that we are afraid of except Drink, and we have signed a Contract on that. *Therefore*, we are going away to be Kings. (p. 104)

According to Carnehan and Dravot, governance itself is the problem. Contradictions arise as these adventurers wish to be simultaneously both inside and outside of the empire – their actions are made possible only by imperial pursuits, but at the same time limited by its bureaucratic forces.²³ Related to this constellation, we find in Kipling's 'The Man Who Would Be King' the necessity of self-imposed limits, relying on a familiar tenet of political philosophy: the need for 'a Contract'. The dangers of this unnamed (and unmapped?) 'some other place', lie not in its mystery or dangerous natives, but the vice of 'Drink'. The implications of this passage suggest an over-regulated, meddling bureaucracy preventing the further expansion and opening up of the empire. Importantly, the opportunities to unleash this imagined repressed potential exists within extractive industry – 'you can't lift a spade, nor chip a rock, nor look for oil.' Kipling's text presents a possible alternative in the wildcat exploration and opening up of unmapped, unspoiled territories. With this, we find a slightly revised conception of sovereignty: 'going away to be Kings' requires not only free movement across borders and stifling bureaucracy, but also implies control over both surface and depth of the land.

Kipling's narrator, a bureaucratic pen-pushing journalist,²⁴ finds himself stuck in the throes of repetitive boredom tied to the empire's administrative duties. The mysterious man on the train, later revealed to be Peachey Carnehan,

²³ In her study of imperialism, Hannah Arendt traces the relation between adventure and bureaucracy: 'The two key figures in this system, whose very essence is aimless process, are the bureaucrat on one side and the secret agent on the other. Both types, as long as they served only British imperialism, never quite denied that they were descended from dragon-slayers and protectors of the weak and therefore never drove bureaucratic regimes to their inherent extremes'; Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, NY: Harcourt, 1994), p. 216.

²⁴ In an influential essay on Kipling's short story, Paul Fussell writes on the unique status of this short story in relation to Kipling's *oeuvre*, the status of irony, and relation to freemasonry. Early on in Fussell's essay we find an interesting commentary on Kipling and journalistic tendencies: 'Perhaps one does not seriously misrepresent current critical attitudes by saying that, if Kipling is regarded at all as an artist, he is thought of as one whose journalistic virtues of pertness, bustle, and breathlessness are gravely counterbalanced by his journalistic vices of superficiality, grandiosity, and vulgarity'; Paul Fussell, 'Irony, Freemasonry, and Humane Ethics in Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King"', *ELH* 25.3 (1958), 216-33 (p. 216).

exists beyond profession; as his bearded partner, Daniel Dravot, claims later on: ‘the less said about our professions the better, for we have been most things in our time’ (p. 104). In this world, the available occupations and pursuits of the narrator and Peachey Carnehan and Daniel Dravot represent two sides of the same colonial coin: bureaucrat and entrepreneur. These ‘types’ within colonial fiction, and the making of the empire itself, bring us back to the early quotation from the story: ‘He told tales of things he had seen and done, of out-of-the-way corners of the empire into which he had penetrated, and of adventures in which he risked his life for a few days’ food’ (p. 98). The language of penetration connotes violation and deployed here also signals the everyday activities of an adventurer as he makes his way through the ‘out-of-the-way corners of the Empire’. This image – ‘into which he had penetrated’ – represents the sexualized, violatory, and possessive depiction of colonial activity at the end of the nineteenth century, and also the imbrication of this attitude with riches below the surface: the extraction of minerals and other resources requires the destruction of the earth through mining.

Kipling offers a vision of extractive industry, bureaucracy, and mapping that will become common within colonial sites in the early twentieth century.²⁵ In imagery of exploration and blankness, Kipling anticipates Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, as Carnehan and Dravot imagine a blank space on the map, to be filled in, explored, exploited: ‘As big a map as you have got, even if it’s all blank where Kafiristan is, and any books you’ve got. We can read, though we aren’t very educated’ (p. 105). The ‘blank’ map, in Conrad figured as a ‘blank space’ (p. 8), functions through familiar imperial ideology – the idea that unmapped space can be equated with uninhabited territory. However, the map also represents a central contradiction of Kipling’s story, and the narrative of empire itself: the potential exploits within this unmapped space signal a desired freedom from bureaucratic overreach, but this exploration and exploitation of peoples and the earth can only

²⁵ On the intersection between colonial mapping, pipelines, and war, Rachel Havrelock traces the importance of the Sykes-Picot Accord: ‘The outcome of World War I brought the companies [BP, Shell, ExxonMobil, and Total] to the region as holders of concessions to everything beneath the ground in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. Anachronism is difficult to avoid here since the countries bearing these names came into being along with the concessionary grants. These countries were born of agreements drawn among colonial powers during and following World War I. The Sykes-Picot Accord that bifurcated territory into spheres of British and French influence—corresponding with rough ideas of where dedicated British and French pipelines would run (Havrelock 2016)—set the tone for subsequent divisions into discrete nation-state colonies’; Rachel Havrelock, ‘The Borders Beneath: On Pipelines and Resource Sovereignty’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116.2 (2017), 408-16 (p. 409).

ever be a part of the imperial project – material resources, land, people, incorporated into the empire. Dravot understands this when he explains:

and we'd be an Empire. When everything was shipshape, I'd hand over the crown – this crown I'm wearing now – to Queen Victoria on my knees, and she'd say: 'Rise up, Sir Daniel Dravot.' Oh, it's big! It's big, I tell you! But there's so much to be done in every place – Bashkai, Khawak, Shu, and everywhere else (p. 119).

If Kipling's story traces a desire linked to independence, an anti-bureaucratic sentiment tied to problems of scale, and sovereignty – the story's title after all is 'The Man Who Would Be King' – why does Dravot wish to immediately cede power back to the imperial center, to the crown of Victoria? Further, the overwhelming masculinity of the story, and of late Victorian fiction more generally of which Kipling is a central contributor, produces a male conception of power; the singularity of 'Man' in the title, and its link to sovereign signifier, 'King', implies a world outside the bounds of Queen Victoria's established Empire, even giving us an early version of anthropocentric Age of Man discourse.²⁶ Ultimately, Dravot and Carnehan are simply tools within the bureaucratic system, willing to hand over their newly mapped territories to the same 'Government' that 'won't let you touch it [exploitable territory]' (p. 104). As a foil to the brazen explorers, Kipling's story also offers insight into another side of imperial bureaucracy – a view of the administrative and professional class work of journalism.

Perhaps the most explicit example of imperial bureaucratic tedium in the story emerges through the description of the daily activities of the newspaper. Kipling deploys the figure of the wheel, familiar to readers of his novel *Kim* (1901), which functions alongside the railroad as representative of progress. However, like the limits arising from class distinctions found in the railcars, the wheel turns, but its circular motion signifies not movement and progress, but stasis and repetition: 'The wheel of the world swings through the same phases again and again. Summer passed and winter thereafter, and came and passed again. The daily paper continued and I with it, and upon the third summer there

²⁶ For a compelling critique of this discourse, see, Dana Luciano, 'The Anthropocene, 1945/1783/1610/1492-???? (Or, I Wish I Knew How to Quit You)', in *Timelines of American Literature* ed. by Cody Marrs and Christopher Hager, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), pp. 147-58.

fell a hot night...’ (p. 109). The scene of day-to-day newspaper business follows the pattern of seasonal change – ‘Summer passed and winter thereafter, and came and passed again’. *Again, and again*. These daily, and then yearly, commitments to the dispersal of information provide an insight into a desire for the ‘wheel of the world’ to catch a hitch, an interruption of monotony. The narrator of Kipling’s story desires *difference*, but this eludes his grasp. Days, seasons, and telegraphs pass in familiar ways: ‘a strained waiting for something to be telegraphed from the other side of the world, exactly as had happened before’ (p. 109). There is an exactitude of repetition that stands as the opposite of an event signaling difference, and this bleak reflection on colonial bureaucracy and its meaninglessness ends with the most trivial of acknowledgements. ‘A few great men had died in the past two years, the machines worked with more clatter, and some of the trees in the office garden were a few feet taller. But that was all the difference’ (p. 109). Deaths of unnamed, generic ‘great men’, the drowning noise of machinery, and the slow growth of the surrounding landscape represent ‘all the difference’ in this office environment. Allusions to the telegraph and ‘clatter’ of the ‘machines’ return the reader to the opening image of the railway, discussed above. The narrator waits for the promise of technological progress, news from abroad, ‘the other side of the world’, only to arrive ‘exactly as had happened before’. In other words, the ‘wheel of the world swings through the same phases again and again’. Even technological infrastructure cannot solve the contradiction at the heart of imperial production and reproduction – the idea that expansion, progress, accumulation inherently reveal stasis as a form of exhaustion. Of course, this is not only true of capitalist economic production, the drive toward ‘lift[ing] a spade, nor chip[ping] a rock, nor look[ing] for oil, nor anything like that’ (p. 104). On the other side of imperial adventure and exploration, we find the journalist-bureaucrat. The dissemination of information via the ‘daily paper’ becomes an ideological act of knowledge production. Ultimately, both economic production and sexual reproduction reveal stasis and sterility throughout ‘The Man Who Would Be King’. A final overreach signals the failed fantasy of sexual reproduction in the story, producing yet another fissure within a vision of imperial conquest and exploitation.

Above, in a discussion regarding Dravot and Carnehan potentially ceding their ‘empire’ to Queen Victoria, I remarked upon the strangeness of this gesture, particularly due to their particular vision of conquest, penetrating into ‘the dark places of the earth’ (p. 100), and becoming kings. After all, the title of Kipling’s story is not, ‘The Queen’s Adventures in Kafiristan’, or, ‘Victoria’s Little

Wars'.²⁷ This is to say that Kipling renders the project of empire as a male endeavor; the story, and its links to exploitation and extractive enterprise, presents an unsettlingly dominant masculine vision. As we have seen, economic and material production, chipping rocks and looking for oil, necessarily expands beyond the boundaries of imperial oversight; but, in Dravot and Carnehan's encounter with the villages and 'natives', economic production and sexual reproduction exist side by side:

Then he and Carnehan takes the big boss of each village by the arm and walks them down into the valley, and shows them how to scratch a line with a spear right down the valley, and gives each a sod of turf from both sides of the line. Then all the people comes down and shouts like the devil and all, and Dravot says: 'Go and dig the land, and be fruitful and multiply'. (p. 113)

Shortly after the carving up of the earth into private property, boundary lines stratigraphically marked in the earth by a spear, Dravot utters a curious conjunction: 'Go and dig the land, and be fruitful and multiply'. In this imperative, readers should hear echoes of the familiar Biblical passage, signaling the transformation of Dravot and Carnahan not only into kings, but Gods as well. But what is fruitful? What is multiplying? Is this an injunction to sexual reproduction, an attempt to people and expand their nascent empire? Or, is this a demand tied to the land, to the 'bowels of the earth'? I want to suggest that the ambiguity in this strange convergence of production and reproduction signals that for Kipling (and others), accumulation via capitalist extraction, imperial growth and expansion must take the place of any sexual reproduction. As we will see, the possibility of and desire for heterosexual coupling reveals a fracture in the imperialism of Dravot and Carnehan.

Near the beginning of their adventures, Dravot remarks upon an agreement made to guard against the typical vices of rambling men: 'We are not little men, and there is nothing that we are afraid of except Drink, and we have signed a Contrack on that'. This 'Contrack' contains three central tenets, the second of which concerns my argument most directly: *'That you and me will not, while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any Woman black, white, or*

²⁷ I have in mind Nathan K. Hensley's explication of and supplement to Byron Farwell's *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* (1972) in his book, *Forms of Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful' (p. 106; original emphasis). On reflection of this agreement, Carnehan states that they 'have kept away from the two things that make life worth having' (p. 107). However, later in the story, Dravot yearns for a 'Queen' to share the 'winter months' (p. 120). Peachey Carnehan reminds his partner, and symbolic brother in imperial pursuits, of their agreement, discouraging any such union: 'It'll only bring us harm. The Bible says that Kings ain't to waste their strength on women, "specially when they've got a raw new Kingdom to work over"' (p. 120). The warning from Carnehan to Dravot is twofold: harm will come because the Bible warns against wasting 'strength on women', but also because their 'Kingdom' sits 'raw', needs to be 'work[ed] over'. Instead of mingling with women '*black, white, or brown*', and finding a 'Queen', Carnehan shifts attention to the land – 'work over' the Kingdom, i.e. extract and accumulate 'raw' materials. Daniel Dravot refuses the opposition between the Kingdom and marriage, or, perhaps framed somewhat differently, between sexual reproduction and economic production.

The hubris that accompanies thinking themselves gods and kings, combined with the violation of the 'Contract', ushers in the inevitable downfall of Carnehan and Dravot and brings the story to a close. But against a familiar narrative resolution in the form of the marriage plot, what Kipling offers is the failure of such consummation or what Nancy Armstrong names 'the good marriage concluding fiction'.²⁸ This hubristic overreach is found in the familiar refrain (quoted as an epigraph): 'I won't make a Nation...I'll make an Empire!' relies on the idea that natives have 'grown to be English' (p. 118). We find a particular tragic irony to this phrase as dissolution unfolds. Paul Fussell writes of this passage: 'Those who would accuse Kipling, at every stage in his career, of the vulgarity of an insensitive imperialism would do well to re-examine the following ranting utterance of Dravot's, delivered just before he decides to violate the contract by taking a woman'.²⁹ This sentiment supports my reappraisal of Kipling's imperial vision as it becomes marred by extractive pursuits. Dravot's frustration with Carnehan and the Council over his desire to find a Queen comes up against the very mythology they have created for themselves. In response to a question posed regarding the 'difficulty' of this situation, Billy Fish, Chief of Bashkai, answers: 'How can daughters of men marry Gods or Devils? It's not

²⁸ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 48. On the peculiarly extractive connotations of the failed marriage plot, non-reproduction, and 'no future' paradigm, see, Elizabeth Miller, 'Drill, Baby, Drill.'

²⁹ Paul Fussell, 'Irony, Freemasonry, and Humane Ethics in Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King"', *ELH* 25.3 (1958), 216-33 (p. 230).

proper' (p. 121). The laws of men, and perhaps propriety, present limits to Dravot's desires. After continued warnings from Billy Fish and Carnehan, suggesting a 'row' is on the horizon, Dravot flaunts his obstinacy and chooses a wife. Chaos, and eventually mutiny, follows this decision. "'The slut's bitten me!'" says he, clapping his hand to his neck, and, sure enough, his hand was red with blood.' (p. 122). In this sexist exclamation, Dravot draws attention to his own mortality, revealing the falsehoods at the center of the imagined all-powerful sovereignty and godliness. The blood that flows from his neck, the site of the tragic bite, is reminiscent of the Biblical bite into the apple, of which Peachey Carnehan surely has familiarity. The knowledge revealed by this feminine sting is not that of good or evil, but of mortality, of the lie at the heart of Dravot and Carnehan's identities.

After the fateful bite, mass disorder ensues, and the specter of mutiny haunts the scene. As Carnehan explains after the exchanged gunfire between the Army and the Bashkai men, "The valley was full of shouting, howling people, and every soul was shrieking, 'Not a God nor a Devil but only a man!'" (p. 122). The repetition of this refrain, reminding all of the mortality of the supposed kings and gods, rings out alongside gunfire: 'only a man!' In the midst of the unrest and violence, Daniel Dravot turns on his partner, misplacing his frustrations and locating the fault not in his desire and hubris, but in his friend's carelessness. Carnehan remarks: 'He sat upon a rock and called me every name he could lay tongue to. I was too heart-sick to care, though it was all his foolishness that brought the smash' (p. 123). However, instead of reflecting further upon 'all his foolishness', Dravot insisting on breaking the 'Contract' because of his want of a wife, Carnehan shifts the responsibility. "'I'm sorry, Dan,'" says I, 'but there's no accounting for natives. This business is our "Fifty-Seven. Maybe we'll make something out of it yet, when we've got to Bashkai"' (p. 123). Carnehan asserts that these actions, this revolt, cannot be incorporated into their 'civilizing' logic – 'no accounting for natives'. Despite earlier insistence that, 'They are Englishmen, these people' (p. 124), Carnehan maintains that this behavior does not fit within their particular ledger. In order to support this claim, he turns to history, citing the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857 as an analogous revolt, in their minds a similarly illogical act of violence. This allusion serves as an unsettling reminder of the precarity of control, a challenge to and disruption of the dominant hegemony of the British Empire. Near the end of the century, Kipling's story published in 1888, this stranglehold on power is even more tenuous.

Both Peachey Carnehan and Daniel Dravot meet violent and tragic ends – Dravot decapitated, his ‘gold crown’ accompanying his body’s fall from a cliff to the water, and Carnehan half-crucified, taken down from the ‘two pine-tress’ after a day of hanging, only to travel the roads as an abandoned beggar and die alone in an asylum. One dies in a swift swing of violence, one in a whimper. The drive to colonise, to extract resources, to enculturate the natives within an English worldview, cannot be sustained by Dravot and Carnehan. The failure to reproduce these ideological positions mirrors the tragedy of heterosexual desire within the story. I turn now to a more familiarly contorted text of this moment, entwining ideological attachment to empire while offering a compelling critique of progress premised on colonial dispossession and capitalist extraction: Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* stages the pervasive presence of extractive endeavors tied to violence and dispossession – an encompassing atmosphere that becomes inseparable from questions of imperial production and reproduction. While Kipling’s story offers a glimpse into the fractures of imperial world-making in a dramatic and abrupt climax staging the failure of the marriage plot, Conrad’s text refuses such a singularly illustrative moment. Instead, the novella understands the literary possibilities of revision and repression, Marlow’s storytelling and encounter with Kurtz’ ‘Intended’ unfurling the irrational and sterile realities of the hypermasculine ‘idea’ of empire. In locating Conrad’s work in relation to world-building and its perpetual unmaking, Said claims that, ‘With Conrad, then, we are in a world being made and unmade more or less all the time’ (p. 29). Kipling and Conrad provide insight into the failings of imperial adventure and the concurrent entrapment within its totalizing impulses. As Said notes, perhaps no other author in the nineteenth century elucidates this more clearly than Conrad. Conrad might be called the aesthete of extraction.³⁰ While Conrad might have been entrapped within a late imperial moment, stuck between what Said calls, ‘two visions’, we can, from his texts, grapple with persistent insights

³⁰ See, for example, recent critical engagement that might support such a characterization: Elizabeth C. Miller’s reading of *Nostramo* in ‘Drill, Baby, Drill: Extraction Ecologies, Open Temporalities, and Reproductive Futurity in the Provincial Realist Novel’; Jesse Oak Taylor’s chapter, ‘Planetary Impressions: Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Global Connection’ in *The Sky of Our Manufacture*; Michael Tondre’s ‘Conrad’s Carbon Imaginary: Oil, Imperialism, and the Victorian Petro-Archive’; and, much of Allen MacDuffie’s work, but particularly his chapter, ‘Joseph Conrad: energy, entropy, and the fictions of empire’ in *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination*.

into unmade environments, imperial ecologies. As Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism*: ‘Conrad’s tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that ‘natives’ could lead lives free from European domination’ (p. 30). On Said’s account, Conrad’s texts illuminate the uneven power relations manifest in territorial exploitation and theft, but as a ‘creature of his time’ cannot occupy an epistemological position outside of the dominant colonial paradigm, and because of this Conrad ‘could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them’ (p. 30). Said articulates a dual entrapment here: the limits of the aesthetic register and the imprisonments of imperialism. This paradox appears as simultaneous blindness and insight, and in the context of the colonial adventure text takes on extractive connotations. In other words, the imperatives of capital’s extractions make and unmake environments, justified by the idea of progress but also revealing forms of exhaustion – stasis, sterility, and decay.

In Rudyard Kipling’s novel *Kim* (1901), readers find a convergence between the Great Game and the Wheel of Life, illustrating a makeshift combination of secrecy and spirituality, bureaucracy and espionage, that congeals around the perpetuation of a civilizational wheel of progress: enlightened *mission civilisatrice*. Published almost concurrently, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* offers a striking repudiation – the wheels of ‘civilization’ are quite literally off the rails, spinning in air. Early in the novella, Marlow offers a picture of industrial decay: ‘I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders and also for an undersized railway truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty rails’.³¹ These forms of technological progress are rendered deranged and animated only to emphasize their lifelessness – ‘The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal’. In this image we find a curious resuscitation of Descartes’ ‘animal machine’, an idea itself displaced with the invention of the steam engine and the discovery of thermodynamic principles in the nineteenth century.³² But the type of machinery and infrastructure often

³¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 15.

³² This transformation is convincingly articulated by Anson Rabinbach in *The Human Motor*: ‘With the invention of the steam and internal combustion engines, however, the analogy of the human or animal machine began to take on a modern countenance. As the philosopher Serres has noted, the eighteenth-century machine was a product of the Newtonian universe with its multiplicity of forces, disparate sources of motion, and reversible mechanism. By contrast, the

understood to be the guarantor of civilizational progress – a boiler and railway, drivers of the transportation of raw materials – appear to Marlow as abandoned, neglected, and lifeless. In his brief analysis of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* within the matrix of a Victorian prehistory of climate denialism and the 'denial of Darwinian nature', Allen MacDuffie locates this image as 'an exercise in futility and self-delusion'.³³ That is to say, these images convey a sense of estrangement that illuminates the coexistence of 'critique and complicity':³⁴ 'the force of denial that helps maintain the will to dominate in the face of the overwhelming presence of that which will not be dominated'.³⁵ Extending MacDuffie's insightful analysis, I want to suggest that this scene pushes the boundaries of the familiar trope of resilient nature, and in fact elucidates the very limits of colonial capitalism's reliance on finite resources. Indeed, the line between nature and machinery often becomes blurred throughout *Heart of Darkness*, central to the general narrative disorientation. But while this estrangement appears on the subjective level mediated by Marlow, the 'wallowing' boiler and overturned 'railway truck' hint at the embedded structures of extractive industry. In other words, industrial infrastructure has transformed the landscape and in the process distorted and destroyed the objective conditions of life.

Conrad associates aimless work for the sake of an equally nebulous 'idea' with the destruction of the earth. But unlike the silver mine in *Nostramo* (1904), an exploration of the 'bowels of the land' (p. 31) in *Heart of Darkness* seems to reveal not minerals or resources, but emptiness – another iteration of a 'blank space' on the map (p. 8). Marlow reveals his stupefaction in the face of purposelessness: 'I avoided a vast, artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn't a quarry or a sandpit, anyhow. It was just a hole' (p. 16). Unmoored in the face of accumulating death and immiseration, Marlow wades through the 'muddle –

nineteenth-century machine, modeled on the engine, was a "motor," the servant of a powerful nature conceived as a reservoir of motivating power. The machine was capable of work only when powered by some external source, whereas the motor was regulated by internal, dynamic principles, converting fuel into heat, and heat into mechanical work. The body, the steam engine, and the cosmos were thus connected by a single and unbroken chain of energy'. Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 52.

³³ Allen MacDuffie, 'Charles Darwin and the Victorian Pre-History of Climate Denial', *Victorian Studies* 60.4 (2018), 543-564 (p. 559).

³⁴ MacDuffie, 'Charles Darwin and the Victorian Pre-History of Climate Denial', p. 559.

³⁵ MacDuffie, 'Charles Darwin and the Victorian Pre-History of Climate Denial', p. 560.

heads, things, buildings’ and finds ‘a precious trickle of ivory’ (p. 18). The unreality builds and pervades the narrative atmosphere:

The word ‘ivory’ rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all like a whiff from some corpse. By Jove! I’ve never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion. (p. 23)

Conrad grounds the undoing of psychic experience in the unmaking of the earth itself. The uncanny experience of such processes becomes explicitly manifest a few pages later: ‘The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free’ (p. 36). An unleashed, ‘free’ earth appears ‘monstrous’ as it resists total annihilation at the hands of colonial adventurers and would-be conquerors. Kurtz exists as the figural embodiment of such a force: ‘He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else’ (p. 25).³⁶ There is a familiarity in this description – the ideals of science and progress touch upon that ghostly ‘idea’ hovering throughout Marlow’s recollection. In their capitalist forms, science and progress are bent towards accumulation and dispossession. The extraction and transportation of ivory becomes just one more source of material flowing back to Europe and England. Near the end of the novella, in a case of striking metonymical sliding, Marlow reflects on Kurtz. A series of flashpoints illuminate the interconnectedness of empire and domestic, bourgeois leisure in quick succession. Following, Elaine Freedgood’s articulation, we might consider the following passages through the prism of ‘strong metonymic readings’.³⁷

³⁶ This claim nicely converges with the argument made by Jesse Oak Taylor in his recent chapter, ‘Wilderness after Nature’. While I depart from his retainment of the Anthropocene framework, Taylor provocatively argues that in *Heart of Darkness*: ‘Conrad reveals what happens when imperial manhood fails the test, subverting the tropes of adventure fiction’ (p. 33). And, in his reading of Kurtz, Taylor connects the dictates of extractive capitalism as they result in exhaustion: ‘Kurtz does not simply embody the logic of extractive capitalism, but also its encounter with the limits that arise directly from its own imperatives. Overexploitation results in exhaustion’ (p. 38).

³⁷ Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 4.

Like in Kipling, readers of Conrad find extraction and its attendant dispossessions to be an overtly masculine endeavour. In the presence of Kurtz's 'Intended', Marlow remembers, 'his abject pleading, his abject threats, the colossal scale of his vile desires, the meanness, the torment, the tempestuous anguish of his soul. And later on I seemed to see his collected languid manner when he said one day, "This lot of ivory now is really mine"' (p. 73). Connecting this unsettling memory of Kurtz's depravity to his current surroundings, Marlow continues: 'I had to wait in a lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves' (p. 73). Seemingly far from the unnerving environs of Africa and the corresponding psychic fracturing and deranged relation between human and nature, such hauntings subtly reappear in the context of bourgeois domesticity. An architectural eye envelops Marlow within excess – a 'lofty drawing room with three long windows'; 'The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness'; 'A grand piano stood massively in a corner'; and, 'A high door opened' (p. 73, my emphasis). This narrative infrastructure appears to subsume Marlow, the subject, within a lifeless object world.³⁸ However, this seeming distinction between subject and object instead emerges here as a white-washed, domesticated version of 'the merry dance of death and trade' (p. 14). Thus, we move from 'a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb' (p. 14) to the sterility of 'monumental whiteness' and 'a sombre and polished sarcophagus'. This dialectical dance connecting the beginning and end of the narrative hinges on the transformation from ivory to piano, 'overheated catacomb' to 'polished sarcophagus'. The 'horror' manifests in the ways in which 'the merry dance of death and trade' ensures and propagates the comforts of bourgeois life. As MacDuffie notes, this entanglement of 'death and trade' manifests in the conjunction between ecological and imperial imaginaries throughout the novella: 'Of course, what *Heart of Darkness* also plainly illustrates is the ways in which the Victorian environmental imaginary was often deeply intertwined with imperial fantasy and the discourse of white supremacy'.³⁹ While in reference to the breakdown of narrative distinction between native inhabitants and unruly nature, we can extend MacDuffie's

³⁸ Such a reading might parallel Elaine Freedgood's project in *The Ideas in Things*: 'So I begin with objects rather than with subjects and plots and stay with them a bit longer than novelistic interpretation generally allows' (p. 4). I attempt to show here, however, that such hypostatized separation becomes increasingly difficult when the project of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in many ways problematizes the subject/object within its narrative content.

³⁹ MacDuffie, 'Charles Darwin and the Victorian Pre-History of Climate Denial', p. 560.

observation to the ‘strong metonymy’ of novella’s end: the overbearing and ‘monumental whiteness’ permeating the ‘lofty drawing-room’ and encroaching upon Marlow and reader as a stark reminder of the horrors of colonial capitalism and its extractions.

By the end of the nineteenth century the British Empire imagined itself as self-sustaining and autonomously self-reproducing – a replacement for sexual reproduction.⁴⁰ While my focus here revolves around colonial adventure texts, Elizabeth Carolyn Miller makes illuminating parallel claims regarding ‘provincial realist texts’. Amplifying the convergence of extraction, exhaustion, and failed reproduction, Miller claims that writers like George Eliot and Joseph Conrad: ‘adapt the provincial realist novel’s long-standing focus on social renewal by way of marriage, reproduction, and inheritance to the extraction-based society of industrial Britain, undergirded by a temporal structure of exhaustion rather than seasonal renewal’.⁴¹ Thus, in a wide array of fiction across the nineteenth century, distorted temporalities bend towards non-futurity. As Miller’s explication of *Nostramo* suggests, the most pervasive version of the Victorian myth of unlimited growth and expansion finds its origins in capitalist extraction and the late imperial moment reproduced in the stories and novels of hypermasculine writers like Kipling and Conrad. As scholars David Stewart and Raymond Brebach point out, we find striking similarities between “The Man Who Would Be King” and *Heart of Darkness*, most evident in the fact that both texts ‘share a remarkably detailed schema or Ur-story: It is a tale told by the survivor of a horrific, life-threatening experience (Peachy/Marlow), to a privileged listener with whom the teller feels some exceptional bond’.⁴² In Conrad and Kipling adventure looks like stasis and stagnancy, tales that become quite literally framed within Victorian networks of journalism and communication. Against what Edward Said names ‘the realistic novel’, the bearers of such a classification marked by ‘[t]ragically or sometimes comically blocked protagonists...Hardy’s *Jude*, George Eliot’s *Dorothea*, Flaubert’s *Frédéric*, Zola’s *Nana*...’, he offers up formal counterpoints (p. 187). We might think of

⁴⁰ In an interesting parallel, Jevons writes: “in a mine there is no reproduction, and the produce once pushed to the utmost will soon begin to fail and sink towards zero”; William Stanley Jevons, *The Coal Question: An Inquiry Concerning the Progress of the Nation, and the Probable Exhaustion of Our Coal-Mines* (London: Macmillan, 1865), p. 178.

⁴¹ Miller, ‘Drill, Baby, Drill’, p. 41.

⁴² Raymond Brebach, ‘Conrad in Context: *Heart of Darkness* and “The Man who would be King”’, *Conradiana* 42.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2010), 75-80 (p. 76).

Said's interjection here as excavating contrapuntal alternatives. He suggests: 'Into this narrative of loss and disablement is gradually interjected an alternative – not only the novel of frank exoticism and confident empire, but travel narratives, works of colonial exploration and scholarship, memoirs, experience, and expertise' (187). Within these narratives, 'Haggard's *She*, Kipling's Raj', for example, Said finds 'a new narrative progression and triumphalism' (187). Exemplary of pure colonial ideology these late nineteenth-century narratives, 'and literally hundreds like them based on the exhilaration and interest of adventure in the colonial world, far from casting doubt on the imperial undertaking, serve to confirm and celebrate its success' (187). As we've seen, Said turns to Conrad in order to show how such celebratory accounts pushed to the extreme unveil fractured and discontinuous 'self-consciousness' and the world-making project of empire. Alongside Conrad, I have elucidated the ways in which Kipling too, despite attachments to colonial adventure and exploitation also reveals similar cracks and fissures within a late imperial moment. Crucially, I suggest, the instability of such ideological attachments emerge within narratives associated with resource extraction framed as an overtly masculinist domain, whether via Conrad's Marlow, Haggard's Allen Quatermain, or Kipling's odd couple, Peachey Carnehan and Daniel Dravot.

Across these narratives, witness to the final days of a Victorian *belle époque* but marked also by the anxieties of the last gasps of empire, literary critics encounter two familiar generic strands: the decadent literature associated with the *fin-de-siècle* and the colonial adventure narrative. We find either the embrace of the ideological project subtending the material dispossessions and extractions of empire (Conrad, Kipling, Haggard) or the embrace of decay, 'art for art's sake', and the attendant decadence of a dying empire. Aimé Césaire offers a repudiating diagnosis of this moment in the first sentence of his *Discourse on Colonialism*: 'A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization'.⁴³ While not a wholesale revision of these dominant motifs of the late-nineteenth century, I have pursued the environmental dimensions of such assumptions. As the Mike Davis epigraph above reminds us, we are dealing 'with the fate of tropical humanity at the precise moment (1870-1914) when its labor and products were being dynamically conscripted into a London-centered world economy'.⁴⁴ Such conscription relies on an extractive project, of peoples

⁴³ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2000), p. 31.

⁴⁴ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (New York, NY: Verso, 2002), p. 9.

(‘labor’) and resources (‘products’), from Madeira to India to South America to southern Africa – guano, gold, silver, coal. We might revisit our analyses of late-nineteenth century writers like Kipling and Conrad in light of what Macarena Gómez-Barris calls the ‘*extractive zone*...the colonial paradigm, worldview, and technologies that mark out regions of ‘high biodiversity’ in order to reduce life to capitalist resource conversion’.⁴⁵ The scope of Gómez-Barris’ work ‘examines social ecologies, or networked potential, within the extractive global economy, the system that was installed by colonial capitalism in the 1500s and that converted natural resources such as silver, water, timber, rubber, and petroleum into global commodities’.⁴⁶ The expansiveness of this colonial project coincides with a heightened vulnerability, manifesting in the *fin-de-siècle* embrace of decay and decadence. But this timeframe borrowed from Davis (1870-1914) also corresponds to the so-called colonial adventure narrative, exemplified by Rudyard Kipling, ‘[t]he author of the imperialist legend’.⁴⁷ As I argue here, in the conjunction between an overtly masculine attachment to imperial adventures, resource extraction, and capitalist progress, Kipling’s ‘The Man Who Would Be King’, alongside Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, reveals cracks in the colonial social order, a vision of the limits of ‘national progress’ reliant on finite and exhaustible resources.

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⁴⁵ Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. xvi.

⁴⁶ Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone*, p. xvi.

⁴⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 207.

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