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Victorian Ecologies



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: VICTORIAN ECOLOGIES <i>Elizabeth Carolyn Miller</i>	1
ARTICLES	
A Return to the Origins of Ecology through Thomas Hardy's <i>The Return of the Native</i> <i>Marie Bertrand</i>	9
Gendered Ecologies in Anthony Trollope's <i>The Eustace Diamonds</i> <i>Lauren Cameron</i>	32
'Some old-world savage animal': H. G. Wells' White Sphinx and the Terror of Posthuman Time <i>Billie Gavurin</i>	54
The Polluted Textures of J.M.W. Turner's Late Works <i>Sarah Gould</i>	77
'India isn't big enough for such as us': Conrad and Kipling's Fictions of Extraction <i>Corbin Hiday</i>	106
BOOK REVIEWS	
<i>Energy, Ecocriticism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Novel Ecologies</i> by Barri J. Gold (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) <i>Alicia Barnes</i>	131
<i>Novel Cultivations: Plants in British Literature of the Global Nineteenth Century</i> by Elizabeth Hope Chang (U of Virginia P, 2019) <i>Lauryn E. Collins</i>	135

Victorian Ecologies, Introduction

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As recently as 2015 in a review essay titled ‘Where Is Victorian Ecocriticism?’, Jesse Oak Taylor was lamenting the seemingly underdeveloped ecological impulse in Victorian studies and the field’s belated turn to ecocritical frameworks that had already become commonplace in studies of Romanticism and nineteenth-century United States literature.¹ In subsequent years, however, Victorian ecocriticism has exploded, with four special journal issues on the subject appearing in the year 2020 alone.² While the vast array of work now appearing displays, like any robust ecosystem, much internal variation, in general we can characterise recent work in Victorian ecologies as possessing two features that distinguish it from ecocritical work in adjacent fields. First, Victorian ecologies as a field tends to emphasise social and anthropogenic natures and a global, imperial frame, perhaps unsurprisingly considering that Victorian Britain saw the culmination of the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of global empire to unprecedented reaches. Secondly, the field of Victorian ecologies has also shaped, and been shaped by, broader debates in Victorian studies about presentism, and it tends to have an overt interest in drawing the connections between nineteenth-century environmental changes and the many ecological emergencies we face today, including climate change, biodiversity and habitat loss, ocean acidification, and the pollution of air, water, and soil.

Such attunement to present-day ecological crisis is probably the most obvious feature that sets more recent work apart from the earlier, foundational scholarship on which studies of Victorian ecologies continue to draw, such as

¹ Jesse Oak Taylor, ‘Where Is Victorian Ecocriticism?’ *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 43.4 (December 2015): 877-94.

² These include ‘The Green Issue: INCS Conference 2020’ in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 42.5 (2020), ed. by Brianna Beehler, Grace Franklin, and Devin Griffiths; the ‘Open Ecologies’ issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 48.1 (2020), edited by Devin Griffiths and Deanna Kreisel; the ‘Victorian Environments’ issue of *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 62.2 (Summer 2020), edited by Allen MacDuffie, and Aubrey Plourde; and the ‘Placing the Author in Ecologies of Literary Tourism’ issue of *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 42.4 (2020), edited by Amber Pouliot and Joanna Taylor. Two special issues also appeared in 2018: ‘Climate Change and Victorian Studies’ in *Victorian Studies*, 60.4 (Summer 2018), edited by me, and the ‘Victorian Ecology’ issue of *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 26 (2018), edited by Wendy Parkins and Peter Adkins.

Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973), Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* (1983), and George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists* (1988). While Beer's book, for example, addresses 'the problem of the future of the earth itself – its survival or decay,' it is primarily focused on what thermodynamics and physics have to tell us about the eventual demise of the planet in the far-off future, whereas recent work on similar topics engages more directly with present-day planetary problems of climate change and fossil fuel addiction, as we see in Allen MacDuffie's *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination* (2014) and Jesse Oak Taylor's *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (2016).³ Apart from this key distinction, however, Beer's book actually anticipates many of the more recent directions taken by scholarship in Victorian ecocriticism: her Thomas Hardy chapter, for example, takes up questions of scale and 'the absolute gap between our finite capacities and the infinite time and space of the universe,' which 'burdens Hardy's text with a sense of malfunction and apprehension,' and her chapter on George Eliot's *Middlemarch* stresses the supreme importance Eliot put on literary form: 'In a letter of 1873 George Eliot emphasised the extent to which meaning is expressed through *form* in her fiction' and 'insiste[d] on structure as the bearer of signification and on congruity between semantics and form.'⁴ Such quotations convey how more recent studies of scale and form in Victorian ecologies, including key articles by Benjamin Morgan and the essays collected in the 2018 volume *Ecological Form*, descend from the earlier interventions of scholars such as Beer.⁵

How did environmental thinking interpenetrate with the knowledge structures provided by literary genre and aesthetic forms? This question, in particular, has been one of longstanding and continuing interest. Despite different orientations toward present-day crisis and its roots in the Victorian past, most

³ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 1983; 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 172. Allen MacDuffie, *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jesse Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

⁴ Beer, 237, 148.

⁵ See, for example, Benjamin Morgan, 'Scale as Form: Thomas Hardy's Rocks and Stars' in *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times* (Pennsylvania, PA: Penn State University Press, 2017): 132-49; and Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer, eds. *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2018).

scholars who have turned their attention to the subject of Victorian ecologies have been drawn by the revolutionary transformations in the human relation to the natural world that occurred in the nineteenth century, and by the question of how those changes register in the spheres of art, discourse, and culture. These revolutionary transformations encompassed both the scientific understanding of the world as well as the human assertion of dominance over it. New scientific speculations, as well as new literary and aesthetic forms, provided frameworks for thinking about and perceiving the environment, and in the course of the nineteenth century these enabling frameworks adapted with and alongside the industrialised and globalised natures of the Victorian era. As Nathan Hensley and Philip Steer put it in their introduction to *Ecological Form*, ‘Victorian writers experimented with new formal techniques, and generated new models for thinking, in order to comprehend the two massively networked and often violent global systems that organised their experience, and that, we suggest, continue to organise ours: the British Empire and the Industrial Revolution’s carbon economy’ (4). Together empire and energy transformed the scale of Victorian life and multiplied exponentially the capacities for human exploitation of the natural world, and we remain enmeshed, as Hensley and Steer argue, in the long present of imperialism and fossil capitalism which the Victorians also inhabited. Recent work in the field of Victorian ecologies has sought to explore this legacy, in all its various complex dimensions.

Loosely united, then, around shared concerns about environmental-cultural inheritance and environmental epistemology, the field of Victorian ecologies remains multitudinous in its methods and approaches. Much recent work has drawn, for example, on the broader field of postcolonial ecocriticism. As Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee has argued, early theorists of decolonisation such as Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor were in no way inattentive to environmental questions and in fact placed a great deal of emphasis on the politics ‘of land, water, forests, crops, rivers, the sea – in other words, on the centrality of the environment to the continuing struggle of decolonisation.’⁶ Nevertheless, in Mukherjee’s estimation, the academic field of postcolonial studies as it developed in the 1970s and 1980s did not initially pay much attention to environmental questions, until a revival of postcolonial-ecocritical work beginning around 2000. Other recent scholars have worked in the similarly emergent critical idiom of the energy humanities, foregrounding energy systems and the cultural and material

⁶ Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (London: Palgrave, 2010): 46.

changes wrought by the momentous arrival of fossil capitalism in the early nineteenth century.⁷ Other important approaches for recent criticism on Victorian ecologies include Anthropocene studies, literature and science, environmental politics and environmentalism, gender and sexuality studies, animal studies, plant studies, and oceanic studies or the blue humanities. Some of these fields, such as literature and science or gender studies, are in no sense new, but their reading practices are now being brought to bear on ecological and environmental questions in innovative ways.

This special issue brings together five essays by early career scholars who draw variously from these different approaches and whose work, together, showcases the search for new critical methods to help us reinterpret our nineteenth-century cultural inheritance in light of the dismal environmental trajectory of the modern era. The authors discuss paintings and novels, science and the sphinx. Arranged roughly in chronological order, the five articles demonstrate the excellence of early-career contributions to the field of Victorian ecologies; particularly notable is the syncretic work these scholars are doing to unite ecocritical practices and concerns with other critical traditions such as Marxism and feminism, and to bring social-scientific fields such as ecopsychology into the purview of literary studies.

The first essay, ‘The Polluted Textures of J. M. W. Turner’s Late Works’ by Sarah Gould, considers Turner’s material practices as a painter and the way that his unorthodox style, and especially his use of impasto, can be understood as an effort to transform painterly craft in order to better represent the air pollution that was becoming increasingly unignorable with the growth of coal-powered industry in nineteenth-century Britain. The ascendance of landscape painting as a genre was coeval with the emergence of the industrial economy, and Gould’s essay helps us see how Turner’s experimental engagements with the matter of his visual art can be read in terms of these larger industrial and atmospheric transformations. Tracking forward to the current decade in its final paragraphs, ‘Polluted Textures’ raises unsettling questions about the aestheticisation of climate catastrophe, exploring the human impulse to document our most recent atmospheric calamities using the techniques and forms we have inherited from landscape painting of the past.

In the next essay, Lauren Cameron draws on feminist ecologies and animal studies in her analysis of Anthony Trollope’s 1871 novel *The Eustace Diamonds*

⁷ See especially Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016).

from his multi-novel Palliser series. Titled ‘Gendered Ecologies in Anthony Trollope’s *The Eustace Diamonds*,’ Cameron’s article explores Trollope’s characterisation of his famous female villain, Lizzie Eustace, against the intellectual context of Charles Darwin’s influential works *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). These works transformed Victorian ideas about humans’ place in the natural world and their relation to other living creatures, and they laid new emphasis on sexual selection as a feature of evolutionary ecology. Under Darwin’s influence, Cameron argues, Trollope was able to create a new kind of anti-heroine, ‘vying for sexual agency in a complicated Darwinian culture, wherein the traditional boundaries between human and animal lack clear meanings.’

In ‘A Return to the Origins of Ecology through Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*,’ Marie Bertrand discusses a novel published seven years later than Trollope’s and describes an author who labored to incorporate new ecological insights into literary form and character in ways quite different from what we see in Trollope. Drawing on the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as well as the emerging field of ecopsychology, Bertrand examines Hardy’s account of perception and consciousness in his much-discussed 1878 novel *The Return of the Native* and argues that the work models an ecological consciousness where humans understand themselves in reciprocal relation to the environment around them: ‘in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology as in Hardy’s narrative,’ she argues, ‘the body is not only a medium to access the world but becomes the world itself through its permeable nature.’ Such a feeling of reciprocity, Bertrand argues, is a ‘prerequisite for ecological action.’

The final two essays in the special issue move us forward to the late-Victorian period and turn to the new, shorter fictional forms that replaced the three-volume format within which both Trollope and Hardy were writing. First, Corbin Hiday’s ‘“India Isn’t Big Enough for Such as Us”: Conrad and Kipling’s Fictions of Extraction’ examines the world ecology of Britain’s fossil-fueled economy and its representation in Rudyard Kipling’s 1888 story ‘The Man Who Would Be King’ and Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*. Reading the late-century moment in which these colonial fictions appeared as ‘the apex of intermingled visions of progress and exhaustion,’ Hiday brings a postcolonial-Marxist critical approach to bear on two texts that depict – and, in Hiday’s argument, diagnose and critique – overseas expansion and extraction and their ruinous environmental impacts at the sunset of the Victorian era.

Lastly, Billie Gavurin's "Some Old-World Savage Animal": H. G. Wells's White Sphinx and the Terror of Posthuman Time' focuses on a short novel published in between Kipling's and Conrad's works: H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895). Gavurin examines the figure of the sphinx in Wells's novel and the way it engages new understandings from geology and archaeology of deep time and human ephemerality. Through its juxtaposition of human and inhuman timescales, Gavurin argues, the novel engages ecological questions concerning 'what kind of future humanity will create for itself' and 'our ultimate powerlessness to predict or shape environmental outcomes.' Gavurin positions Wells's novel within a rich, fascinating literary and cultural context of thinking about environmental futures, a context that includes Darwin, Egyptology, the Rossetta Stone, John Ruskin, Thomas De Quincey, Helena Blavatsky, and Percy Shelley's 1817 sonnet 'Ozymandias'.

As this last reference to Shelley may remind us, this special issue is heavy on narrative literature with less discussion of poetry, and art history as a field is only represented by Gould's essay; in some ways this is a reflection of Victorian ecologies as a field, which tends, like the rest of Victorian studies, to weigh heavily on the side of fiction, mirroring our primary pedagogical responsibilities at the university level. But exciting ecocritical work is also happening with respect to other genres and disciplines within Victorian studies. Recent ecocritical studies of Victorian poetry, for example, have been published by such scholars as Devin Garofalo, Emma Mason, Ashley Miller, Jesse Oak Taylor, and Daniel Williams, while Sukanya Banerjee and Devin Griffiths have both published groundbreaking ecocritical analyses of nineteenth-century drama.⁸ A longer, fuller, more comprehensive special issue would include work in environmental history and the history of science, as well as ecocritical analyses of the literary and cultural productions of colonial writers and artists of color, such as we find in the accomplished scholarship of Sukanya Banerjee and Upamanyu Pablo

⁸ On poetry, see Devin Garofalo, 'Victorian Lyric in the Anthropocene' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 47.4 (2019): 753-83; Emma Mason, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Ashley Miller, 'Ripeness and Waste: Christina Rossetti's Botanical Women' *Victorian Studies*, 61.2 (Winter 2019): 194-203; Jesse Oak Taylor, 'Mourning Species: *In Memoriam* in an Age of Extinction' in *Ecological Form*, ed. Nathan Hensley and Philip Steer (42-62); and Daniel Williams, 'Down the Slant Towards the Eye: Hopkins and Ecological Perception' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 48.1 (2020): 127-154. On drama, see Sukanya Banerjee, 'Drama, Ecology, and the Ground of Empire: The Play of Indigo' in *Ecological Form*, ed. Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer (21-41) and Devin Griffiths, 'Petrodrama: Melodrama and Energetic Modernity' *Victorian Studies*, 60.4 (Summer 2018): 611-38.

Mukherjee.⁹ While a five-essay special issue can hardly be expected to cover the entire range of work in Victorian ecologies, together this issue demonstrates the diverse methodologies and intellectual contexts that are informing discussions of Victorian ecologies and their connection to the environmental crisis today.

Concluding any piece of writing on any environmental subject feels like a fraught and difficult enterprise these days, for it seems to require that one make a prediction about the future. The task feels especially charged when one is concluding the introduction to a special issue that features the work of early-career scholars – the next generation of thinkers, writing brilliant scholarship amidst such precarity and calamity. What kind of benediction to utter in this moment? Should I end on a hopeful note, or a melancholy one? Shift my generic register to utopia, Jeremiad, or apocalyptic Millenarianism? Clear-eyed realism may seem like the right goal, but it is an impossible one to meet, since the future is cloudy and unknown – a work of fiction, at least for now. Concluding an essay on an environmental topic is a reminder that writing is always an act of worldmaking, and we write, today, at a moment when the making of worlds seems particularly audacious, in the face of so much unmaking. As Anna Kornbluh has recently observed, ‘We live in destructive times, on an incinerating planet, over institutional embers, around prodigious redundancy between the plunder of the commons and the compulsive echolalia “Burn it all down”’.¹⁰ H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*, the subject of the final essay in this issue, is a novel about watching it all burn down: first a forest, then the solar system. But as Darko Suvin perceptively remarks, Wells’s greatest legacy for later science fiction writers was his ‘rebelliousness against entropic closure,’ and the ‘basic historical lesson’ of his work is that the era in which we live is ‘but a short moment in an unpredictable, menacing, but at least theoretically open-ended human evolution under the stars’.¹¹ If literature, as Kornbluh suggests, is a model for building

⁹ For excellent ecocriticism focused on colonial writers of colour, see Banerjee’s ‘Drama, Ecology, and the Ground of Empire’ referenced above, as well as her ‘Ecologies of Cotton’ *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, (6 January 2021): 1-15. See also Mukherjee’s *Natural Disasters and Victorian Imperial Culture: Fevers and Famines* (London: Palgrave, 2013) and his articles ‘Re-charge: Postcolonial Studies and Energy Humanities’ in *Reframing Postcolonial Studies: Concepts, Methodologies, Scholarly Activisms*, ed. David D. Kim (London: Palgrave, 2020): 135-55; and “‘Yet Was It Human?’ Bankim, Hunter and the Victorian Famine Ideology of *Anandamath*’ in *Victorian Environments: Acclimatizing to Change in British Domestic and Colonial Culture*, ed. Grace Moore and Michelle J. Smith (London: Palgrave, 2018): 237-58.

¹⁰ Anna Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019): 156.

¹¹ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979): 221.

rather than burning, so too is criticism. Let us read these five essays by the light of the stars rather than the fire.

A Return to the Origins of Ecology through Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

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Abstract

*Ecology, in its modern understanding, often invokes exclusively the protection of the non-human environment by humans, without any particular focus on a potential relationship between them. This article invites the reader to go back to the original principles of the ecological thought through a close reading of *The Return of the Native*, written by Victorian novelist Thomas Hardy. Rediscovering Hardy's writing in the light of new philosophical and eco-critical works will allow both an assessment of the author's ecological thinking and of the role of the Victorian period in shaping the features of our contemporary ecological movement. Classical works in phenomenology along with more recent and ground-breaking studies in ecopsychology will offer a new perspective on Hardy's novel while relocating the interrelationship between humans and non-humans to the forefront of the ecological stage. The involvement of humans within nature and their subsequent concern for its fate will pervade the argument of this article, which, eventually, aims at initiating a debate on an ecological paradox.*

Opening Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Return of the Native* (1878), feels like opening the Earth's geological journal, starting from the Holocene, 'a Face on which Time makes but a little Impression'¹ and going into the Anthropocene,² which hadn't been defined as yet but which Hardy's chapter title seems to be defining with a somewhat uncanny accuracy: 'Humanity appears upon the scene, hand in hand with Trouble' (p. 13). When Hardy published his novel in 1878, trouble was indeed already there, as the Industrial Revolution had altered the relationship between humans and nature and had led to the exploitation of nature

¹ Thomas Hardy, 1878, *The Return of the Native* (London: Penguin Classics, 1999), p. 9. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

² The Holocene is defined as 'the most recent geological epoch, which began approximately 10,000 years ago and still continues and which together with the Pleistocene epoch makes up the Quaternary period' while the Anthropocene refers to 'the epoch of geological time during which human activity is considered to be the dominant influence on the environment, climate, and ecology of the earth, a formal chrono-stratigraphic unit with a base which has been tentatively defined as the mid-twentieth century' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

by human-designed machinery. This shift in perspective is illustrated by the twofold definition of the term ‘ecology’, which was actually coined by Ernst Haeckel in his *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*³ only nine years before the publication of *The Return of the Native*.⁴ Indeed, the Oxford English Dictionary offers both an early and a later definition of the term, each representing a different conception of humans’ affiliation to their natural surroundings. Originally, ‘ecology’ referred to ‘the branch of biology that deals with the relationships between living organisms and their environment; the interrelationships between any system and its environment’ and then it gradually took up the modern meaning by which we usually understand it today, that is ‘the study of or concern for the effect of human activity on the environment’.⁵ The absence of the word ‘relationship’ from the second definition is all the more striking as it is replaced by the word ‘effect’, thus implying that the human-nature collaboration later became a one-way relationship for the benefits of humans. Now one may wonder whether these two acceptations of the term are irreconcilable and whether or not Hardy’s own understanding of ecology was in accordance with Haeckel’s original definition of it as ‘the whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment including, in the broad sense, all the “conditions of existence”’ (Miller, ‘Ecology’, p. 653). At any rate, I will argue that if ‘the ecological self is a dialogical self’,⁶ then, strictly speaking, an ecological text is first and foremost a text that focuses on the interrelationship between characters and their environment, rather than openly and explicitly criticising human actions on that environment.

Famous for his pastoral scenes set up in a ‘partly real, partly dream-country’,⁷ Hardy has often been described by critics as a lover of nature as well as a lover of all non-human creatures. His intellectual affinity with Darwin has also been extensively studied, especially in terms of ‘their mutually loving,

³ Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, ‘Ecology’, *Victorian Literature and Culture [Special Issue]*, 46.3/4 (2018), 653-56 (p. 653). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁴ See John Parham, ‘Sustenance from the Past: Precedents to Sustainability in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture’, in *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*, ed. by John Parham et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 33-51 (p. 36). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁵ See *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁶ Douglas A. Vakoch and Fernando Castrillon, *Ecopsychology, Phenomenology, and the Environment – the Experience of Nature* (New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media, 2014), p. 152. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁷ Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Preface, ed. By Robert C. Schweik (New York, NY: Norton, 1986), p. 5.

meticulous and ethically intense attention to the range of nature, organic and inorganic [...]'.⁸ Indeed, a recovery of Hardy's close relationship to the natural world is not new, and this paper will not try to open doors that have already been opened by many previous works. However, an endeavour to define Hardy's ecological thought cannot be reduced to a study of his affection for nature, the same way as the Darwinian influence or the representation of rural England in his novels cannot be enough to qualify his writing as ecological. On the contrary, some critics such as John MacNeill Miller have interpreted such a strong presence of nature in his novels as 'a misattribution of character status to a landscape', which, instead of encouraging ecological commitment, would paint the picture of a 'single monolithic nature', stable enough to guard against any human threat.⁹ The aim of this essay will precisely be to offer new textual analyses in an attempt to reveal the very 'metonymic connection' (p. 160) between humans and their environment that MacNeill Miller deems absent from Hardy's novels.

To that end, I will take up an eco-critical approach whose aim is to explore the link between literature and environmental studies, as critics such as Parham initiated in his exploration of sustainability in nineteenth-century literature,¹⁰ or as Buell applied to American literature in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995). Buell's four-fold definition of an environmental text will accompany my investigations on Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, chosen for the particular place it gives to nature and the non-human in general. Moreover, recent theories in green studies may shed a new light on Victorian texts and reveal the pioneering role some of them may have taken up. Drawing upon environmental philosophies theorised by Morton in *The Ecological Thought* (2010) or by Albrecht in *Earth Emotions* (2019), I will try and define whether Hardy's characters think and feel in an ecological way, and more specifically, relying on critics in ecopsychology (Adams, Abram, or Vakoch and Castrillon), whether Hardy had a spiritual connection to nature as such. Now, defining the act of thinking or feeling in relation to nature only applies to the first meaning of the term 'ecology' and does not necessarily lead to ecological actions — that is, actions to protect the environment — being taken. The bridge connecting the psychological

⁸ George Levine, 'Hardy and Darwin: An Enchanting Hardy?', in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Keith Wilson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 36-53 (p. 37).

⁹ John MacNeill Miller, 'Mischaracterizing the Environment: Hardy, Darwin, and the Art of Ecological Storytelling', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 62.2 (2020), 149-177 (pp. 150-1). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁰ See Parham.

relationship to nature and the actual need to act on that feeling seems to be provided by Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher who inspired much writing in ecopsychology and whose phenomenology of perception recently came to be understood and used in an ecological perspective. First theorised by Husserl in the early-twentieth century and further developed by Merleau-Ponty in the mid-twentieth century, the phenomenological approach has indeed been explored in ecological studies for its focus on the interdependence and intermingling of the human and the non-human, echoing both the first definition of ecology as ‘interrelationship’ and the second definition as a ‘concern’ for an environment in which we are all absorbed. Studying Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* thus offers an opportunity to go back to the Victorian origins of the ecological thought and to rediscover them in the light of more recent philosophical and ecological thinking, entertaining the possibility that Hardy may have been a precursor to such thinking.

Finding one’s Alter-eco: The Mirroring Effect at the Roots of the Ecological Thought

In the partly autobiographical *Life of Thomas Hardy*, the author declares: ‘In spite of myself I cannot help noticing countenances and tempers in objects of scenery, e.g. trees, hills, houses’.¹¹ As suggested in the first definition of the term ecology, perceiving the world in an ecological way starts with feeling affiliated to it in a close relationship. And indeed, when is one more connected to nature than when one actually manages to perceive oneself in nature? Hardy’s ecological thinking seems therefore to be rooted in an anthropomorphic vision of the world that is very much significant in his work: ‘for Hardy, characterisation is completed personification’ (Nishimura, p. 911). His novel *The Return of the Native* starts precisely with a personification of the environmental setting, the heath, as ‘a face’, which appears both in the chapter title and in the core text:

the face of the earth by its mere complexion added half-an-hour to eve;
it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the
frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a
moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread. (p. 9)

¹¹ Satoshi Nishimura, ‘Thomas Hardy and the Language of the Inanimate’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 43.4 (2003), 897-912 (p. 901). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Here, the personification of the setting is further emphasised by the accumulation of action verbs such as ‘added’, ‘retard’, or ‘intensify’, which tend to give nature some agency, rendered possible by its human-like appearance. Hardy’s extensive use of anthropomorphism in his descriptions is actually qualified by Beer as ‘ambiguous’¹² to the extent that it both empowers nature and deprives it of the possibility of independent action outside of the human scope. On the other hand, the representation of a ‘place perfectly accordant with man’s nature’ seems to be in keeping with the rooting principle of ecology that requires a dialogical harmony between the human and the non-human (Hardy, *Return of the Native*, p. 11) . Even more importantly, Parham defines sustainability as being ‘founded upon a philosophical paradigm that [...] emphasized the energy, complexity, and autonomy [...] of nature’ (p. 34). Seen in such a light, Hardy’s often commented-upon ‘displaying [of] excessive humanity’ (Nishimura, p. 897) would therefore become secondary to his constant effort made to animate nature so as to allow a meaningful conversation between the human and the non-human worlds. In order to nurture an environmental consciousness, in its modern understanding, the first step could be to give a consciousness to the environment, to give it a ‘watchful intentness’ and the ability ‘to tell its true tale’ (Hardy, *Return of the Native*, pp. 9-10).

However, Hardy’s ambivalent anthropomorphism may lead to different interpretations of his intentions, prompting MacNeill Miller to argue that ‘his personification tacitly admits the stability and internal coherence of the landscape as a conceptual category’, resulting in ‘a totalizing understanding of the land and its nonhuman inhabitants as an “environment”’ (p. 161). While I acknowledge the grounds on which such a reasoning is founded, I read Hardy’s personification of the heath as going against the representation of nature as still life, and therefore, as conceptual: ‘when other things sank brooding to sleep, the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen’ (p. 10). Quite significantly, this refusal to depict a motionless nature constitutes, to Buell, one of the four elements that qualify an environmental text: ‘some sense of the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text’.¹³ In this active environment,

¹² Gillian Beer, 1983, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narratives in George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Third Edition (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 235.

¹³ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 8. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Hardy naturally includes non-human creatures that seem to be embedded in the heath, animals thus helping to further animate nature: ‘though these shaggy hills were apparently solitary, several keen round eyes were always ready on such a wintry morning as to converge upon a passers-by’ (p. 88). Here, the synecdochic presence of animals in the landscape goes against MacNeill Miller’s reading of an enviroing heath that would ‘rob individual lives of significance’ (p. 166) and helps to bring humans and animals closer by drawing our attention to the observing tool (the eyes) and the observation ability we share with them. In an effort to see in nature a reflection of humanity, and as a consequence to attribute a deeper meaning to the human-non-human relationship, Hardy chooses to anthropomorphise his animal characters and, more specifically, focuses on their human-like ability to think and feel. In Hardy’s Wessex, birds are compared to philosophers (p. 88), heath-croppers are described ‘wondering what mankind and candlelight could have to do in these haunts at this untoward hour’ (p. 230) and horses can be ‘conscious of misfortune’ (p. 362). If anthropomorphism is often equated with anthropocentrism for its paradoxical focus on the human within the non-human, I would argue that Hardy’s anthropomorphism only reveals a genuine desire to open the human onto the non-human world despite the blatant inability on the part of humans to understand that world outside of their own value system. Because ‘the live adder regarded the assembled group with a sinister look in its small black eye’, a deep and meaningful connection is made possible between the snake and the dying Mrs Yeobright: ‘Mrs Yeobright saw the creature and the creature saw her’ (p. 288). Here, the chiasmus perfectly illustrates the reciprocal respect between the two characters and places them on an equal footing.¹⁴ For any human-environment relationship to be initiated, a mirroring effect seems to be required but the ability to see oneself in the other, performed by anthropomorphism, also needs to apply to the environment.

If Hardy’s fictitious environment often takes up human traits, the reflection of that environment in the descriptions of human characters is just as significant in *The Return of the Native*. As a matching device to anthropomorphism, Hardy’s text is pervaded by what I will call ‘ecomorphism’, that is, quite simply, a reversed anthropomorphism that William A. Cohen also identified in Hardy’s 1887 *The Woodlanders*.¹⁵ In his novel, human characters are seen to be wanting

¹⁴ To read more on the subject of animals in Hardy’s novels, see Anna West, *Thomas Hardy and Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁵ William A. Cohen, ‘Arborealities: The Tactile Ecology of Hardy’s *Woodlanders*’, *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 19 (2014), p. 6.

to establish contact with their environment by trying to look like it as much as possible: ‘we seem to want the oldest and simplest clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive’ (p. 12). Looking natural takes up a new meaning in Hardy’s work as it is directly linked to a genuine desire to get closer to nature, not only by looking *at* it but by looking *like* it. In his study of the relationship between people and the places they inhabit, Casey explains that it is actually common for humans to ‘come to share features with the local landscape’,¹⁶ especially when that landscape is rural rather than urban. A shift in perspective consequently happens when we go from anthropomorphism to ‘ecomorphism’ as the tenor of the simile is not the environment anymore but the human character, compared in his turn to his natural environment: ‘his eye, which glared so strangely through his stain, was in itself attractive — keen as a bird of prey, and blue as autumn mist’ (p. 13). Depending on the weather they are experiencing or on the particular spot they are occupying in a specific moment, the characters’ appearances may change, which says a lot about the interaction between the human and the non-human world: ‘there was a slight hoar-frost that night, and the moon, though not more than half-full, threw a spirited and enticing brightness upon the fantastic figure of the mumming band, whose plumes and ribbons rustles in their walk like autumnal leaves’ (p. 130). Here, the description of the mummers is dictated by the environmental phenomena happening around them, thus giving them a more-than-human dimension in the process. All the more striking is the presence of nature in the portrayal of Eustacia, a character paradoxically estranged from her natural surroundings which she openly hates. In one instance, the young woman is described in such hyperbolic terms that she almost becomes an unexpected representation of the goddess Gaia¹⁷ whose appearance contains the Earth’s day and night cycle: ‘to see her hair was to fancy that a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form its shadow. It closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow’ (p. 68). As much as Eustacia would want to keep her environment at a distance, as an inhabitant of the heath, her character, from her physical appearance to her mental features, cannot be fathomed outside of the natural scope of Egdon. Using a floral extended metaphor

¹⁶ E. S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 305.

¹⁷ Gaia is the goddess of the Earth (Terra Mater). Such an attribution of a goddess status to the character of Eustacia could be further justified by the numerous descriptions of her lonely walks on the heath that are only opportunities for the narrator to describe both her extraordinary beauty and her more-than-human appearance as she merges with her surroundings. For another instance of these descriptions, see Hardy, p. 342.

a few lines later, Hardy further stresses this inextricable link between humans and their non-human counterparts : ‘her presence brought memories of Bourbon roses [...]; her moods recalled lotus-eaters [...]; her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola [...].’ (p. 69). Looking in the natural mirror, each of Hardy’s characters seems to be able to find his or her alter-*eco*, which ultimately has the effect of putting the environment itself in the foreground.

As Plotz reminds us, Hardy himself ‘labelled his principal works “Novels of Characters and Environment”’, the use of the conjunction ‘and’ placing the environment as ‘complementary to (rather than determinative of) character [...]’.¹⁸ Yet, for the non-human to be considered of as much importance as human characters in a novel centred on the complexity of human relationships, it takes for the environment to be highlighted and praised. To perform such a tribute to nature, Hardy uses his main protagonist Yeobright who often seems to be in awe of his natural surroundings: ‘as he watched the dead flat of the scenery overpowered him, though he was fully alive to the beauty of the untarnished early summer green which was worn for the nonce by the poorest blade’ (p. 204-5). Indeed, praising the beauty of one’s environment seems to be the first step towards a levelled relationship between nature and humanity that has been deemed superior for centuries. This argument becomes quite explicit a few lines later when the action of observing the landscape suddenly amounts to initiate an ecological reflection on the place of mankind within their environment: ‘there was something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him a sense of bare equality, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun’ (p. 205). In that particular instance, the symbolic use of horizontality works hand in hand with the ternary rhythm of the sentence which serves to put an emphasis on the clause placed between the commas (‘and no superiority to’), thus performing a literal decentring of man and depriving him of his extraordinary place in the grand scheme of things. Here, I concur with Anne Feuerstein’s reading of *The Return of the Native* and her argument that Hardy ‘recognizes the claims animals have on human attention beyond their imbrication in a larger environment and offers a more horizontal representation that includes animals’.¹⁹ Reconciliation between the human and the natural is therefore made

¹⁸ John Plotz, ‘Going Local: Characters and Environments in Thomas Hardy’s Wessex’ in *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*, ed. by John Plotz (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 122-43 (p. 123).

¹⁹ Anna Feuerstein, ‘Seeing Animals on Egdon Heath: The Democratic Impulse of Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*’, *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 26 (2018), p. 4.

possible through the character of Yeobright whose very name succeeds in reconciling intelligence, (usually deemed an exclusively human characteristic), with the natural world.²⁰ From seeing one's reflection to seeing one's better version of oneself in natural surroundings, the mirroring effect at work in the numerous descriptions provides the foundations for an ecological thought to emerge and expand.

From Reflection to Fusion: A Phenomenological Approach to Victorian Ecology

For Hardy's approach to be considered ecological, reflection cannot be the final step in the perception process and needs to be enlightened by Merleau-Ponty's own theory of perception. According to the French philosopher, the body is the central tool by which one can perceive one's environment and respond to it: 'but precisely because my body can shut itself off from the world, it is also what opens me out upon the world and places me in a situation there'.²¹ From a phenomenological standpoint, for any connection to take place between humans and their environment, there needs to be an organic body opened to its organic surroundings with which it shares common features: 'we can feel the trees and the roots underfoot, because we are not unlike them, because we have our own forking limbs and our own mineral composition'.²² The narrator of *The Return of the Native*, commenting on Eustacia's sudden ability to see through her ears, endorses the character's sensations by supporting them with actual testimony of such an experience: 'Dr Kitto was probably under the influence of a parallel fancy when he described his body as having become, by long endeavour, so sensitive to vibrations that he had gained the power of perceiving by it as by ears' (p. 116).²³ In this quotation transpires the idea of a body centralising the perception

²⁰ Yeobright is a contraction of 'yeo' as in 'yeoman' (a man holding and cultivating a small landed estate), with 'bright' as in 'smart'.

²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 191. Original quotation from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945, repr. 1976), p. 203 : « mais justement parce qu'il peut se fermer au monde, mon corps est aussi ce qui m'ouvre au monde et m'y met en situation. »

²² David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, Vintage Books Edition, 1996 ; repr. 2017), p. 47.

²³ As mentioned in the footnote of the edition, "John Kitto (1804-1854) became deaf as a child and wrote of his adversity."

process and, in so doing, representing the link between the human psyche and the organic non-human.²⁴

Yet in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as in Hardy's narrative, the body is not only a medium to access the world but actually becomes the world itself through its permeable nature. The French philosopher talks about 'the Flesh of the World' to refer to this organic whole in which the human body is intermingled:

Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? [...] the world seen is not 'in' my body, and my body is not 'in' the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. [...] There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one [the body] in the other [the thing]²⁵

From that point of view, the human being further loses his central place in the whole scheme of things to become just one organism within what Morton, drawing from Merleau-Ponty, calls the 'mesh'.²⁶ In Hardy's novel, we find a literary equivalent to this philosophical theory, especially when the landscape is described by the narrator from a distance. In Book First, an unnamed figure is said to be 'so much like an organic part of the entire motionless structure that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon' (pp. 17-18). This passage quite strikingly echoes Merleau-Ponty's argument for an absence of boundaries between the body and its environment — an argument that Hardy takes care of fully endorsing through the following sentence: 'Immobility being the chief characteristic of that whole which the person formed portion of, the discontinuance of immobility in any quarter suggested confusion' (p. 18). The specific use of terms such as 'part of' or 'portion of' in relation to an organic 'whole' confirms our initial assumption regarding Hardy's intellectual affinity with a philosophical movement that wasn't even born at the moment when *The*

²⁴ On the subject of embodied perception in *The Woodlanders*, see Cohen.

²⁵ Maurice Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. by Claude Lefort and translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 138. Original quotation from Merleau Ponty, *Le Visible et l'Invisible* (Paris: Collection Tel, Gallimard, 1964), p. 180 : « Où mettre la limite du corps et du monde puisque le monde est chair ? [...] Le monde vu n'est pas "dans" mon corps, et mon corps n'est pas "dans" le monde visible à titre ultime : chair appliquée à une chair, le monde ne l'entoure ni est entourée par elle. [...] Il y a insertion réciproque et entrelacs de l'un [corps] dans l'autre [chose]. »

²⁶ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 51.

Return of the Native was written. All the characters seem to be wandering in a phenomenological setting, in that ‘flesh of somnolence’ (p. 107) among which Eustacia’s ‘face look[s] from its environment as from a cloud, with no noticeable lines of demarcation between flesh and clothes’ (p. 253). The numerous pastoral scenes offer an obvious opportunity for the author to represent a harmonious fusion between the human and the non-human, whether it be during the characters’ long walks on the heath or during Clym’s furze cutting, as his working-space has to be shared with bees, butterflies, grasshoppers, flies, snakes, or rabbits: ‘his familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enrol him in their band’ (p. 247). Not only do we witness the fusion of humans and environment in Hardy’s work, but we can also grasp the very process that leads to this fusion. To qualify that process, Adams uses the term ‘interpermeation’ that conveys ‘the vital way in which one thing flows or passes into another thing, dissolves and diffuses throughout the other, pervades the other, affects every aspect of the other, and actually becomes part of the other’.²⁷ The very verb ‘to permeate’ can be found in Hardy’s work as Clym is described to be “permeated with its [the heath’s] scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product’ (p. 173). Through this interpermeation process, Clym’s position in the universe suddenly shifts as he goes from a user of the land for production to a simple ‘product’ of that land. In Adams’s view, this feeling of being infiltrated by natural forces is actually a powerful ecological feeling to the extent that it may lead us to ‘understand ourselves and reality differently, and to be more aware and compassionate with others and the natural world [...]’.²⁸ Opening one’s self to the organic whole is both to become a larger self and to decide to be selfless, that is, to care for who or what is not oneself. Such an altruistic personality is to be found in Hardy’s novel with the character of Venn, the reddleman, who thinks about others’ needs and wellbeing before his own. Interestingly enough, Venn comes across as a very mystic character covered in an organic substance, the redde, which seems to bring him even closer to the natural world. In several instances, Venn appears to be just another part of the natural environment rather than a human being:

²⁷ Will W. Adams, ‘The Interpermeation of Self and World: Empirical Research, Existential Phenomenology, and Transpersonal Psychology’, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 30.2 (Fall 1999), 30-67 (p. 45).

²⁸ Adams, ‘The Interpermeation of Self and World’, p. 39.

The reddleman would now have been quite invisible, even by daylight; the turves standing upon him with the heather upwards, looked precisely as if they were growing. (p. 83)

He [Venn] vanished entirely. The nook among the bambles where his van had been standing was as vacant as ever the next morning, and scarcely a sign remained to show that he had been there, excepting a few straws, and a little redness on the turf, which was washed away by the next storm of rain. (pp. 163-4)

In the blink of an eye, Venn's presence is literally 'washed away' by the storm, as if the man were reduced to the red substance covering his body just as he is reduced to his occupation and reddish appearance by the other characters. As the most selfless of all, Venn is also the most organic character, thus emphasising the link between interpermeation and the emergence of an environmental consciousness. Opposite Venn on the scale of altruism, Eustacia is not for all that excluded from the interpermeation process, especially by the end of the story when her vulnerability makes her humble. As she is going away from her home and from her life with her husband, Eustacia suddenly appears to form an organic whole with the heath she has despised so much:

Between the drippings of the rain from her umbrella to her mantle, from her mantle to the heather, from the heather to the hearth, very similar sounds could be heard coming from her lips; and the tearfulness of the outer scene was repeated upon her face. (p. 346)

Here, the use of anadiplosis offers both a visual and musical illustration of the continuity between herself and the hostile nature surrounding her. As much as she would like to get away, she is experiencing a strong attachment to the land as nature itself echoes her mental state. Reading through all the occurrences previously mentioned, the use of the term 'environment' increasingly sounds out of place since the characters are not only connected to their surroundings but are part of that non-surrounding. Implying that Hardy's acceptance of the term is actually closer to Darwin's use of the term "conditions," Nathan K. Hensley defines Hardy's environment as 'the variable milieus [...] that enable and constrain the human actors attempting to flourish in those particular zones'.²⁹ In a further attempt to find a fitting term for Hardy's Wessex scenery, I turn to

²⁹ Nathan K. Hensley, 'Environment', *Victorian Literature and Culture [Special Issue]*, 46.3/4 (2018), 676-81 (pp. 676; 678).

Albrecht and his work *Earth Emotions*, which helps us qualify this new whole introduced by Merleau-Ponty with the term ‘symbioment’,³⁰ thus replacing the term ‘environment’ which is to him only ‘a product of erroneous dualistic thinking typical of Anthropocene separation’ (p. 101). When reading descriptions of Hardy’s Wessex, the term ‘symbioment’ actually sounds perfectly in accordance with the idea of a place where the characters’ doings, wanderings, and feelings are so inseparable from the heath’s own secret life.

Walking around the symbioment of Egdon heath, Hardy’s characters are filling the place with memories that, in turn, permeate the natural landscape and become an integral part of its history. Indeed, the phenomenological fusion between man and nature entails another type of fusion, that of human history with natural history, endowing the heath with an anthropological dimension. Because humans and nature are parts of a same unified whole, what man remembers, nature remembers too, and a particular place may even have the power to bring vivid memories back to one’s mind:

The expression of the place, the tone of the hour, were precisely those of many such occasions in days gone by; and these antecedent similarities fostered the illusion that she, who was there no longer, would come out to welcome him. (p. 310)

Not only can the heath remind one of previous intimate moments shared in its midst, but the entire natural world seems to be aware of each individual’s history, since it is so intermingled with its own: ‘He frequently walked the heath alone, when the past seized upon him its shadowy hand, and held him there to listen to its tale’ (p. 373). Here, the personification of the past gives the reader the impression that it is the heath itself that seizes Clym in order to refresh his memory and unite his personal history with that of his native place. Interestingly enough, this anthropological approach to nature is introduced by Buell as one of the four characteristics of an environmental text where ‘the Non-human is present not only as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history [...]’ (p. 7). From an ecological perspective, linking anthropology to biology does not amount to placing man at the centre of natural history but rather to point at man’s humble and short-lived

³⁰ See Glenn A. Albrecht, *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019) for the full definition of “symbioment” as the “recognition that all life exists within living systems at various scales. There is no “outside” for life forms within the biosphere”, p. 201. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

achievements within the great history of all beings. That particular history, according to Darwin, is not to be found in books written by humans, but rather within the earth itself that, like Hardy's heath, has a tale to tell: 'I look at the natural geological record, as a history of the world imperfectly kept [...]'.³¹ Darwin's perspective on a historically-charged geology was one among many arguments that appealed to Hardy at the time and that found their poetical translation in his work: 'in the heath's bareness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian' (p. 20). The use of an agricultural metaphor to evoke the work of the historian is here a striking example of Hardy's desire to fuse the natural world and the human world together so as to show that they cannot be conceived or fathomed separately. The heath's ground then becomes a geological palimpsest on which the history of its inhabitants has been written throughout the years: 'Those of the dyed barbarians who had chosen the cultivable tracts were, in comparison with those who had left their marks here, as writers on paper beside writers on parchment' (p. 373). As soon as human history is intermingled with natural history, then our own responsibility towards the non-human becomes a matter of self-preservation as much as of natural preservation. If a feeling of closeness to nature is not enough to trigger ecological action, the phenomenological certainty of being embedded within that nature seems to be the final stepping-stone towards environmental ethics.

Feeling Concerned: Reciprocity as Prerequisite for Ecological Action

According to the OED, to feel concerned is both to be 'troubled or anxious' about something and to be 'involved' in something. Through our exploration of Merleau-Ponty's "Flesh of the World", we have argued that humans are indeed very much involved in the grand scheme of the universe and being conscious of that involvement may trigger some eco-anxiety, that is some concern for the future of our one and only symbioment, the planet. Yet for any such concern to arise, there needs to be an emotional (spiritual) fusion added to the previously mentioned physical (organic) fusion with the natural world. Contemporary eco-critics such as Albrecht are actually showing how one's natural surroundings are likely to have an impact on one's emotional state. If Hardy is well known for his descriptions of a nature reflecting human emotions,³² his tendency to depict

³¹ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London: MacMillan Collector's Library, 1859; repr. 2017), p. 337. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³² See Nishimura, p. 909.

nature's impact on these emotions is not to be neglected. Indeed, in Hardy's Wessex, a heath can make 'a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful [...]' (p. 73). As conveyed in this example, the effect of one's living environment on one's emotions may be positive or negative depending on the character's initial state of mind or relation to that particular place. In the case of Eustacia, for instance, the heath is more often than not responsible for her feeling of loneliness and imprisonment, as if 'the wings of her soul were broken by the cruel obstructiveness of all about her' (p. 346). The young woman's own relationship with Clym is being threatened by the heath as she 'cannot endure it' while he 'would rather live on these hills than anywhere else in the world' (p. 185). Throughout that particular dialogue, the reader gets the impression that the heath has come between the two lovers and that the communication between them is consequently broken. The melody of their respective discourses becomes dissonant as Eustacia's accumulation of harsh plosives is answered by Clym's alliteration of soft fricatives:

“[...]‘The heath is a cruel taskmaster to me’.
‘[...]To me, it is most exhilarating, and strengthening, and soothing’”. (p. 185)

Yet, what would be better than an eclipse of the moon observed from the intimacy of the heath to enhance the two lovers' feelings for one another and blind them to their divergent needs? Indeed, perfect emotional harmony may also be achieved with the help of one's environment when natural phenomena all work together to give the lovers a sense of belonging, both to one another and to their native land:

They formed a very comely picture of love at full flush, as they walked along the valley that late afternoon, the sun sloping down on their right, and throwing their thin spectral shadows, tall as poplar trees, far out across the furze and ferns. (p. 204)

In Hardy's novel, natural forces actually seem to work for the good of those who feel a special bond with the place they inhabit. Such is the case for Thomasin who hardly ever left her native heath and who relies on it for comfort as she mourns her husband: 'the spring came and calmed her; the summer came and soothed her; the autumn arrived, and she began to be comforted' (p. 372). The narrator's choice of assessing Thomasin's grieving process in terms of seasons

rather than months shows how nature, rather than time, heals all wounds on Egdon heath. From an organic to a psychological connection to nature, the characters in *The Return of the Native* allow themselves to engage in a reciprocal relationship in which ‘the environment is determined by the human just as the human is determined by the environment.’³³ Addressing this particular approach and its ecological implication, Levine argues that Hardy’s work is thereby given ‘a sense of universal connectedness — both material and moral’.³⁴

As soon as one realises that one lives in a symbioment rather than in an environment, then every action becomes an interaction and, as Vakoch and Castillon declare, ‘all being is “interbeing”’ (p. 73). This sense of reciprocity probably finds its roots in the often distorted Darwinian concept of ‘struggle for existence’ which actually argues that ‘the structure of every organic being is related, in the most essential yet often hidden manner, to that of all other organic beings’ (p. 90). In Hardy’s plot, as in Darwin’s theoretical development, no human action is taken separately from the environment in which it happens, as a reminder that all of our actions may have serious consequences. Answering MacNeill Miller’s condemnation of Hardy’s inability to recognise that ‘human beings may be working to cocreate the landscape that sustains so many species’ (pp. 165-6), I must underline that, on Egdon heath, the simple action of indulging in a gambling game when the sun is down is enough to attract ‘the attention of every bird within eyeshot, every reptile not yet asleep, and set the surrounding rabbits curiously watching from hillocks at a safe distance’ (p. 107). Here, non-human activities on the heath seem to be disturbed by Venn and Wildeve’s game to the point that a moth has to take it upon itself to extinguish their lantern so that they stop playing. Moreover, the numerous interruptions of the game by heath-croppers that Venn has to chase away is another clue that points at the negative impact of the two men’s activity on their surroundings. On several instances, the narrator takes care to describe Egdon heath as a shared space in which an action on one organism may change the living conditions of another drastically: ‘he unlocked the gate, and found that a spider had already constructed a large web, tying the door to the lintel, on the supposition that it was never to be opened again’ (p. 311). Now that Clym is back, the smart spider will have to find another protected spot to build her webby home and the reader suddenly feels a speck of injustice for the creature whose living space depended on the stability of a man’s

³³ Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, “Dendrography and Ecological Realism”, *Victorian Studies*, 58.4 (2016), 696-718 (p. 701).

³⁴ Levine, p. 39.

marriage. If, as Buell suggests, ‘the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest’ (p. 7) in an environmental text, then this particular instance brings Hardy’s novel a step closer to its qualification as green writing. Human interests are actually pushed into the background when natural forces are seen in turn to have an impact on human lives, to the point that a character like Eustacia tends to blame all her misfortunes on her surroundings: ‘O the cruelty of putting me into this imperfect, ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control’ (p. 346). As we have seen before, the interaction between man and his environment may be beneficial for one, as for instance when outdoor activity helps Clym’s eyesight to gradually improve (p. 392). At other times, however, natural phenomena such as a heavy rain or a river overflow may well directly lead to the death of human characters, namely Eustacia and Wildeve who are drowned in Shadwater Weir during a storm. In that tragic event, some may see natural forces getting back at two characters who have always acted without the least concern for their environment, while sparing Clym, the one who has always respected his native land he chose over Paris. Whether we support that interpretation or not, Hardy’s depiction of human-non-human interactions is undoubtedly part of a larger moral reflection on human’s responsibility towards the environment. Through his friendly reminder that we need to think about the consequences of our actions on the non-human world, Hardy lays the foundation of the very modern understanding of ‘the ecological thought’ as ‘coexistentialism’.³⁵

The third point in Buell’s definition of an environmental text is a sense of ‘human accountability to the environment’ (p. 7), which echoes our exploration of the double-meaning of ‘concern’ as both involvement in and preoccupation with the natural world. Without a sense of belonging, Adams argues, no environmental ethics can ever emerge in the human mind since ‘as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore not entitled to moral or ethical consideration’.³⁶ The refusal to conceive one’s life in terms of its reciprocity to the environment always leads to conflict and disharmony in Hardy’s text; the most striking example being the gambling scene previously mentioned. As Wildeve and Venn are practicing an immoral game with other people’s money and without the least concern for the creatures around

³⁵ Morton, p. 45.

³⁶ Will W. Adams, ‘Nature’s Participatory Psyche: a Study of Consciousness in a Shared Earth Community’, *The Humanist Psychologist*, 38 (2010), 15-39 (p. 16).

them, the narrator stresses ‘the incongruity between the men’s deeds and their environment’ (p. 229):

The soft juicy vegetation of the hollow in which they sat, gently rustling in the warm air, the uninhabited solitude, the chink of guineas, the rattle of the dice, the exclamation of the players, combined such a bizarre exhibition of circumstances as had never before met on those hills since they first arose out of the deep. (p. 229)

The rupture between the human characters and their environment is further strengthened by Wildeve’s aggressive behaviour towards non-human beings that he only sees as props for his game. In that spirit, the man decides to fetch some glow worms and to use them for their light since their lantern has been extinguished by a moth. When the prop glow worms fail to act as a proper lantern, he then gets mad and becomes disrespectful towards the creatures: ‘why don’t you burn, you little fool?’ (p. 230). When one is done reading and can think about this scene in relation to Wildeve’s tragic ending, then one tends to think that the character might have learned ‘by bitter experience that the organism that destroys its environment destroys itself’.³⁷ Wildeve’s conflictual relationship with nature acts as a counterpoint to Hardy’s imagination of an (e)co-happiness in which caring for one’s environment would be caring for oneself, as in any cooperation systems. This ecological utopia can be achieved by characters who allow themselves to have ‘experiences of intimate relating to nature’ (Vakoch and Castrillon, p. 131) and, like Venn, to feel ‘in direct communication with regions unknown to man’ (p. 88) just by observing a landscape. As we read through Hardy’s novel, the first step in that communion process seems to be the decision to shift one’s perspective and try and understand the world ‘beyond the human’,³⁸ according to non-human values. From the narrator’s point of view, ‘to dwell on a heath without studying its meanings [is] like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue’ (p. 73). Choosing to look at one’s environment with fresh eyes and a desire to learn from that environment allows some of the characters to feel protected, rather than threatened, by natural forces. As opposed to Eustacia’s, Thomasin’s relation to the heath is representative of what W.H. Auden defined in 1947 as ‘topophilia’, that is ‘the attention given to the love of particular and peculiar places’ (p. 120): ‘To her there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the

³⁷ Adams, ‘Nature’s Participatory Psyche’, p. 32.

³⁸ Feuerstein, p. 18.

air, and malice in every bush and bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever [...]' (Hardy, *Return of the Native*, p. 355). Moments of perfect harmony between Thomasin and her environment pervade the story to the point that, walking through a door, she becomes the very link between the sun and the heath: 'the oblique band of sunlight which followed her through the door became the young wife well. It illuminated her as her presence illuminated the heath' (p. 209). Such chiasmatic structures are typical of Hardy's vision of a human being able to give something back to a nurturing nature and eventually, to 'effect alterations that serve a mutually-supportive, sustainable environment' (Parham, pp. 35-6). In Hardy's Wessex, only when one is concerned *with* the heath can one feel concerned *for* it and consequently, feel the need to preserve it.

To Conclude: Hardy and the Ecological Paradox

Considered from an eco-critical perspective, Hardy's pastoral scenes and depictions of long walks among the English heath take up a meaning that goes far beyond the author's tribute to his native land. In a Victorian age when progress meant inventing new ways of overcoming limitations imposed by nature, the ecological thought seems to have emerged as an opposing force to that unilateral mode of thinking. What if progress actually meant cooperating with nature and observing it to know which way to go forward? The mirroring effect at work in *The Return of the Native* symbolises this new approach both consisting in looking *at* nature to find one's alter-*eco*, and in looking *up* to nature to reconcile the human with the non-human. To a Victorian person who might feel overwhelmed by such a drastic change of scenery, Hardy, as if drawing from the Isa Upanishad,³⁹ writes between the lines of his novel a very comforting maxim: 'who sees all beings in his own self, and his own self in all beings, loses all fear'.⁴⁰ Thinking in an ecological way in the nineteenth century is coming to the realisation that one is not separate from one's environment, that if one can see oneself in nature, then one may not be looking at it from outside but actually from inside, as an integral part of it. In such a light, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology

³⁹ The Isha Upanishad is a sacred Hindu Text. For lack of space, this won't be dealt with at length. On the relation between this text and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, see Adams; and on the role of the text to illuminate our contemporary ecological debate, see Eknath, Easwaran, and Michael N. Nagler, eds., *The Upanishads*, The Classics of Indian Spirituality, 2nd ed (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2007).

⁴⁰ Adams, 'The Interpermeation of Self and World', p. 64.

of perception and our modern understanding of ecology suddenly seem to share the same Victorian root, that is a strong sense of belonging with nature: ‘it is only when intimacy is felt palpably as no separation that its essential connection with care becomes evident’ (Vakoch and Castrillon, p. 11). To go from an ecological thought to an actual ecological commitment, there needs to be a feeling of involvement and that, only, will urge one to protect what is so intrinsic to one’s own existence. This very argument that pervades Hardy’s work and tells us a lot about his own ecological thinking, raises an important, yet unpopular, issue at the core of the ecological movement, that of the anthropocentric dimension of a supposedly eco-centric cause. Indeed, what if humans were actually separate from nature and couldn’t suffer the consequences of nature destruction? What if global warming was not threatening human habitat and safety? Then would humans really care for their environment? Would ecology ever have emerged as an utter disinterested movement? Darwin would likely have answered negatively to that question, since he couldn’t believe that ‘any animal in the world perform[ed] an action for the exclusive good of another of a distinct species’ (p. 324). Looking back at the origins of ecology through the reading of Hardy’s novel, one is both reminded of the paradox at the heart of ecological thinking and of the long way we still need to go in order to protect nature, for the sake of nature.

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Gendered Ecologies in Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds*

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Abstract

Considering the impact of Darwinian evolutionary discourse on Anthony Trollope's The Eustace Diamonds, this essay examines the construction of the main character, Lizzie, through shifting cultural understandings of gender roles and human/animal identities. Looking at the impact of Darwinian theory on ecology from multiple perspectives elucidates the novel's concerns with social structures that shape and constrain individual agency in women's lives particularly. The Descent of Man's complicating of the human/animal divide demonstrates the complexities of Lizzie's reptilian characterisation while Victorian considerations of domestic animals highlight the importance of her portrayal as a cat. Her feline behaviour is a means of violating domestic norms and defining herself outside of traditional dichotomies. The legal ecology of the novel shows the inseparability of human and object materiality, a cultural concern to which Darwin's work contributed. The animals and gemstones contribute to the novel's larger argument about women's ownership of their bodies and sexuality. Thus, relationships between the human, animal, and material challenge Victorian norms while fitting into the Palliser series' interest in the limits and potential of women's agency.

Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) has been called 'the first decent ecology text' largely because it constructs its argument through ecological examples.¹ By looking at animals' and plants' interactions in small, anecdotal ways, Darwin builds to patterns and then to systems in order to support his crucial interlocking theories of natural selection and sexual selection. In his *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin continues to look at the dynamism of ecological interactions, seeing how animals operate in their environmental contexts and in turn operate on them, with the conclusions always leading toward humans' own evolutionary histories. His work, though building on science that had come before, nonetheless '[made] an epoch', to quote from George Eliot's

¹ John Kricher, *The Balance of Nature: Ecology's Enduring Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 63.

correspondence.² It had profound implications not only in scientific arenas but also in literary ones, as much for what it explored and implied as for what it did not.

Moreover, there is no ecology, as we understand it in the modern sense, without Darwin's influence. Darwin's work, after all, inspired Ernst Haeckel to coin the term 'ecology' in 1866, defining it as 'the science of the mutual relationships of organisms to one another'.³ Darwin studies have been flourishing in Victorianist scholarship for decades, thanks in large part to the influence of Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* (1983) and George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists* (1988).⁴ A Darwinian ecology, as defined by Anna Feuerstein, emphasises inclusivity, breaks down hierarchy, and focuses on the freedom that is enabled by embracing human/animal interconnectedness.⁵ This essay weaves together multiple related strands in scholarship – Darwinian narrative, gender studies, ecological perspectives, and animal studies – to elucidate an often-dismissed novel that in fact provides a fascinating study of the complexities of Victorian social ecological thinking: Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* (1871-73).⁶

The Eustace Diamonds teems with animal imagery. Although Trollope often likens men's treatment of horses to their treatment of women, in no other

² George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, Volume III, ed. By Gordon S. Haight (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954-56, 1978), p. 227.

³ Ernst Haeckel, quoted in Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 144. Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

⁴ Such monographs were by no means the first academic considerations of Darwin's influence on Victorian literature, of course; see, for example, John C. Greene, *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1959) and Leo J. Henkin, *Darwinism in the English Novel, 1860-1910* (New York, NY: Russell and Russell, 1963).

⁵ Anna Feuerstein, *The Political Lives of Victorian Animals: Liberal Creatures in Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 167. Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

⁶ There is a startling trend in scholarship to caricature Lizzie and the novel in such article titles as 'Trollope's Trollop', 'Trollope's Book of Odd Women', or 'Trollope's Material Girl.' While such article titles are attention grabbing and do not necessarily reflect the nuance of criticism contained in the body of each essay itself, they nonetheless point to a troubling tendency to flatten Trollope's narrative style, which other critics have long labored to show is in fact deceptive in its depth and layering. See, for example, Deborah Deneholz Morse, *Women in Trollope's Palliser Novels* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Research Press, 1987); Jane Nardin, *He Knew She Was Right: The Independent Woman in the Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); and Frank O'Connor, 'Trollope the Realist' in *The Mirror in the Roadway: A Study of the Modern Novel* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1959).

Palliser novel does he focus so much on the porousness and artificiality of the human/animal divide. Drawing on different animal analogies throughout the novel, Trollope portrays the main character, Lizzie, as having an identity constructed by herself and others based on her shifting circumstances and environments. Her negotiated and dynamic characterisation does not fall neatly into traditional dichotomies of feminine/masculine, animal/human, natural/civilised, and private/public, however. The personal, or domestic, is undoubtedly political, as Carol Hanisch pointed out fifty years ago, just as the scientific is inevitably political and gendered as well. This essay considers the impact of Darwinian evolutionary discourse on the novel's construction of Lizzie through shifting cultural understandings of gender roles and human/animal identities, emphasizing the novel's concerns with social structures that shape and constrain individual agency in women's lives particularly.

The Darwinian Context

The Palliser novels constitute Trollope's only series entirely undertaken after the publication of *Origin* in 1859 and concurrent with Charles Darwin's rise to prominence as the cultural touchstone for evolutionary theory. These books appeared between 1864 and 1879. The first novel in the series, *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864-65), introduces many of the characters, patterns, and concerns that appeared in later Palliser novels: a primary courtship plot involving the choice between a proper and an unsuitable partner, a secondary courtship plot that often mirrors the primary one but in a lower-stakes or degraded form, political conflicts that are widely discussed in drawing rooms by women who wish to influence public life, and of course the centrality of the Palliser family. If we think of ecology as presenting 'a vision of shared life', the Palliser novels likewise represent a Darwinian ecological vision spanning thousands of pages and multiple fictional generations to convey the social and natural worlds' dynamic and radical inclusiveness.⁷

Throughout the Palliser novels, Trollope explores the complex intertwining of individual, familial, political, and societal histories. I have argued in previous work that the Palliser series incorporates an examination of Darwinian narrative that was gripping public attention and intellectual imaginations in the

⁷ Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, 'Ecology', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46 (2018), 653-6 (p. 655).

years following the publication of *Origin*.⁸ Many critics have noted that the Palliser series is a careful study of character evolution that frequently deprioritises plot for the sake of exploring contingency, adaptation, gradualism, and entanglement over generations⁹, but the ways in which these themes can be understood as Darwinian have been largely overlooked by scholarship. Moreover, Darwin's arguably more topical *Descent* was published February 1871; *The Eustace Diamonds* was serialised beginning in July 1871 and was published in book form in 1872. This timing makes it difficult for us to read the novel without taking into account the substantial cultural impact of Darwin's work, as Trollope's contemporaneous audience would inevitably have done.

Descent details Darwin's theory of sexual selection, which was the focus of a single chapter in *Origin* despite being a crucial form of natural selection. Darwin first defined sexual selection in *Origin* as the 'struggle between the males for the possession of the females' with the results being successful reproduction or 'few to no offspring'.¹⁰ One of the most significant outcomes of sexual selection, particularly for Darwin's explorations of human evolution in *Descent*, is sexual dimorphism, defined in *Origin* as natural selection's ability 'to modify one sex in relation to wholly different habits of life in the two sexes' (p. 87). Thus, a tension emerges as Darwinian theory challenges traditional divides between dichotomies such as animal and human but strives to uphold firm gender distinctions within species, including humans. The phrase 'sexual selection' appears nineteen times in *Origin*, and 286 in *Descent*, if the preface and table of contents are excluded. Cultural attention to this concept was therefore heightened after the publication of *Descent*, as the book intensified debate around the subject. Most significantly, Darwin applied the topic of sexual selection to humans at length in *Descent*, a controversial move that he had avoided in his earlier treatise. Beginning with 'evidence of the descent of man from some lower form', Darwin builds to topics such as how a belief in God, racial differences, and women's lack of a beard can all be explained under his joint, interlocking theories of sexual and

⁸ Lauren Cameron, 'Trollope and Darwin', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Anthony Trollope*, ed. By Deborah Denenholz Morse, Margaret Markwick, and Mark Turner (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), pp. 201-9 (p. 203-4).

⁹ See, for example, George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 200-5.

¹⁰ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Charles Darwin: A Facsimile of the First Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 88. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

natural selection.¹¹ To illustrate the title's subject, the descent of man, Darwin discusses analogous behaviours, histories, and structures in animals ranging from beetles to reptiles to birds. Thus, *Descent* breaks down the traditional human/animal and culture/nature divides that *The Eustace Diamonds* likewise complicates.

As a member of multiple London clubs and literary circles where Darwin's ideas were discussed with interest, and as a market-savvy author and editor, Trollope could not remain unaware of the ways in which common themes such as courtship, reproductive success, lineage, and inheritance were perceived through a Darwinian filter in his *milieu* and by his readers. Darwin's work, as Beer has argued, became a 'determining fiction' regardless of the extent to which an individual author was aware of testing its narrative value: she asserts that 'everyone found themselves living in a Darwinian world'.¹² It is noteworthy, then, that animal references abound in *The Eustace Diamonds*, far beyond Trollope's tendency to include colloquialisms such as 'pig-headed' or 'a bird in the hand', or even his passion for describing fox hunts. The term 'creature' is used in reference to human characters thirty-nine times in *The Eustace Diamonds*; to contextualise, that is the same number as *Phineas Finn* (1869), *Phineas Redux* (1874), and *The Duke's Children* (1879) combined, or thirty-one percent of the usage of the word in all of the Palliser series. 'Creature' is a charged term, as multiple critics have pointed out: Eric Santner argues that creatures mark a 'threshold' in which life's materiality and politics blend,¹³ while Tobias Menely claims that creatures break open human/animal divisions.¹⁴ In *The Eustace*

¹¹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: J. Murray, 1871; repr. New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 21. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹² Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 2, p. 3.

¹³ Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 12. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁴ Tobias Menely, *The Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015) p. 14. The term 'creature' has captured extensive scholarly interest, beyond the two scholars noted. For example, Anat Pick sees creatureliness as opening up culture to 'contexts that are not exclusively human', while Kreilkamp sees creatures as occupying 'indeterminate zones' that grant them partial and negotiable humanity. Christine Roth argues that Darwin's theories made species differentiation unclear, leading Hardy to adopt the word 'creature' to mark this indeterminacy. Anat Pick, *Creaturely Politics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 10; Ivan Kreilkamp, *Minor Creatures: Persons, Animals, and the Victorian Novel* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 15. Further references are given after quotations in the

Diamonds, such blurring arises consistently. Women are cats and vultures; men are bears and sharks. Among the cast of characters appear a lawyer nicknamed Turtle Dove, a peer named Lord Fawn, a suitor named Sir Griffin, and a maid named Crabstick. Most importantly, there is a protagonist/‘villain’ named Lizzie.¹⁵

Lizzie’s first name is not incidental, nor is its resonance with ‘lizard’. Trollope’s narrator comments that she is widely referred to as ‘Lizzie’ – not ‘Lady Eustace’ or ‘Elizabeth Eustace’ – even ‘by people who had hardly ever seen her’, as her diamond scandals increase her notoriety (p. 127). She is portrayed as reptilian multiple times throughout the novel. In the initial description of her appearance, the narrator comments that ‘There were some who said that she was almost snake-like in her rapid bendings and the almost too easy gestures of her body’ (p. 19). Despite her prettiness, which is commented on by other characters, Trollope takes care to emphasise that Lizzie cannot be trusted to uphold societal norms because of her reptilian gaze (p. 20, p. 93, p. 261). When trying to entice her cousin Frank Greystock to propose to her, for example, she ‘scrambles’ and ‘clammers’ across rocks by the seaside (p. 180). The narrator describes her as ‘quick as a lizard in turning hither and thither’ and she attempts to win Frank’s hand with snake-like, pleading movements, ‘sitting almost upright now, though her feet were still on the sofa, and [...] leaning over towards him, as though imploring him for his aid’ (p. 77, p. 145). In this position, we are told, ‘She was very lovely, very attractive, almost invincible’ (p. 145). In fact, Trollope casts Lizzie in this serpentine mode in masculine Darwinian terms, as she uses ‘arms’ and wages ‘battle’ ‘against which [some men] can raise no shield,—from which they can retire into no fortress,—in which they can parry no blow [...] even the poor chance of running is often cut off from [them]’ (p. 145). Much of Lizzie’s unromantic fighting in this novel, with female rivals for a possible second husband, or with male lawyers who are trying to make her return the family diamonds once she is widowed, occurs in animalistic terms: she snaps, snarls, and growls (9, 468, 476), again taking on a more aggressive role, and therefore a masculine one in Darwin’s gendered evolutionary terms. For Darwin, ‘the

text; and Christine Roth, ‘The Zoocentric Ecology of Hardy’s Poetic Consciousness’, in *Victorian Writers and the Environment: Ecocritical Perspectives*, ed. by Laurence W. Mazzeno and Ronald D. Morrison (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), pp. 79-96. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁵ Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1862; ed. by Helen Small, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 530. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

severest rivalry' occurs between males, who have 'special weapons, confined to the male sex' whereas female agency is located in selecting the victorious male (*Descent*, p. 89, p. 88). Lizzie challenges such roles.

In *Descent*, Darwin dedicates most of his section on reptiles to snakes and lizards. Although the overarching theme of the section is sexual dimorphism, Darwin expresses fascination with snakes' breeding patterns, commenting 'Their intellectual powers are higher than might have been anticipated', going on to comment that snakes clearly possess 'some reasoning power, strong passions, and mutual affection' (p. 400-1). Nonetheless, uncertainty remains for him about whether snakes have 'sufficient taste' to appreciate bright colours and therefore engage in the same kinds of sexual selection as birds, as well as which sex might attract the other with mating displays such as rattling (p. 401-2). Lizards, on the other hand, fold perfectly into his theory of sexual selection, displaying marked male aggression and sexual dimorphism, and so he elucidates their examples with enthusiasm (pp. 402-7). Darwin's 1871 narrative thus highlights lizards while elevating snakes, which might surprise readers of *Origin* who associate his interests so closely with pigeons. Moreover, *Descent's* expansive embrace of species, including the reptilian, opens up new narrative possibilities that we can see Trollope utilising in *The Eustace Diamonds*.

An easy reading of Trollope's reptilian imagery would equate Lizzie with the tempting biblical snake and cast the novel as a stereotypical depiction of gendered literary tropes. Lizzie is obviously a villain in this mode: lizards and snakes have not typically been positive figures in literature. Darwin's cultural influence substantially complicated such presentations, however, as well as the gendering of sexual agency. As Darwin decreased the amount of agency that he attributed to females in sexual selection over the course of his publications, he was implicitly commenting on broader cultural issues, projecting Victorian patriarchal norms onto the animal world.¹⁶ In so doing, he also muddied any clear distinction that would take the human out of nature or vice-versa. What is labelled as 'natural' or 'unnatural' is largely a matter of power relations and the definitions provided by the dominant cultural perspective.

Like Gwendolen Harleth, then, whose serpentine appearance attracts comments at the beginning of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Lizzie's

¹⁶ See Susan David Bernstein, 'Designs after Nature: Evolutionary Fashions, Animals and Gender', in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Deborah Deneholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 65-79 (p. 66) and Rosemary Jann, 'Darwin and the Anthropologists: Sexual Selection and Its Discontents', *Victorian Studies*, 37 (1994), 287-306 (p. 290).

reptilian features and movements in *The Eustace Diamonds* mark a woman vying for sexual agency in a complicated Darwinian culture, wherein the traditional boundaries between human and animal lack clear meanings.¹⁷ Such a breakdown means that a reptilian woman is no longer inherently an embodiment of evil, an oversimplified symbol plucked from Genesis, but rather a vibrant hybrid who is exploring and testing her cultural limitations to see if she can write herself a new script. While snakes have long been phallic symbols and such Lamia figures could be seen as sexual threats as a consequence, that both Eliot and Trollope portray their characters as snakes is less a reflection of the authors' condemnation of such behaviour than an exploration of how to make new symbolic space for agentic women. We see both Gwendolen and Lizzie as snakes mostly through the eyes of other characters or through the narrator's free indirect discourse, such as when Lizzie's fiancé Lord Fawn ponders whether 'she [would] not ever be as an adder to him, – as an adder whom it would be impossible that he should admit into his bosom' (p. 492). Thus, to many characters in the novel, Lizzie is a wild creature, a dangerous biting animal such as a minx (p. 574) or a vixen (p. 70, p. 72, p. 73). In each of these cases, the animal imagery emphasises Lizzie's unpredictability. Her agency can only be categorised as dangerous by characters who are frustrated by their inability to thwart or control what they perceive as her undesirable behaviour. As with Eliot, Trollope's complex gender negotiation was influenced by Darwin's writing, which troubled the human/animal divide more substantially than any previous evolutionary theory of the modern era and made 'the human more animal and the animal more human, destabilizing boundaries in both directions'.¹⁸ This dissolution of traditional divisions demonstrates that the novel's ambiguities are not equivocation but rather an exploration of a world 'in which two or more possible ways of being and ways of meaning exist at the same time' continuously.¹⁹

Violating the Domestic: A Household Cat

¹⁷ See George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Edinburgh: Wm. Blackwood & Sons, 1876; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 3.

¹⁸ Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1-12 (p. 2). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁹ Danielle Barkley, 'Interpreting Sympathy in *The Eustace Diamonds*', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, 129 (2016), 66-79 (p. 67).

Along with Darwin's evolutionary theories, a radical shift in the way that humans and non-human animals lived and related to one another also shaped the Victorian view of animals: the emergence of the household pet as a cultural phenomenon. Under the influences of urbanisation and industrialisation, the pet became one of the most substantial developments in Victorian domestic ecology.²⁰ Not wild animals with little use value for the middle class, nor beasts of burden, nor yet sources of food and clothing, the pet dog, cat, and bird offered potent new cultural roles and, by extension, literary symbols. Though not much scholarship has been dedicated to Darwin's perspective on pets specifically, Natalie McKnight has persuasively demonstrated an overlap in Darwinian and literary presentations of pets, particularly that of Charles Dickens: pets blur the human/animal divide for the Victorians and throw into question notions of human superiority.²¹ Ivan Kreilkamp notes that *Descent* presented domesticated animals as characters, deserving of sympathy and capable of agency (p. 4, p. 10). Pets are hardly straightforward literary symbols, however, and are frequently politically charged. For the Victorian man intimidated by cultural changes, pets could provide a comforting image of domesticated nature that was entirely integrable into the home, thereby reducing perceived threats posed by gender or class conflict.²² Any hint of violence posed to the Victorian imperialistic, patriarchal, middle-class order could be countered with 'the more cheering picture' of 'the kitten toying with its ball of yarn', as James Turner puts it; he goes on to argue that by 'creating the modern pet [...] animal lovers manufactured an animal designed to quell savage nature with the balm of love'.²³ Similarly, Monica Flegel has argued that the pet is a figure that reinforces patriarchal control over the home space and the broader world beyond it.²⁴ It is this indifferently violent vision of nature that Darwin's work brought to cultural attention, and this commitment to patriarchy that he upholds in his discussion of sexual selection across species, as discussed

²⁰ Mario Ortiz-Robles, *Literature and Animal Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), p. 5. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

²¹ Natalie McKnight, 'Dickens and Darwin: A Rhetoric of Pets', *The Dickensian*, 102 (2006), 131-143 (p. 142). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

²² Martin A. Danahay, 'Nature Red in Hoof and Paw: Domestic Animals and Violence in Victorian Art', in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 97-119 (pp. 99-100). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

²³ James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 76.

²⁴ Monica Flegel, *Pets and Domesticity in Victorian Literature and Culture: Animality, Queer Relations, and the Victorian Family* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), pp. 97-8.

earlier. Martin A. Danahay points out the inverse of Turner's and Flegel's perspectives: that there is little more threatening to the era's notion of masculinity than the claws on a pet cat—the ability to cause damage and pain otherwise hidden in a seemingly sweet creature—because 'the image then transgresses both norms of femininity and the domestic' that otherwise comforted the Victorians in the idealisation of pets (p. 103).

Even a playful kitten is therefore a vexed cultural symbol. Thomas Hardy celebrates the inability to assimilate cats to human consciousness in multiple poems (Roth, pp. 90-1). Lewis Carroll's cats resist domesticity and tyranny, as in the case of the Cheshire Cat, or motivate a break from patriarchal power, as in the case of Dinah (Feuerstein, p. 151, p. 157). Traditionally, cats' contradictions stand as what Mario Ortiz-Robles describes as 'a living reminder of the strangeness inherent in our domestication of a species that, at times, seems to have domesticated us' (p. 117). This tug across the simple human/animal, owner/pet divide is very different from literary portrayals of dogs, which represent a more 'benign tale of recognition and domestication' than felines (Ortiz-Robles, p. 70). Darwin idealised the emotional capacities of dogs but had little interest in cats; for Dickens, cats are feminised opposites to dogs, faithless, fierce, and sneaky (McKnight, p. 141). Kreilkamp's few examples of pet cats in Victorian novels are also problematic, either too benign or too violent (p. 43, p. 54). Cats are rarely reducible to the convenient loyalty of dogs and are often associated with nonconforming women.²⁵

Perhaps more clearly than Lizzie the reptile, then, Lizzie the cat captures the ambivalence and difficulty of Victorian domestic ecologies. Lizzie Eustace is not only portrayed as a biting wild creature by those men who are frustrated by her, as explored in the previous section, but also as a scratching domesticated one by people who are attached to her. Those two characters who know her best, Frank and Lucy, have the following exchange:

'She looks like a beautiful animal that you are afraid to caress for fear it should bite you;—an animal that would be beautiful if its eyes were not so restless, and its teeth so sharp and so white.'

'How very odd.'

'Why odd, Mr. Greystock?'

²⁵ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 22-3.

‘Because I feel exactly in the same way about her. I am not in the least afraid that she'll bite me; and as for caressing the animal,—that kind of caressing which you mean,—it seems to me to be just what she's made for. But, I do feel sometimes, that she is like a cat.’

‘Something not quite so tame as a cat’, said Lucy. (p. 93)

The cat is most easily integrated into Victorian art when asleep, evoking ‘associations of fidelity, peace and companionship strongly linked to the ideal of the family and the domestic sphere as [Ruskin’s] “place of Peace”’ (Danahay, p. 99). Lizzie outright rejects this reduction, proclaiming, ‘It does not suit me to be tame. It is not my plan to be tame’ (p. 116). Other women are cats that purr over each other and sleep contentedly in front of the family hearth (p. 52, p. 116, p. 195), but Lizzie spurns such comfortable domestic integration. Another woman, Lucy, is able to recognise that Lizzie is nothing like an ideal pet cat when the men around her cannot. Nonetheless, even Lizzie’s primary champion and occasional suitor Frank acknowledges to himself, when alone, that her ‘claws would scratch’ (p. 97). The comforting domestic and feminine cat on the hearth can in fact have its own mind and violent intentions that counter social norms and patriarchal preferences, as Lizzie does for each man who attempts to confine or control her throughout her widowhood. Lizzie takes advantage of the opportunities for self-redefinition provided by the post-*Descent* blurring of the human/animal divide, even as such a cultural shift upends other characters’ more traditional gendered notions.

The Legal Complexities of Ownership

No discussion of *The Eustace Diamonds* could responsibly overlook the titular gemstones. The novel’s legal discourse over jewellery is not separate from the novel’s ecological vision, despite the seeming distance between a diamond and a non-human animal. Returning to Santner’s understanding of ‘creature’, the ambiguity enabled by such a term brings together living organisms, the material world, and the politics that make meaning out of them (p. 12). Carey Wolfe famously argues that biopolitics show us how the line between the human and the nonhuman is not ‘given by nature’, but rather ‘about rules and laws’.²⁶ The legal concerns about gemstone ownership in *Eustace Diamonds* reinforce this larger

²⁶ Carey Wolfe, *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 10.

Darwinian breakdown of societal norms and divisions discussed in the preceding sections. Moreover, the legal ecology of the novel demonstrates the inseparability of ‘our material world of people and things’, a cultural concern to which Darwin’s work contributed.²⁷

In *Descent*, Darwin discusses women’s tendency to wear jewellery, a behaviour that he says is common to ‘our women, both civilised and savage’, and reminiscent of the colouring of birds, although he claims that ‘Judging from the hideous ornaments, and the equally hideous music admired by most savages, it might be urged that their aesthetic faculty was not so highly developed [...] as in birds’ (p. 408, p. 116). Here we have a gendered crossing, where male birds’ and female humans’ behaviour are equated although not with the self-awareness that might consider the inappropriateness of projecting Victorian patriarchal norms onto non-human animals or non-western cultures. Similarly, Darwin’s aesthetics are tinged with his cultural privilege. What he terms ‘high tastes’ are, he argues, ‘acquired through culture, and depend on complex associations; they are not enjoyed by barbarians or by uneducated persons’ (p. 116). Lizzie Eustace’s stunning ‘circle of stones [...] with a Maltese cross appended to it [...] constituted of real diamonds’, beautiful enough to make peers recognise their value at first glance, therefore fall into a Darwinian loophole: her diamonds are clearly markers of western cultural value and yet are continuous with the pleasures of those so low on the Victorian evolutionary hierarchy as birds and indigenous peoples (p. 79).

Although Lizzie’s ‘diamonds’, the refined if old-fashioned jewellery that impresses even unknowledgeable men with their beauty and evident cost, are most often referred to as such, they are also interchangeably called ‘stones’, a total of twenty-one times in the novel. This casual description emphasises their elemental nature, their continuity with the natural world, and the artificiality of the value that is placed on them. The artificial nature of the diamonds’ importance and worth is emphasised by the complexities of the legal and social norms surrounding the eponymous objects. Whether laws or customs can dictate Lizzie’s possession and disposal of the stones, for example, is contentious for much of the novel. The complexities of the law on something as simple as a necklace take over four pages of dense text to hash out, only to reach the

²⁷ Kevin Curran, *Shakespeare’s Legal Ecologies: Law and Distributed Selfhood* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), p. 48. Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

conclusion that the diamonds have looser regulations and precedents attached to them than even pots and pans, or nonhuman animals (pp. 123-4, pp. 185-6).

Paul Waldau comments that ‘the basic principles of property law as they apply to nonhuman animals have not changed essentially’ since the nineteenth century.²⁸ The many animal protection laws that were passed in the Victorian era were overwhelmingly focused on animals with clear economic value: cattle, horses, and dogs that were being used by humans for their bodies’ contribution to the capitalist market.²⁹ Wild animals were of concern to the law primarily so that humans could have a system for gaining ownership over them, not as having a protected status in nature. Domestic animals, on the other hand, were and still are categorised legally as personal property and pets have had ‘almost no visibility in the legal system, as the noneconomic values of companionship were not of importance’ (Favre, p. 65). Legal restrictions are built on constructed systems of value: what can be done with a herd of cattle will likely be defined more clearly and extensively than what can be done with a litter of puppies. Likewise, what can be done with a collection of diamonds will be codified in a way that what can be done with a handful of more common stones is not, even if the former is ‘hardly so useful’ (Trollope, *Eustace Diamonds*, p. 574).

Moreover, Darwin’s interest in jewels and ornamentation among women and animals stems from a concern with reproductive success: women adorn their bodies to make themselves more attractive to potential mates, in his logic (*Descent*, p. 116). Because female sexuality was constructed as a form of property

²⁸ Paul Waldau, ‘Animals as Legal Subjects’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, ed. by Linda Kalof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 167-88 (p. 171). As the 1870s saw the growth of cultural concerns over vivisection, scientific works such as Darwin’s *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), literary works such as Anna Sewall’s *Black Beauty* (1877), and innumerable accounts in the British press of animals’ experiences made ‘the physiological and emotional barriers between species harder to maintain’ for Victorian readers. See Jed Mayer, ‘The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Laboratory Animals’, *Victorian Studies*, 50 (2008), 399-417 (p. 406). This cultural zeitgeist drove the enactment of the last major piece of nineteenth-century legislation to protect animals: the 1876 version of the Cruelty to Animals Act, developed from the final report of the 1876 Royal Commission on the Practice of Subjecting Live Animals to Experiments for Scientific Purposes. Prior to this, legal form had been granted ‘to the growing political demand among Britons to face humans’ ethical responsibility towards animals [in] the Act to Prevent the Cruel and Improper Treatment of Cattle of 1822 (also known as Martin’s Act); [and] the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1835, which was repealed and replaced in 1849, 1850, 1854, and 1876’ (Ortiz-Robles, p. 11).

²⁹ David Favre, ‘Animals as Living Property’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, ed. by Linda Kalof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 65-80 (p. 65). Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

in the Victorian era, with women's bodies belonging to their fathers or husbands, depending on their marital status, other property such as diamonds, or pets, can stand in for women's sexuality.³⁰ Thus, as Kathy A. Psomiades has explored through the conjunction of contemporaneous anthropologies and *The Eustace Diamonds*, the legal concerns of the novel impact sexuality in so far as property is 'connected to the logic of reproduction and blood that organizes' social structures (p. 102). Trollope is demonstrating the overlap between the civilised and the primitive, exploring the thin veneers that his culture put on marriage and property law in order to maintain the illusion of evolutionary distance.

Darwin's theories tie 'discourse on animal rights inevitably [...] [to] human rights, especially in connection with women' (Morse and Danahay, p. 5). Like Lizzie's diamonds, then, animals' and women's legal rights existed in a contradictory and complicated legal ecology. Lizzie herself is 'absolutely, alarmingly ignorant, not only of the laws, but of custom in such matters' but she counters the obfuscating, masculinist intellectual exercises of the lawyers with a simpler language of personal and bodily 'rights' (p. 39, p. 195). She uses her diamonds primarily as a tool to assert her agency and independence from masculine domination. As Frederik Van Dam points out, 'she is not interested in whether the law is true or false: what matters is that it is there and that it can be used'.³¹ Throughout much of the narrative, we see Lizzie lying about being ill, infirm, or outright dying to keep male police officers, doctors, and court clerks away from her property. Although her motives are shown to be complex and shifting over the course of the novel, she comes to declare, 'After all, a necklace is only a necklace. I cared nothing for it,—except that I could not bear the idea that that man should dictate to me' (p. 388). She hopes that in whatever second marriage she contracts, she will be 'the rare case in which the woman can make herself the dictator' rather than 'playing the tunes that men dictate' (p. 555). This is her main criterion for a potential husband. To her suitor, Lord Fawn, she proclaims, 'If you, my lord, intend to take an attorney's word against mine [...] then you are not fit to be my husband' (p. 150). After all of the threats that Lizzie

³⁰ William A. Cohen, 'Trollope's Trollop', *Novel: A Forum in Fiction*, 28 (1995), 235-56 (p. 238). Further references are given after the quotations in the text. Kathy Alexis Psomiades, 'Heterosexual Exchange and Other Victorian Fictions: *The Eustace Diamonds* and Victorian Anthropology', *Novel: A Forum in Fiction*, 33 (1999), 93-118 (p. 97). Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

³¹ Frederik Van Dam, 'Victorian Instincts: Anthony Trollope and the Philosophy of Law', *Literature Compass*, 9.11 (2012), 801-12 (p. 804). Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

faces and all of the trouble that she puts others to, her brother-in-law concludes, ‘She is a very great woman [...] and, if the sex could have its rights, would make an excellent lawyer’ (p. 531), a recognition of her paramount intelligence in navigating the complex situations into which legal regulations force her.

Kevin Curran defines legal ecology as promoting ‘communal, collaborative, and distributive’ notions of selfhood, notions that were opening up to redefinition thanks in part to *Descent*’s tracing of human evolutionary history (p. 8). Lizzie understands all boundaries as in flux and moves across them as needed to achieve her ends, a Darwinian sign of the times. Women, jewellery, and animals were all seen as circulating in exchanges between men, but Trollope complicates such reductive narratives in his novels. Lizzie trying to maintain ownership of her jewels is a woman trying to maintain control of her body and its uses (Cohen, p. 238), which is in turn an animal trying to control her own reproductive autonomy – regardless of the laws regulating it. The intersecting implications of family jewels as inherited property, resources of great immediate value, and male genitalia are particularly noteworthy in this context.³² Trollope problematises the overlap among the cultural categories of women, animals, and jewels by showing how they can be manipulated for an individual’s gain. Lizzie, who is associated as much with jewels as with biting teeth and scratching claws, uses instinct and appeals to natural law in order to promote her own interests (Van Dam, p. 804).³³

Complicating the Politics: Conclusion

Trollope’s achievement at tapping into this cultural matrix of concerns over the scientific, cultural, and legal status of women and animals can be measured by his own perception that *The Eustace Diamonds* was his most successful novel in

³² See ‘family jewels, n.’, in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, December 2020) www.oed.com/view/Entry/256886. Accessed 28 December 2020.

³³ From her childhood on, and despite her father’s impecuniousness, she ‘went everywhere with jewels on her fingers, and red gems hanging round her neck, and yellow gems pendent from her ears, and white gems shining in her black hair’ (p. 7). The titular diamonds, which Lizzie repeatedly claims to be her own, were placed into her hands by Sir Florian (p. 39) but at various points, she asserts that he ‘threw them round [her] neck’ (p. 42, p. 316). She even once says that she plans to usurp her son’s husbandly role by placing them around his bride’s neck herself (p. 150). The intimacy of placing the jewels in their proper bodily display is for Lizzie proof of transfer of ownership – they belong to her body as they cannot belong to a storage vault or a man’s legal claim. Until she can transfer them to another woman’s body and her ownership, Lizzie reinforces her claim to them by wearing ‘her diamonds again and then again’ (p. 142).

almost a decade.³⁴ Although this novel has often been excluded from the Palliser series based on its lack of political content, this essay helps us to see that the animal imagery that intersects with legal, scientific, and gender concerns through the figure of Lizzie makes this a deeply political novel. Despite Harriet Ritvo's argument that post-Darwin, cultural consensus would not have deemed humans to be animals,³⁵ nonetheless Trollope's social ecological vision captures how troublingly and enticingly malleable the categories of human/animal, man/woman, culture/nature, refined/savage, family/personal, legal/ethical, and science/culture were in the early 1870s, all through the figure of Lizzie Eustace. Each belongs in and with the other, and all are mutually constitutive.

It might be tempting to reduce Lizzie to a Becky Sharp figure, with her social climbing, mendacity, and conscious use of sexual appeal for her own ends. Lizzie's scheming, however, serves a very different function in this narrative than Becky's does in *Vanity Fair* (1848) (see Psomiades, p. 98). Importantly, in *The Eustace Diamonds*, the same censure and punishments are not applied to Lizzie's methods of breaking open cultural institutions, family traditions, and social restrictions. As various scholars have pointed out, then, this novel presents us with a vision of a constructed rather than natural society in 'an essentially unproductive world' and of how easily determining fictions such as personal and family history, class structure, and intergenerational stability can become undone.³⁶ By controlling the Eustace men's family jewels and her metonymic sexuality, even by telling whatever story suits at a given moment, Lizzie purchases a stressful and short-lived freedom that she makes the most of.

Other female characters in the novel notice this opportunity for change and are enthused by Lizzie's trajectory. This is the most significant thematic connection between *The Eustace Diamonds* and the rest of the Palliser series: women's struggle for personal and political agency in a time of flux. Glencora Palliser fights this battle from the first novel until *The Prime Minister* (1876), the last one in which she appears alive. Cora visits Lizzie twice in *The Eustace Diamonds* to offer sympathy with her plight. Fascinated by Lizzie's defiance of

³⁴ John N. Hall, *Trollope: A Biography* (London: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 377.

³⁵ Harriet Ritvo, 'Animal Dreams and Animal Reflections', in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 272-75 (p. 272).

³⁶ See Zubair S. Amir, "'So Delightful a Plot": Lies, Gossip, and the Narration of Social Advancement in *The Eustace Diamonds*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36 (2008), 187-204 (p. 188, pp. 187-91); and James R. Kincaid, *The Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), pp. 172-3.

patriarchal expectations for women's interactions with the legal system, she comments publicly, 'It is so delightful to think that a woman has stolen her own property, and put all the police into a state of ferment' (p. 352). Throughout the series, Lizzie is one of the only female characters to take on the public sphere and succeed, if in small and compromising ways. Although the Eustace family lawyers want to take away what Lizzie sees as her property rights, since as a widow she can produce no more Eustace heirs, Lizzie's manoeuvrings position her as both the 'villain' – an Althusserian bad subject who does not consent to her own subjection³⁷ – and a very modern protagonist who takes advantage of the changes in her Darwinian world to reposition herself within a malleable 'multispecies social and political community' (Feuerstein, p. 5). Kreilkamp argues that animal figures in the Victorian novel contributed to creating cultural categories of who and what 'can count as a protagonist or even as a character'; to be more animal than human is to become dispensable or mere matter to be used by others (p. 3, p. 32). Not so with Trollope's Lizzie. She embraces the freedom in animal identities in order to adjust to new threats and demands, using them as necessary to work toward her own goals.

To return to Haeckel's definition of ecology as 'the science of the mutual relationships of organisms to one another', we can see how *The Eustace Diamonds* presents a challenging vision of such human, animal, and material relationships through Lizzie's trajectory (qtd. in Richards, p. 144). Darwin's work led to an uncomfortable reckoning for Victorians about their understandings of non-human animals as well as humans that had been coded as animal-like (Feuerstein, pp. 22-23). The destabilisation of traditional categories resulted in 'more expansive representational strategies' that privileged animal qualities, even seemingly negative ones like instinct, wildness, and viciousness (Feuerstein, p. 2, pp. 3-4). Consequently, post-*Descent* novels like *The Eustace Diamonds* offer broader, less anthropocentric visions of community and agency. Lizzie's agentic animal identities and legal acrobatics convey Trollope's insights about the problems of a social system trying to adhere to divisions that no longer hold in a Darwinian context.

³⁷ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 29.

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‘Some old-world savage animal’: H. G. Wells’ White Sphinx and the Terror of Posthuman Time

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Abstract

This article examines the significance of the White Sphinx statue in H. G. Wells’ The Time Machine (1895) in relation to Victorian anxieties surrounding deep time and posthuman futures. It argues first that contemporaneous developments in archaeology and palaeontology during the first half of the nineteenth century led to an elision between the two fields, with the result that Victorian literary depictions of archaeological artefacts often link them with geological or palaeontological timescales.

In Wells’ The Time Machine, a colossal marble sphinx functions as a symbolic manifestation of complex and often conflicting questions surrounding the newly-conceptualised geological timescale that dwarfed human history, and that implied the disturbing likelihood of both pre-human and posthuman temporalities. At once an archaeological remnant produced by a human society, and a transitional hybrid body comprised of both human and animal elements, Wells’ sphinx is able simultaneously to embody historical and evolutionary timescales. As such, it appears to offer a possible answer to unsettling questions about time, history, and humanity’s place on this planet, if only its significance can be unriddled. Ultimately, however, the White Sphinx remains an unassailable enigma, testament to the incomprehensible profundity of deep time.

The nineteenth century saw a dizzying expansion of time. Rapid developments in geology and palaeontology brought people face to face with the prospect of a world that was immensely older than previously imagined. More troublingly still, it was a world that had existed long before the arrival of humans, and that might conceivably long outlast them. The Victorians were forced to reassess their relationship with a planet made alien by the newfound understanding of both deep time and evolution. H. G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895) is one of the best-known Victorian literary responses to the question of deep time, employing the mechanism of time travel to explore abhuman and ultimately posthuman futures. Voyaging forward to the year 802,701, the unnamed Time Traveller finds himself confronted with the incongruous shape of a vast white marble sphinx, looming, with enigmatic smile, over far-future Surrey. The first thing the Time Traveller sees upon his arrival, the White Sphinx is a figure so obviously symbolic as to have prompted a multitude of critical responses and interpretations. But little has

been written about the interestingly conflicted relationship between Wells' sphinx and deep time itself. I will argue that concurrent developments in geology and archaeology during the nineteenth century led to a blurring of lines between the two disciplines, so that archaeological artefacts were often employed in literature to embody questions of deep time. Wells' sphinx, therefore, functions firstly as a physical manifestation of geological/evolutionary time, ostensibly enabling human engagement with an otherwise alienatingly expansive concept. Secondly, and contradictorily, the sphinx's traditional association with opacity and enigma testifies to the ultimate impossibility of any true human comprehension of deep time. Allen MacDuffie writes that Victorian literature 'reveals a culture simultaneously struggling to come to terms with, and struggling to avoid, its relationship to the natural world, and thus its situation on the planet'.¹ Existing at the juncture between human and inhuman timescales, the silent, unclassifiable form of Wells' White Sphinx reflects deep ecological anxieties surrounding the question of what kind of future humanity will create for itself.

'Awful Changes': reimagining time in the early-to-mid nineteenth century

For much of post-antique history, as Daniel Lord Smail writes, 'human history, as imagined in the Judeo-Christian tradition, was coterminous with the age of the earth itself'.² This meant around six thousand years, according to most theologians. As geological knowledge progressed, however, it became increasingly apparent that world and humanity both were of a far greater age than this biblical timescale suggested. In 1788, the Scottish geologist James Hutton declared that he could identify for the earth 'no vestige of a beginning – no prospect of an end'.³ Interest in fossilised remains increased, with the French zoologist Georges Cuvier identifying dozens of now-extinct species in the early nineteenth century. Between 1830-33, Charles Lyell released his sweeping earth-history *The Principles of Geology*, which drew attention to the idea that different geological strata represented different chronological periods. Lyell's belief in

¹ Allen MacDuffie, 'Charles Darwin and the Victorian Pre-History of Climate Denial', *Victorian Studies*, 60 (2018), 543-564 (p. 545).

² Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 21.

³ James Hutton, quoted in Stephen Jay Gould, 'Toward the Vindication of Punctuational Change', in *Catastrophes and Earth History: The New Uniformitarianism*, eds. William A. Berggren and John A. Van Couvering (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 9-34 (p. 12).

gradual change across vast swaths of time would prove influential upon Charles Darwin's eventual development of an evolutionary theory.

With the recognition of the planet's antiquity came speculation about the age of the human race. Across Europe, human-made artefacts were being excavated from the same strata as the bones of extinct animals.⁴ In 1859, having previously rejected the idea of a deep past for humanity, Lyell visited various sites of excavation in France and England to inspect flints uncovered alongside fossil remains, and judged the tools to be of human origin. Reluctantly, he conceded at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science that 'man was old enough, at least, to have coexisted with the Siberian mammoth'.⁵ The same year, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* appeared in print. Darwin's hypothesis, Smail writes, provided 'a crucial link in the time revolution [...] because it offered a way to link the history of life and the descent of humanity to the emerging geological timescale, thereby unifying biological time'.⁶

The fascination and unease provoked by these scientific developments is well-documented. In 1851, John Ruskin famously complained in a letter to Henry Acland that his faith was being eroded by progressions in geology: 'If only the Geologists would let me alone, I could do very well, but those dreadful Hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses —'.⁷ Even humorous nineteenth-century responses to questions of deep time reveal anxiety. An 1830 cartoon by Henry de la Beche – produced in response to comments by Lyell that the world's climatic conditions might someday return to their prehistoric state, bringing with them a resurgence of previously-extinct genera – depicts an anthropomorphic ichthyosaur, lecturing to its fellows on the now-extinct human species.⁸ Its caption reads: 'AWFUL CHANGES. MAN FOUND ONLY IN A FOSSIL STATE – REAPPEARANCE OF ICHTHYOSAUR'.⁹ While the cartoon is intended as a joke, its subject matter reveals that the possible implications of this new planetary timescale had not gone unnoticed. Having previously supposed both human and planetary history to be essentially knowable

⁴ Smail, p. 25.

⁵ Charles Lyell, 'On the Occurrence of Works of Human Art in Post-pliocene Deposits', in *Report of the Twenty-Ninth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (London: John Murray, 1860), pp. 93-5 (p. 93).

⁶ Smail, p. 26.

⁷ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1909), XXXVI, p. 115.

⁸ Virginia Zimmerman, *Excavating Victorians* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 38.

⁹ De La Beche, cited in Zimmerman, p. 39.

and contained, the Victorians now found themselves adrift in a sea of time too vast to comprehend, with no guarantee that humanity would continue its dominion over the earth.

Contemporaneous with these changes in the understanding of geological time was a growing interest in archaeology, in particular that of Egypt. Napoleon's Egyptian campaign of 1798-1801, which included a large group of scientists and academics, had sparked a widespread fascination with Egypt's ancient past. The group's findings were published between 1809-1829 as the *Description de L'Égypte*. By 1822, twenty-three years after its discovery, the hieroglyphic portion of the Rosetta Stone was beginning to be deciphered, allowing for a greater understanding of Egyptian history and mythology. Meanwhile, continued excavations in Egypt ensured that a steady flow of artefacts (including numerous sphinx statues) made their way to Europe, and a dedicated Egyptian Room was opened in the British Museum in 1837.¹⁰

These major developments in archaeology and geology took place almost concurrently during the final years of the eighteenth century, and the early decades of the nineteenth. Hugh Torrens has argued that our current understanding of the two as separate disciplines is a departure from the nineteenth-century conception of these subjects. Scholars of the time, he suggests, regarded both geological and archaeological remnants as the products of worlds which were 'continuous, and equally past'.¹¹ Both geology and archaeology involved excavation; both centred upon the 'reading' of ancient fragments for information about the past, and both raised unsettling questions about the marks left upon the world by past iterations of life, whether these took the form of extinct species or vanished civilisations. My argument in this paper, then, builds upon the premise that the lines we now draw between the two fields – 'the one human, the other scientific', in Torrens' words – were faint or even nonexistent during the nineteenth century.¹²

Archaeological fragments and deep time in nineteenth-century literature

¹⁰ Beverley Rogers, 'Unwrapping the Past: Egyptian Mummies on Show', in *Popular Exhibitions, Science and Showmanship, 1840-1910*, ed. by Joe Kember, John Plunkett, and Jill A. Sullivan (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 199-218 (p. 205).

¹¹ Hugh Torrens, 'Geology and the Natural Sciences: Some Contributions to Archaeology in Britain 1780-1850', in *The Study of the Past in the Victorian Age*, ed. by Vanessa Brand (Oxford: Oxbow, 1998), pp. 35-60 (p. 36).

¹² Torrens, p. 36.

Likely as a result of the close links between archaeology and geology, nineteenth-century literary responses to ancient artefacts (and ancient Egyptian artefacts in particular) frequently invoke the idea of unfathomably vast spans of time. An early and well-known example is Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1817 sonnet 'Ozymandias', composed in response to the news that a colossal granite head of Ramesses II was being transported to London for display in the British Museum. The poem describes the huge and fragmentary remains of the pharaoh's statue, which lie 'half-sunk' in the Egyptian desert.¹³ The speaker does not relate this story first-hand, but claims to have encountered 'a Traveller from an antique land' who told him of the figure.¹⁴ Here, Shelley conflates the spatial and the temporal: the land from which the Traveller hails is itself characterised as *antique*; as if, by voyaging there, one might transcend time as well as distance. Virginia Zimmerman has argued that Victorian literary responses to questions of deep time are often marked by a 'sense of time as spatial', reflecting 'the fact that geology is a science based on digging into the Earth, and that the new time scale was a direct product of those excavations'.¹⁵ Shelley's poem anticipates this approach. The image of the ruined statue seems to reach the poem's reader across a chasmic gap of both space and time, with its own wasted form functioning at once as a symbol of endurance and of decay.

An alternate version of the poem written at the same time by Shelley's friend Horace Smith makes plain what 'Ozymandias' leaves unsaid:

We wonder, – and some Hunter may express
 Wonder like ours, when thro' the wilderness
 Where London stood, holding the Wolf in chace,
 He meets some fragment huge, and stops to guess
 What powerful but unrecorded race
 Once dwelt in that annihilated place.¹⁶

Smith explicitly transfers the threat of civilisational collapse from the ancient Egyptian ruins to his own society. While he stops short of envisaging a posthuman world, his references to 'fragments' and 'annihilation' evoke images

¹³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ozymandias', in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds. Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, Nora Crook, 3 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), III, p. 326, l. 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 1.

¹⁵ Zimmerman, p. 36.

¹⁶ Horace Smith, 'Ozymandias', in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, III, p. 949.

of species extinction and palaeontological remnants, thus linking the poem with contemporary ecological concerns. The possibility that these hubristic lost societies might have been responsible for their own downfall lingers unnervingly between the lines of each sonnet, and Smith's vision of a future visitor stumbling upon English ruins is strikingly anticipatory of Wells' narrative in *The Time Machine*.

The idea of the Egyptian fragment as possessing a kind of trans-temporal sublimity is evident, too, in Thomas De Quincey's essay 'The Affliction of Childhood' (1853), in which the same statuary head of Ramesses is described as '[wearing] upon its lips a smile co-extensive with all time and all space'.¹⁷ In his earlier essay 'System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescope' (1846), De Quincey recalls his encounter with the head in greater detail:

[W]hat it symbolised to me were: 1. The peace which passeth all understanding. 2. The eternity which baffles and compounds all faculty of computation; the eternity which had been, the eternity which was to be.¹⁸

For De Quincey, the statue does not only represent the millennia that have passed since its own creation, but a far vaster span: all the time that has ever passed, or even that ever will pass. It is an object associated explicitly with deep time, rather than history.

In *fin-de-siècle* poetry, the Great Sphinx in particular is often figured as an impassive observer of the ravages of time. The American poet John Spollon's work of 1900, 'The Sphinx', describes the statue as 'The Watcher [...] who never winks', and states that 'Empires rise and Empires fall / The Sphinx's eyes beheld them all'.¹⁹ John Davidson's 1895 poem 'St George's Day' similarly establishes the statue as a constant and unchanging presence in time: 'The sphinx that watches by the Nile / Has seen great empires pass away'.²⁰ Perhaps the most well-known poetic depiction of the watchful sphinx archetype is Oscar Wilde's 'The

¹⁷ Thomas De Quincey, 'The Affliction of Childhood', in *Works of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. by Daniel Sanjiv Roberts, 21 vols (London: Routledge, 2003), XIX, pp. 3-21 (p. 12).

¹⁸ De Quincey, 'System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes', in *Works of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. by Frederick Burwick, 15 vols (London: Routledge, 2003), XV, pp. 393-420 (p. 403).

¹⁹ John Spollon, 'The Sphinx', in *Mary Ann; Or, Advice to a Street-Walker, and Other Poems* (Boston: Jos. M. Wade, 1900), pp. 54, 53.

²⁰ John Davidson, *St George's Day: A Fleet Street Eclogue* (New York: John Lane, 1895), p. 14.

Sphinx' (1894). The poem is a monologue, delivered by a young man to the sphinx statuette that sits in the corner of his room. He offers a decadent account of her past deeds, and speculates that she observed various pivotal events from Egyptian, classical, and biblical mythology. Like other late-nineteenth-century sphinxes, she is portrayed as a being outside of time:

Inviolat and immobile she does not rise she does not stir
For silver moons are naught to her and naught to her the suns that reel.

Red follows grey across the air, the waves of moonlight ebb and flow
But with the Dawn she does not go and in the night-time she is there.

Dawn follows Dawn and Nights grow old and all the while this curious cat
Lies couching on the Chinese mat with eyes of satin rimmed with
gold.²¹

The model sphinx, like her giant counterpart at Giza, is a creature immune and indifferent to the movement of day and night, defined by her static immutability in time. She has outlived civilisations before, and will do so again.

H. G. Wells' future-past: recapitulation, degeneration, and hybridity

In Wells' *The Time Machine*, a sphinx statue again acts as an inscrutable observer of overwhelming temporal spans. In this case, the focus is not upon the past, but the future: in De Quincey's words, 'the eternity which was to be'.²² As we shall see, however, Wells' 'deep future' is constantly haunted by the deep past: posthuman temporalities are revealed to be disturbingly analogous to pre-human temporalities, and future evolutionary and environmental decline mimics primordial indifferenciation. This layering of times finds physical expression in the figure of the White Sphinx.

The Time Traveller voyages forward some 800,000 years, to find the landscape of his day transformed into a bountiful garden, littered with the

²¹ Oscar Wilde, 'The Sphinx', in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde: Poems and Poems in Prose*, ed. by Bobby Fong and Karl Beckson, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), I, ll. 3-8.

²² De Quincey, 'System of the Heavens', p. 403.

decaying monuments of an earlier civilisation. The first of these structures to be encountered by the Time Traveller has a familiar appearance:

It was very large, for a silver birch-tree touched its shoulder. It was of white marble, in shape something like a winged sphinx, but the wings, instead of being carried vertically at the sides, were spread so that it seemed to hover. The pedestal, it appeared to me, was of bronze, and was thick with verdigris. It chanced that the face was towards me; the sightless eyes seemed to watch me; there was the faint shadow of a smile on the lips. It was greatly weather-worn, and that imparted an unpleasant suggestion of disease.²³

The White Sphinx stares inscrutably out over a world inhabited by the descendants of humanity, which has split into two distinct strands: the beautiful but dissolute Eloi, who have lost all intellectual acuity, and the intelligent but monstrous Morlocks, who inhabit underground industrial structures, and feed upon the Eloi by night. The Eloi are all that is left of a feckless, pleasure-loving upper class, while the abhuman Morlocks represent the remnants of an abused proletariat that gradually evolved into a chthonic species as a result of increasingly inhumane living and working conditions. These divergent evolutionary paths are the direct result of human impact upon the environment: what the Time Traveller refers to as ‘the subjugation of Nature’ through advanced technology (p. 40). In shaping the upper-world into a place of ‘perfect comfort and security’ (p. 42), free from illness or hunger, the progenitors of the Eloi removed all evolutionary pressures from themselves, leading gradually to their own mental decay. Meanwhile, subterranean industrialisation created the Morlocks. ‘Humanity had been strong, energetic, and intelligent,’ the Time Traveller writes, ‘and had used all its abundant vitality to alter the conditions under which it lived. And now came the reaction of the altered conditions’ (p. 42). Aaron Rosenberg rightly observes that the text may be regarded as ‘anticipatory of the global crises now framed by the Anthropocene’.²⁴ Wells’ vision of a world in which humanity has brought about its own downfall by unintentionally triggering planetary-scale forces (in this case, the blind

²³ H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, in *The Works of H. G. Wells*, Atlantic Edn, 28 vols (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1924), I, pp. 1-118 (p. 27). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

²⁴ Aaron Rosenberg, ‘Romancing the Anthropocene: H. G. Wells and the Genre of the Future’, *Novel*, 51 (2018), 79-100 (94).

indifference of evolutionary change) in its search for greater technological power is strikingly prescient. Far from demonstrating the power of humanity to mould its environment, this debased future does quite the opposite, emphasising our ultimate powerlessness to predict or shape environmental outcomes.

So what can the White Sphinx tell us about this ‘catastrophe narrative’?²⁵ A colossal and weather-worn relic, it immediately evokes the Great Sphinx of Giza (an impression heightened by the fact that the novel’s original cover image depicts a sphinx wearing an Egyptian headdress). However, Wells specifies that his sphinx is winged, an attribute particular to the Greek offshoot of the sphinx mythos. Like many *fin-de-siècle* sphinxes, it seems Wells’ sphinx combines Greek and Egyptian features. The Greek sphinx is of course most famous for its riddling encounter with Oedipus at Thebes. Numerous critics have noted that Wells’ sphinx, too, appears to offer a riddle which can be answered with the same response as that given by Oedipus: ‘Man’. Gazing at the statue soon after his arrival in the future, the Time Traveller wonders what might have happened to humanity in the intervening years:

I looked up again at the crouching white shape, and the full temerity of my voyage came suddenly upon me. What might appear when that hazy curtain was altogether withdrawn? What might not have happened to men? [...] What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful? I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness – a foul creature to be incontinently slain. (pp. 27-8)

Of course, humanity *has* grown ‘inhuman’ in the millennia since the Time Traveller set out upon his voyage, although not in quite the way he imagines. While the Eloi are superficially attractive, both they and the Morlocks are ultimately presented as degenerate, and it is the Time Traveller who comes to regard these inhabitants of the future earth as something akin to ‘animals’, rather than the other way around. The White Sphinx, whose appearance immediately prompts the Time Traveller to question the possible ramifications of human evolution, physically contains within itself the answer to the Time Traveller’s question (‘What has become of humanity?’), since it is later established that the

²⁵ MacDuffie, p. 557.

base of the statue serves as an entrance to the underworld community of the Morlocks. The riddle of the original Theban sphinx – most often transcribed as ‘What has four legs in the morning, two at mid-day, and three in the evening?’ – deals with questions of human development and change within time.²⁶ The riddle implicitly posed by Wells’ sphinx replaces ontogeny with phylogeny, examining not a single human life, but the broader arc of human evolution as a whole.

To regard the White Sphinx as a version of the Greek riddler is to suggest that it is in possession of an essential truth that its questioner must attempt to ascertain. We have already seen that this is true, in the sense that the Morlocks dwell beneath the statue. I will argue, however, that the truth held and embodied by Wells’ sphinx goes beyond this. Stephen Jay Gould writes in his history of geology *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle* that the concept of deep time ‘is so alien that we can really only comprehend it through metaphor’.²⁷ The White Sphinx of *The Time Machine* functions as the metaphor by which its reader might hope to approach, Oedipus-like, the vast and luring question of deep time.

Wells’ sphinx mediates between deep time and what Smail refers to as ‘deep history’. Deep history is based upon a rejection of the traditional understanding of history as having begun with the genesis of the written word. Instead, ‘deep historians’ locate the birth of history at the point of the evolutionary development of modern humans. In other words, deep history includes within its remit the portion of deep time inhabited by humanity. Deep history was not yet a named concept in the late nineteenth century; in fact, Smail argues that historians of the time ‘recoiled’ from the idea, choosing to relegate pre-literate, human-inhabited time to the foggy designation of ‘prehistory’.²⁸ However, Aaron Worth has argued that an anxious awareness of the implications of deep time for our understanding of history is nonetheless evident in nineteenth-century literature.²⁹

For Worth, the significance of deep history for Victorian writers lies in its blending of ‘the conceptual spaces of historiography and deep (evolutionary or palaeontological) time, in a move whose concomitants include the imaginative transference of such conceptual elements as the idea of a continuity between

²⁶ Eleanor Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 163.

²⁷ Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Deep Time* (London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 3.

²⁸ Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (London: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 1-2.

²⁹ Aaron Worth, ‘Arthur Machen and the Horrors of Deep History’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 40 (2012), 215-27, p. 217.

nature and culture'.³⁰ Worth's essay focuses upon the fiction of Arthur Machen, but parts of his argument may be brought to bear upon *The Time Machine*, whose inclusion of literal time travel adds an interesting dynamic to questions of deep history. While Wells' text deals with the future rather than the past, I would argue that the society visited by the Time Traveller – as a distant temporal 'location', inhabited by hominins – can be included under the umbrella of deep history, particularly since Wells' vision of the future is so clearly influenced by ideas of the past.

Worth's mention of the elision of nature and culture is particularly relevant here. He writes that Machen 'imaginatively [attributes] an impossible antiquity to symbolic forms' such as the faun, thus suggesting an unsettling melding of 'the cultural and the biological' by conceptualising a mythological product of human culture as a naturally occurring, pre-human entity.³¹ Rather than being projected impossibly into the past, Wells' sphinx occupies a distant future; yet the implications of its presence there are equally disturbing, and similarly serve to blur the lines between organic and human-made. The White Sphinx is, we must assume, the product of an earlier human culture: one that thrived before the evolutionary schism between Eloi and Morlocks developed. The derelict state in which the Time Traveller finds the statue is visual evidence of the depth of time that has passed between its creation and the year 802,701. The fact that the figure is that of a sphinx, a shape recognisable from antiquity, suggests, in Patrick Parrinder's words, 'a grotesque repetition implying that what is to come is (like the Sphinx's famous riddle, to which the answer is "a man") no more and no less than we already know'.³² Rather than ascending to new heights, the supposedly advanced future society that produced the White Sphinx circled back upon the iconography of the ancient past – and, like the empires of antiquity, ultimately fell.

This idea of recapitulation is doubly significant to the figure of the sphinx. Not only does its presence suggest a regression to the belief systems of earlier societies, but its physical form – part human, part animal – echoes the evolutionary turn taken by the inhabitants of the future earth. While the Eloi remain at least superficially human in appearance, the Morlocks are consistently described as bestial. Glimpsing one of the creatures' luminous eyes in the

³⁰ Worth, p. 219.

³¹ Worth, p. 217.

³² Patrick Parrinder, *Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction, and Prophecy* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 16.

darkness, the Time Traveller admits to feeling ‘the old instinctive dread of wild beasts’ (p. 59). His first proper look at a Morlock leads him to liken it initially to ‘a queer little ape’ (p. 59), and then to ‘a human spider’ (p. 60). These references serve at once to emphasise the creature’s proximity to, and divergence from, humanity. One of Wells’ first references to the sphinx, meanwhile, describes it as a ‘crouching white shape’ (p. 27), a phrase echoed in the numerous allusions to the pallor of the Morlocks, and their stooping, ape-like movements. As a form hovering unsettlingly between human and beast, the White Sphinx anticipates the future humanity’s descent into animality.

Moreover, since evolutionary science denies human specificity, arguing instead that our species developed from animal ancestors, the sphinx’s human-animal form also suggests humanity’s prehistoric origins. T. H. Huxley reached first for the image of mythical hybrids when describing our proto-human forebears, writing in 1863 that,

though the quaint forms of Centaurs and Satyrs have an existence only in the realms of art, creatures approaching man more nearly than they in essential structure, and yet as thoroughly brutal as the goat's or horse's half of the mythical compound, are now not only known, but notorious.³³

The White Sphinx therefore implies both the deep past and the deep future of human evolution, with its presence suggesting an unsettling temporal recapitulation. As both a cultural artefact, and a transitional form linked with evolutionary time, Wells’ sphinx is therefore connected with both deep history and deep time. That it is a human-made object only ties it more closely to the inhabitants of the future earth, who are themselves ‘human-made’, in that they are the evolutionary outcome of anthropogenic environmental changes. Thus the human-inhuman sphinx exists at the heart of the novel’s ecological concerns: the point at which human and planetary outcomes collide, and, as Rosenberg writes of the Anthropocene, ‘inhuman scales start to look profoundly human after all’.³⁴

The idea of deep future as recapitulating deep past was not of Wells’ own invention. As noted earlier in this article, Charles Lyell had famously suggested that coming epochs would see the return of earlier climatic conditions,

³³ Thomas Henry Huxley, *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), p. 1.

³⁴ Rosenberg, p. 80.

accompanied by flora and fauna akin to those of the prehistoric past. In an 1830 letter to Gideon Mantell, he writes that '[a]ll these [climatic] changes are to happen again, and Iguanodons and their congeners must as assuredly live again in the latitude of Cuckfield as they have done so'.³⁵ Zimmerman observes that, while Lyell is often regarded as having had a cyclical interpretation of time, 'reading time as purely cyclic reduces time's complexity, and Lyell also embraced the linear. [...] In his view, progress *and* decay are the Earth's texts' (emphasis mine).³⁶ Wells' approach to time is similarly complex. While the evolutionary changes seen in his vision of the deep future recall and recapitulate the deep past, his future world appears simultaneously to be moving linearly towards a set end point of complete indifferenciation and destruction. When, having eventually regained his machine, the Time Traveller voyages even further into the future, he finds the earth barren and cold, and devoid of any being even distantly resembling humanity. Instead, he encounters 'a thing like a huge white butterfly', which emits a 'dismal' screaming sound as it flees from 'a monstrous crab-like creature' with 'vast ungainly claws' and a mouth 'all alive with appetite' (pp.106-7). He has now arrived in a fully posthuman world. Yet this predator-prey dynamic is familiar from the earlier section of the novel, and, while the Time Traveller himself never explicitly suggests as much, it seems likely that the frail and defenceless butterfly-creatures are all that remain of the Eloi, while the vicious crab-monsters represent a further deterioration of the Morlocks. Humanity, it appears, has continued down the degenerate path it unknowingly set for itself in its attempt to 'triumph [...] over Nature' (p. 39).

Travelling still further ahead, he finds that even this level of recognisability has been lost: all that remains is a sterile sea, and one living creature: 'a round thing, the size of a football perhaps [...] tentacles trailed down from it; [...] and it was hopping fitfully about' (p. 110). Sickened by this image of utter degeneration, he boards his machine once more, and returns to the nineteenth century. Alex Eisenstein suggests that this 'Last Creature' may be read as a final and ultimate degeneration of humanity: '[A] highly specialised and atrophied edition of genus *Homo*. Note particularly the size of the creature; it is about 'the size of a football' – which is to say, about the size of a human head'.³⁷ Eisenstein suggests that the Time Traveller's nauseated response to this creature stems from

³⁵ Charles Lyell, Letter to Gideon Mantell, February 20th, 1830, in *Life and Letters of C. Lyell*, ed. by K. Lyell, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1881), I, p. 262.

³⁶ Zimmerman, p. 38.

³⁷ Alex Eisenstein, "'The Time Machine' and the End of Man", *Science Fiction Studies*, 3 (1976), 161-5 (163).

his subconscious recognition of ‘what man has become’.³⁸ There is no sense, here, of an ongoing cycle in which humanity will someday rise again to greatness – only of a gradual waning into shapelessness and extinction. Yet this grim vision of future life also inevitably recalls the earliest stages of evolutionary development: the amorphous, tentacled creature which we presume to be the last vestige of humanity might just as easily be taken for a sea creature from millions of years in the past. The evolutionary wheel seems, at its stopping-point, to have come almost full circle, ending with a primitive life-form described by W. Warren Wagar as ‘nothing more than a glorified horseshoe crab’.³⁹ Thus the future presided over by the White Sphinx may be read both as one stage on a linear journey towards the annihilation of life on Earth, and as part of an uncanny cyclical return to the deep past. The sphinx itself – both human and bestial, able simultaneously to embody conflicting geological and archaeological timescales – is well-placed to represent Wells’ complex vision of planetary time, and of our relationship with it.

The riddle with no answer

The Time Traveller imagines breaking down the doors of the White Sphinx, and entering the statue in ‘a blaze of light’ to reclaim his machine. Such a scene would be the fulfilment of his role as Oedipus-figure: what Willis Goth Regier describes as ‘the overthrow of enigma by thought, of nature by man, of mystery by clarity’.⁴⁰ Yet Eleanor Cook observes that the Oedipus myth does not end in certainty or illumination, but in ‘darkness and blinding’: upon discovering the truth of his parentage, Oedipus stabs out his own eyes, and lives out the rest of his life sightless and in exile.⁴¹

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835), Hegel writes of the Theban encounter as an example of human mastery over enigma: ‘Oedipus found the simple answer: a man, and he tumbled the Sphinx from the rock.’⁴² In this reading of the myth, Oedipus’ response is characterised as an objective truth, and sphinx and riddle

³⁸ Eisenstein, p. 163.

³⁹ W. Warren Wagar, *H. G. Wells: Traversing Time* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), p. 51.

⁴⁰ Willis Goth Regier, *The Book of the Sphinx* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 5.

⁴¹ Cook, p. 70.

⁴² G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. by T. M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), I, p. 361.

both are dismissed as an almost comically feeble obstacle to human ingenuity. But Hegel's view did not go unchallenged. The nineteenth century saw an increasing tendency for writers to recast the Oedipus myth as an example of the failure of human reason, rather than its triumph, and to depict the sphinx as a creature of essential and irresolvable enigma. Writing in 1850, De Quincey attacked the Hegelian assumption that Oedipus' answer of 'a man' had conclusively solved the riddle posed by the sphinx. In his essay 'The Sphinx's Riddle', De Quincey argues that, while Oedipus' response is *a* solution to the riddle, 'it is not *the* solution' (emphasis mine), since '[a]ll great prophecies, all great mysteries, are likely to involve double, triple, or even quadruple interpretations — each rising in dignity, each cryptically involving another'.⁴³ Instead, he writes, 'the full and final answer to the Sphinx's riddle lay in the word Œdipus. Œdipus himself it was that fulfilled the conditions of the enigma (p. 20)'. The true answer to the riddle, De Quincey suggests, lies in the figure of Oedipus – who was, as an injured infant, uniquely vulnerable in his four-legged crawling; who then stood on his own two feet as, 'trusting exclusively to his natural powers as a man', he rose to power in Thebes (p. 20). Finally, blinded and in exile, he leaned upon his daughter Antigone, using her as the 'third leg' or staff alluded to as the final age of man in the riddle. 'In this way', De Quincey argues, 'we obtain a solution of the Sphinx's riddle more commensurate and symmetrical with the other features of the story', which are all marked by an air of mystery (p. 20).

Thus Oedipus, who believed he had out-reasoned the sphinx, is shown to have been blind to a greater truth, long before he put out his eyes. De Quincey suggests that the sphinx herself may have been unaware of the implications of her riddle, writing that this second reading was '*possibly* unknown to the sphinx, and *certainly* unknown to Oedipus' (p. 22). Yet, despite this speculation, De Quincey retains a sense of her fundamental enigma: 'The Sphinx herself is a mystery. Whence came her monstrous nature, that so often renewed its remembrance amongst men of distant lands, in Egyptian or Ethiopian marble? Whence came her wrath against Thebes?' (p. 20). Whether or not the sphinx comprehended the full answer to her own riddle, she is a being 'clothed with the grandeur of mystery' (p. 20).

The influential nineteenth-century occultist Helena Blavatsky takes a similar approach to the Oedipus myth in her 1888 work *The Secret Doctrine*: 'If

⁴³ De Quincey, 'The Sphinx's Riddle', in *Works of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. by Edmund Baxter, 21 vols (London: Routledge, 2001) XVII, pp. 14-22 (p. 19). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

the Sphinx threw herself into the sea and perished, it is not because Oedipus *had* unriddled the secret of the ages, but because, by anthropomorphizing the ever-spiritual and the subjective, he had dishonored the great truth forever'.⁴⁴ The sphinx did not die because Oedipus had successfully decoded her riddle, but because, in his attempt to force the 'great truth' into the shape of a man, he debased that which ought to remain unknowable and inexpressible.

I will examine one further nineteenth-century reception of the sphinx's riddle before returning to *The Time Machine*. In his essay 'Enigmatic Intertexts: Decadence, De Quincey, and the Sphinx', Alex Murray highlights a fascinating but now little-known Victorian text: *Riddles of the Sphinx: A Study in the Philosophy of Evolution*, an 1891 work by Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller. *Riddles of the Sphinx* purports to '[accept] without reserve the data of modern science, and [derive] from them a philosophical cosmology'.⁴⁵ At its heart is the symbol of the sphinx, which, for Schiller, can be found 'seated in the soul of each man', asking the answer to the fundamental questions '[w]hat is man or what is life?' – both queries that are central to *The Time Machine*.⁴⁶ Schiller's work culminates with an imagined encounter between philosopher and sphinx:

And when he finds the Sphinx, enthroned amid the desert sands far from the pleasant paths of life, he cannot read the ambiguous smile that plays around her face. It may be much that she is not grimly unresponsive to his plea, but he cannot tell whether he have answered her aright, whether her smile betoken the approval and acknowledgement of a goddess to be won by toil and abstinence, or the mocking irony of a demon whom no thought can fathom and no sacrifice appease. And even though he abide to sit at the feet of the Sphinx, if so be that his steadfast gaze may read the signs of her countenance in the light of long experience; yet anon will the wild storms of fortune tear him away, and the light of life fade out, the rushing pinions of Time sweep him along into darkness, and the bitter waters of Death engulf the questioner. For life is too fragmentary and experience too chequered wholly to dissipate a dread that springs from the heart rather than from the reason, and

⁴⁴ Helena Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*, third edn, two vols (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893), II, p. 543.

⁴⁵ F. C. S. Schiller, Preface, *Riddles of the Sphinx* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), p. vii.

⁴⁶ Schiller, pp. 8, 9.

shrinks too vehemently from the cruelties of the world's ways to be consoled by the subtleties of a metaphysical demonstration.⁴⁷

Marked by anxieties surrounding human (in)significance in time, this evocative passage is reminiscent of the Time Traveller's encounters with the White Sphinx, who, upon the Traveller's first arrival in the future, 'seemed to watch me all the while with a smile at my astonishment' (p. 32). Any attempt to answer the riddle of the sphinx must necessarily be in vain; no matter how we devote ourselves to the essential questions of existence, their answers will ultimately remain inaccessible to us. In Murray's words, this excerpt suggests that 'there is no form of philosophical reflection that could wholly combat the experience of uncertainty and profound sense of finitude that characterizes a post-Darwinian world'.⁴⁸ Murray identifies the birth of evolutionary theory as the driving factor in this sense of *fin-de-siècle* dread. Certainly this is true of *The Time Machine*, in which the abyssal spaces of geological/evolutionary time provoke fear and revulsion in equal measure. It seems likely that Wells would have been familiar with Schiller's text. He was fascinated by evolutionary science, and his own essay on evolutionary degeneration, 'Zoological Retrogression', appeared the same year as *Riddles of the Sphinx*; in it, he argues that there can be 'no guarantee in scientific knowledge of man's permanence or permanent ascendancy'.⁴⁹ Indeed, the Time Traveller's observation that 'Man as I knew him [...] had been swept out of existence' (p. 79) might be taken as a conscious echo of the passage quoted above. Planetary time, in Schiller's text as much as in Wells', is chasmic, and disturbingly indifferent to human desires and fears.

Like the unfulfilled questioners of De Quincey, Blavatsky, and Schiller's prose, Wells' Time Traveller ultimately fails to unravel the enigma of the White Sphinx – and, by extension, the enigma of deep time. Having prepared to fight his way into the sphinx to retrieve his machine, he finds instead that the doors to the base of the statue are already open: 'Within was a small apartment, and on a raised place in the corner of this was the Time Machine. [...] So here, after all my elaborate preparations for the siege of the White Sphinx, was a meek surrender' (p. 102). Superficially, the Time Traveller has succeeded in solving the riddle

⁴⁷ Schiller, p. 436.

⁴⁸ Alex Murray, 'Enigmatic Intertexts: Decadence, De Quincey, and the Sphinx', in *Decadent Romanticism*, ed. by Kostas Boyiopoulos and Mark Sandy (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 89-101 (p. 100).

⁴⁹ H. G. Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 271 (1891), 246-253 (253).

implicitly offered by the silent sphinx. He has deduced that both Eloi and Morlocks represent the debased future of the human race, and the sphinx has opened to allow him entry. But the Time Traveller does not enter, as he imagined, bearing ‘a blaze of light’ which will defeat the Morlocks (p. 82). Instead, he finds that his matches – which Bradley W. Buchanan identifies as representing ‘[the] idea of a human nature based on mental achievement’ – will not ignite.⁵⁰ He is left in the dark, scrabbling against the hungry advances of the Morlocks. Fleeing into two increasingly desolate futures, he finds only ecological collapse, and greater obscurity; the last thing he sees before returning to the nineteenth century is, in fact, an eclipse. Thus the Time Traveller’s narrative ends, like that of *Oedipus Rex*, with a blinding: as darkness sweeps over the face of the dying earth, like the final falling of a great theatre curtain.

Conclusion

In the frame narrative that closes the novel, the unnamed narrator reports that, the day after hearing the Time Traveller’s story, he visited him again, finding him about to embark upon his second voyage. Catching a glimpse of the Time Traveller’s departure – ‘a ghostly, indistinct figure sitting in a whirling mass of black and brass’ – the narrator determined to wait for his return (p. 116). But, we are told, three years have since passed, and, ‘as everybody knows now’, the Time Traveller has not yet reappeared (p. 117). The epilogue is composed of the narrator’s speculations as to where (or rather *when*) the Time Traveller might be:

It may be that he swept back into the past, and fell among the blood-drinking, hairy savages of the Age of Unpolished Stone; into the abysses of the Cretaceous Sea; or among the grotesque saurians, the huge reptilian brutes of the Jurassic times. He may even now — if I may use the phrase — be wandering on some plesiosaurus-haunted Oolitic coral reef, or beside the lonely saline lakes of the Triassic Age. (p. 117)

Once again, prehistory and futurity are shown to be intimately connected. The violence of the ‘blood-drinking’ Stone Age humans mirrors the Morlocks’

⁵⁰ Bradley W. Buchanan, Introduction, *Oedipus Against Freud: Myth and the End(s) of Humanism in Twentieth Century British Literature* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 10.

cannibalism. Deep past, like deep future, provokes revulsion: dinosaurs are ‘grotesque brutes’ and prehistoric humans ‘hairy savages’. The narrator finds comfort only in the possibility that the Time Traveller might instead have gone ‘forward, into one of the nearer ages, in which men are still men, but with the riddles of our own time answered and its wearisome problems solved’ (p. 117). In travelling to a nearer future, the narrator hopes that his friend might have arrived at ‘the manhood of the race’ (p. 117): an age in which the fundamental enigmas of human existence – ‘what is man or what is life?’, to return to Schiller’s sphinx-question, might finally have been resolved. This seems a rather inadequate solace, given what the Time Traveller has revealed about humanity’s ultimate destiny. It is also the only point in the novel at which the word ‘riddle’ is actually used, and it seems a deliberate reference to the Oedipus mythos: a last nod to the White Sphinx whose watchful presence overshadows the narrative.

Even before his voyages, the Time Traveller was apparently less optimistic than the narrator about the future of humanity, correctly predicting that overreaching ambition would bring about the downfall of the species:

He, I know – for the question had been discussed among us long before the Time Machine was made – thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilisation only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end. (p. 117)

The narrator rejects this idea, favouring instead a stolid pragmatism: ‘If that is so, then it remains for us to live as if though were not so’ (p. 117). MacDuffie highlights this comment, linking it with current ‘soft denial’ of climate change: the ability to accept that climate change is real, and really happening, and simultaneously to go about one’s life as if it were not.⁵¹ The narrator chooses to blind himself to the uncomfortable truth of humanity’s future, concluding that ‘to me the future is still black and blank: a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places by the memory of his story’ (p. 117). Again, deep time is figured as abyssal, and again, human (in)comprehension of it is marked by imagery of darkness and blindness. The few spots of illumination created by the Time Traveller’s story cannot compensate for the fact that the deep future is a space of human ignorance.

We have seen that the only way to satisfactorily conceptualise deep time is through metaphor. As Gould writes, ‘[a]n abstract, intellectual understanding of

⁵¹ MacDuffie, p. 556.

deep time comes easily enough [...]. Getting it into the gut is another matter'.⁵² Wells' White Sphinx serves as a super-saturated embodiment of deep time: a physical monument onto which vastly different timescales may be simultaneously projected. Its presence links deep past and deep future; time occupied by humans, and time in which humanity has long since destroyed itself. Through their association with the sphinx, a recognisable man-made artefact, these troubling temporal and environmental questions are made tangible, and therefore approachable.

Yet the sphinx at the *fin de siècle* was associated as much with mysterious silence as with elucidation, with Blavatsky writing in 1877 that the creature 'has become a greater riddle in her speechlessness than was the enigma propounded to Œdipus'.⁵³ Wells' sphinx remains silent; it neither offers an explanation for the mystery it itself represents, nor confirms the speculations of its interrogator. To engage with it is at once to perceive the possibility of an answer to the fundamental questions of planetary time and our place within it, and to recognise that such a thing is ultimately unattainable. While we might sit at the feet of the sphinx, we cannot hope to read her.

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⁵² Gould, *Time's Arrow*, p. 3.

⁵³ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 6th edn, 2 vols (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1892), I, p. 515.

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The Polluted Textures of J.M.W. Turner's Late Works

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Abstract

This article considers the ways in which J.M.W. Turner's engagement with the material surfaces of his works testifies to the ever-changing experiences of early industrialisation and globalisation. Turner's obtrusive handling of paint was considered excessive by many of his contemporaries; his use of impasto was, especially in his late works, thought to thwart representation itself. The disruptive dimension of his technique has in turn become one of the main entry points for critical evaluations of his work and, for art historians, a crucial marker of his modernity. Shared by some art historical studies concentrating on this question is the idea that Turner's treatment of matter is regarded as avant-garde because it testifies to a consciousness of form. Contrary to this view, this paper aims to show that an alternative conceptualisation of texture as a semiotically unstable category might contribute to reprocessing Turner's attention to atmospheres. It will be my contention that through the expressivity of the painterly medium, Turner introduces a new relation to observed matter such as polluted air, both setting him apart from his contemporaries, and enabling him to illustrate subjects that were outside of traditional representations.

The railways have furnished Turner with a new field for the exhibition of his eccentric style.¹

In 2019, the contemporary artist and Royal Academician Emma Stibbon produced large monochrome drawings and cyanotype photographs of the same Alpine landscapes that Turner and Ruskin had represented in the first part of the nineteenth century. When juxtaposed to Ruskin's daguerreotypes and etchings made after Turner, Stibbon's pictures of the Montenvers esplanade, where the Mer de Glace bends towards Chamonix at the bottom of the Mont Blanc, show the retreat of the glacier and the ravage of climate change.² Now twelve kilometres long, the Mer de glace is three kilometres shorter than when Turner represented it in 1802. Such images reveal how paradigms of ecological thinking productively complicate our understanding of Turner's work. His pictures can be read as celebrations of natural environments, captured in paint as they were

¹ [Anon.], *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, 12 May 1844.

² See *Ruskin, Turner & the Storm Cloud*, ed. by Suzanne Fagence Cooper and Richard Jones (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2019).

beginning to be irrevocably altered by the effects of human activities at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.

The first half of the nineteenth century generally corresponds to the common starting point of what is called the Anthropocene, our current geological age marked by the human impact on the biosphere and atmosphere. While the very term Anthropocene has been criticised, judged all-encompassing, and replaced by alternative concepts such as the Capitalocene,³ or given revalued starting points,⁴ it, however, describes a change of paradigm that was part of Turner's life. In fact, whether it constitutes the beginning or, perhaps rather, a further stage in the Anthropocene, the Victorian period marks the emergence of a carbonised economy where the burning of fossil fuels released bigger quantities of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This was especially the case in the British industrial cities where Turner lived and travelled. What is remarkable is that incidentally, it is also at that time, and in the same country, that landscape painting was given new importance as a genre.

In many of his works Turner represents vile air belching out of factories, forges, steam-ships, or trains. To represent the variety of nature and its substances the artist experimented with media facture and textures of paint. In this article I aim to look at how his engagement with matter, especially in his experimental handling, testifies to the ever-changing experiences of early industrialisation. I will try to demonstrate that through the expressivity of the painterly medium, Turner introduced a new relation to a form of matter that had not yet been represented, namely air pollution. By focusing on Turner's depiction of the effects of greenhouse-gas pollution on atmospheres, I therefore aim to complicate the reading of Turner's works, and especially of his late works, by going back to the historical circumstances in which they were shaped. His obtrusive handling was considered excessive by many of his contemporaries; his use of impasto, mark-making, and broad brushstrokes was sometimes thought to, especially in his works from 1835, thwart representation itself. From this point of view, it is often assumed that in the later part of his career, that is from his sixtieth birthday

³ See Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015); or Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam-Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2015).

⁴ Heather Davis and Zoë Todd, for example, root the beginning of the Anthropocene in modern times, that is in the early seventeenth century and the European Conquest which was accompanied by operations of deforestation and extraction. Heather Davis and Zoë Todd, 'On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16.4 (2017), pp. 761–80.

to his last exhibited works, Turner withdrew from social life, creating works that were increasingly at odds with the culture in which they were produced.

The disruptive dimension of his technique and formal developments of his works have in turn become one of the main entry points for critical evaluations of his art and a crucial marker of his modernity. Shared by some art historical studies concentrating on this question is the idea that Turner's treatment of matter is regarded as avant-garde because it testifies to a consciousness of form. Lawrence Gowing's exhibition *Turner: Imagination and Reality* at MoMa in 1966 famously proposed a proto-abstract reading of Turner's late works.⁵ While this analysis had an enduring impact on readings of Turner's works, most of the people who work on Turner today disagree with its teleology. John Barrell, in his *Dark Side of the Landscape* (1980) argued that landscape paintings such as Turner's emerged from social and economic power relations.⁶ More recently, Sam Smiles, in his book *The Late Works of J.M.W. Turner* (2020) showed how, from 1835 until his death, Turner in fact consolidated many of his principles and mostly did not step back or retreat from the world and its concerns.⁷ It could however be argued that the anachronic vision of the artist through modernist readings have had the result of, perhaps for a time, preventing scholars from associating contemporary ecological concerns with Turner's experiments.

Thus, this paper aims to show that an alternative conceptualisation of texture as a semiotically unstable sign, in Saussure's sense, might contribute to reprocessing Turner's attention to materials and atmospheres. Indeed, it will be the contention of this article that through experiments with the painterly medium Turner displayed original matter, both setting him apart from his contemporaries and enabling him to illustrate excesses outside of traditional representations. Air pollution then presented an aperture for Turner to not only represent the natural but frame human induced environmental effects as a part of an aesthetic vista.

⁵ Lawrence Gowing, *Turner: Imagination and Reality* (New York, NY: Doubleday Garden City, 1966).

⁶ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). See also: *Late Turner: Painting Set Free*, ed. by David Blayney Brown, Amy Concannon, and Sam Smiles (London: Tate Publishing, 2014).

⁷ Sam Smiles, *The Late Works of J. M. W. Turner: The Artist and his Critics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020).

Atmospheres

In 2014, scientists at the National Observatory of Athens published a study of old masters' paintings in which they looked for evidence of natural pollution resulting from volcanic eruptions around the globe.⁸ Based on the law of atmospheric physics that describes the effects of aerosols on the different wavelengths of solar light, they studied the ratios of red and green in the sunsets of landscape paintings at the Tate Gallery. Their study demonstrated that post-eruption years, when the sky was supposedly dirtier, for example after the 1815 Tambora eruption in Indonesia, the 1831 Babuyan one in the Philippines, or Cosiguina in Nicaragua in 1835, landscape paintings had redder sunsets. The study analysed a great number of paintings by Turner, 108 paintings out of 124, making him a cornerstone artist of the study. Here art informs science as Turner's paintings tell us about the quality of air in his time. His works testify to, at the same time, pollution resulting from depositions in the stratosphere, that is volcanic pollution, and anthropogenic pollution, resulting from the troposphere and coming from anthropogenic and other biogenic sources. Such a study was echoed in the 2020 Tate exhibition *Turner's Modern World* in which the curators stressed how Turner's atmospheres, and the full-spectrum of his sunsets and cloudscapes, also registered the meteorological effects of greenhouse-gas pollution.⁹

The ecological imagination of what we call 'smog' often starts with Turner. The *porte-manteau* word was coined by Dr. Henry Antoine Des Voeux in 1905 and designates the typical visible air pollution that emerged in the nineteenth century, especially in cities such as London.¹⁰ Also characterised as pea souper, this smoky type of fog pervades many of Turner's artworks. In a watercolour such as *A Paddle-steamer in a Storm* (fig. 1), the smoke belching out of the boat curls in the same way as the brooding clouds as both are shaped by the same wind. The mixture of particles makes for iridescent, kaleidoscopic, or chalky surfaces. Throughout his career the artist expressed a fascination for natural forces such as snow, fire, and water and for how their destructive power competed with man's own industrial atmospheres, charged in ash, smoke, and wasted fuel.

⁸ C. S. Zerefos and others, 'Further evidence of important environmental information content in red-to-green ratios as depicted in paintings by great masters', *Atmos. Chem. Phys.*, 14, (2014) <<https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-14-2987-2014>> [accessed 5 January 2021].

⁹ *Turner's Modern World*, ed. by David Blayney Brown, et al. (London: Tate Publishing, 2020).

¹⁰ 'smog, n.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/182692> [accessed 24 March 2021].

In *The Sky of our Manufacture* (2016), Jesse Oak Taylor writes that ‘smog does not simply emerge at the intersection of nature and culture’, but that ‘it emerges as that intersection’.¹¹ In the iconic *Rain, Steam and Speed* of 1844 a black mass representing a steam engine rushes towards the beholder through showers, flickers, and carbon-filled clouds. On the sides, a rowing boat and distant field are reminiscent of the old world. With his pictures of the Great Western Railway, Turner was the first artist to raise such a modern subject to the rank of academic painting. Starting in the 1820s, steamships also appeared regularly in his works. In these pictures, industrial vaporous atmospherics fuse with natural air currents. What comes up from these works are not just encounters between two worlds but, to paraphrase Taylor, worlds in themselves.

Several studies have concentrated on Turner’s representation of black air as the result of natural forces or industrial processes. William Rodner, in his research on Turner’s steamboats, demonstrated that steam was adequate for an artist who increasingly turned to the dissolution of form.¹² He also argued that it was because it created an opportunity to work with the colour black that steamers appealed to Turner (p. 60). In many instances scholars have categorised Turner’s masses of dark air, that sometimes, especially in his sketches, appear thick white, as atmospheric and *therefore* as formless, or verging towards abstraction. In *Staffa, Fingal’s Cave* of 1832 (fig. 2), the churned basaltic ocean floor grounds infuse the colour of the muddy sea, which in turn echoes the black fumes coming from the ship. The American patron James Lenox, upon having bought the painting, expressed his disappointment in front of the work’s ‘indistinctness’. For a long time, it was said that Turner had defiantly answered his criticism by replying ‘indistinctness is my forte’. This comment on his art was later amended as it was proven that Turner had actually pronounced the phrase ‘indistinctness is my fault’.¹³ The interchange of ‘forte’ for ‘fault’, as a slip, says much about the interpretation of Turner’s painterly style, and especially of how his conception of atmospheric representation was perceived. The original sentence testifies to the fact that Turner desired to represent his landscape as precisely as possible. By

¹¹ Jesse Oak Taylor, *The Sky of our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016), p. 3. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹² William S. Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner: Romantic Painter of the Industrial Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹³ See Adele M. Holcomb, “‘Indistinctness Is My Fault’: A Letter about Turner from C. R. Leslie to James Lenox Author(s): Adele M. Holcomb and C. R. Leslie”, *The Burlington Magazine*, 114.833 (1972).

offering direct observations of nature, he was introducing a new serious and tangible relation to observed matter.

Thus, one could wonder how to tackle the question of atmospheres without univocally essentialising Turner's experimentations with the medium. To do so we can go back to one of his earlier oils on canvas, *London from Greenwich Park* (fig. 3), exhibited in 1809, in which the smoky city centre contrasts with the green and lush foreground in which undisturbed deer graze peacefully. In this view, the resulting atmospheric pollution is exaggerated so that from the beholder's perspective it almost looks like smoke emanating from a burning fire. The fumes also chime with the above clouds and the beam of light descending on the city seems to carry this charged atmosphere. To accompany the watercolour, Turner wrote:

Where burthen'd Thames reflect the crowded sail
Commercial care and busy toil prevail
Whose murky veil, aspiring to the skies
Obscures thy beauty, and thy form denies
Save where thy spires pierce the doubtful air
As gleams of hope amidst a world of care.¹⁴

While it is often difficult to situate Turner's positions and sympathies regarding contemporary concerns, this poem testifies to an awareness of the 'obscuring' effects of industrial fumes and especially of how they modified the very texture of the sky. The atmosphere that is created conveys a shared experience as there is a direct form of mediation between the depicted object and its representation through the organic substances of the pigments.

Turner travelled at length in Great Britain and Europe and always carried a sketchbook along his peregrinations. While most of his works were done or finished indoors, his impressions and annotations of meteorological matter were gathered outside, very much like Constable who wrote down meteorological notes at the back of his oil sketches.¹⁵ Ruskin too collected weather observations, as discussed in his lecture 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century' (1884), where the polluted atmospheres of the industrial era are mentioned more

¹⁴ *The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner*, ed. By Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 69.

¹⁵ On the role of Constable's works in the history of climate, see Nicholas Robbins, 'John Constable, Luke Howard, and the Aesthetics of Climate,' *The Art Bulletin*, 103.2 (2021), 50-76.

specifically. Joyce Townsend reminds us about Turner that ‘[...] some early works on paper show rain spatters that attest to his ability to get the most from an interesting view, whatever the weather’.¹⁶ Turner not only *depicts* the environment in the paintings but *materialises* environments in their substances. Atmospheres are not only represented but conveyed in and through his works. In his literary analysis, Taylor explains that the atmosphere is ‘bound up both in the texture of language and in the material presence of books themselves; it is also a material property, inhering in the air shared by the world, the text, and the critic’ (p. 7). This analysis appears productive in the context of pictorial representations, for Turner’s works carry immersive experiences that materialise these poisonous atmospheres. Literary analysis, in its thrust to think form and content as inseparable, appears particularly apt here. Quoting Eva Horn’s argument that we can think of the air (and of atmosphere) as a medium, Mark A. Cheetham asks how ‘atmospheres’ can at the same time be tangible and metaphorical, ‘both figurative and material, abstract and down-to-earth’.¹⁷ This is also what Bruce Bégout calls ‘ambience’, that is the interlacing of the subject and the object in what constitutes an experience.¹⁸ In the phenomenological entanglement that they generate, one way of thinking about Turner’s atmospheres is to consider what they leave behind, in the form of traces.

What is Left

Writing in December 1872 to George Richmond’s daughter Julia, Samuel Palmer remembered his fourteen-year-old self’s enthralled and lasting reaction to a painting by Turner: ‘The first exhibition I saw, in 1819 is fixed in my memory by the first Turner *The Orange Merchant on the bar* [fig. 4] – and being by nature a lover of smudginess, I have revelled in him from that day to this’.¹⁹ Coming from Palmer, an artist close to William Blake and sharing with him a taste for neat lines and definite forms, the choice of the word ‘smudginess’ is unexpected. Perhaps ironic, the term recalls Turner’s contemporaries’ regular comments on his obtrusive and blatant factures.

¹⁶ Joyce Townsend, *How Turner Painted: Materials and Techniques* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2019), p. 17.

¹⁷ Eva Horn, ‘Air as Medium,’ *Grey Room* 73 (Fall 2018), 6-25, p. 9, quoted by Mark A. Cheetham, “‘Atmospheres’ of Art and Art History’, *Venti Journal* (2020), 51-61, p. 52.

¹⁸ Bruce Bégout, *Le Concept d’ambiance* (Paris: Seuil, 2020).

¹⁹ Quoted in *The Paintings of J. M. W. Turner*, ed. by Butlin and Joll, p. 106.

In an article published in 1990 and entitled ““Splashers”, “Scrawlers” and “Plasterers”: British Landscape and the Language of Criticism, 1800-40”, Smiles looked at how broadly-handled landscapes were attacked by critics, artists, and connoisseurs in the early nineteenth century. In his analysis of the language in which these criticisms were couched, Smiles shows how loose and vigorous brushstrokes were considered ‘all too close to the stuff of nature itself’. In his words: ‘Pictures that offered the spectacle of disordered nature, or at any rate the refusal to order nature, may have prompted disapproval precisely because their ‘provincial’ style may have been felt to question the stability of an ordered world’.²⁰ Different types of extended metaphors appear in criticisms of the time. Comments on Turner’s paintings often took the form of grotesque speculations, in which observers wondered what substances he was combining: ‘eggs’, ‘mustard’, ‘curry’, or ‘spinach’ were some of the terms used to describe his paintings.²¹ If the nomenclature underlines the deprecatory dimension of these comments, what these food metaphors also reveal is the axiology of texture. The ideological entailments hinted at reveal the tensions around the material treatment of surface taking place at the time, recalling that this was a matter of good and bad *taste*. Smiles looks at the vocabulary of construction materials: ‘mortar’, ‘plaster’, ‘whitewash’, or ‘chopped hay’ to show that many contemporaries of Turner were not at ease with the menial quality of such surfaces. We can mention one of the most famous uses of such a reference when Ruskin recorded Turner’s hurt reaction to the criticism that his painting was nothing but a mass of ‘soapsuds and whitewash’: ‘[...] I heard him muttering to himself at intervals, “soapsuds and whitewash!” What would they have? I wonder what they think the sea’s like? I wish they’d been in it’.²² The term ‘whitewash’ is interesting here because it also has to do with visible traces of cleaning, with conspicuous concealment. In the same vein, in Palmer’s comment, the word ‘smudginess’ encapsulates the idea of

²⁰ Sam Smiles, ““Splashers”, “Scrawlers” and “Plasterers”: British Landscape and the Language of Criticism, 1800-1840”, *Turner Studies*, 10.1 (1990), 5-11 (p. 11).

²¹ Typical of this type of gibes, we can quote the *Athenaeum*’s review of *Snow, Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour’s Mouth* of 1842: ‘This gentleman has, on former occasions, chosen to paint with cream, or chocolate, yolk of egg, or currant jelly—here he uses his whole array of kitchen stuff’. Unnamed author, *Athenaeum*, 14 May 1842. Or again, in *John Bull*: ‘MR TURNER, indeed, goes further, for he carries the rivers, and the bridges, and the boats upon the rivers, and the ladies and gentlemen in the boats’. Unnamed author, *John Bull* VII, 27 May 1827, p. 165.

²² John Ruskin, ‘Notes on the Turner Gallery at Marlborough House, 1856’, in *Turner and the Harbours of England*, vol. XIII, published in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1904), p. 161.

trace. *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives a definition of ‘smudge’ for this period as ‘the scum of paint’. ‘Scum’, then has to do with surface: ‘It is more generally, any undesirable surface layer or deposit [...]’.²³ The word is also associated with dirt and residue. What is remarkable is that this painting also has to do with residues in its subject: oranges lost at sea, and fishermen rummaging for them. To declare oneself as a ‘lover of smudginess’ is a strong statement as it underlines a taste for this type of buttery texture that is so symptomatic of Turner’s use of oil, but it also emphasises the idea of something left. Throughout his career Turner continually represents what the sea sweeps along. The French art historian Pierre Wat talks about the fact that there is frequently a sense of irreversible loss in his paintings, which incidentally often bear the preposition ‘after’ in their titles.²⁴

In his book *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (2000), David Trotter dedicates a chapter to *Turner’s Litter* in what he identifies as the ‘middle ground between mess and waste’.²⁵ In many of Turner’s works we are faced with natural debris such as rotten vegetables, sprawled fish, flotsam and jetsam, and remnants of human presence. While these elements generally appear in genre paintings, Trotter demonstrates that the difference in Turner’s paintings is that ‘rummages’ are not just sporadic apparitions but that they are constitutive of his aesthetics. While Trotter’s study powerfully demonstrates the link between Turner’s ‘dusty textures’ and his ‘Covent Garden cabbage-stalks’, he does not mention the more elusive and ethereal form of dirt that is atmospheric pollution, in itself another type of waste, for pollution has to do with residues of households and production industries. I therefore want to push forward what is hinted at in Trotter’s study and argue that in Turner’s works these traces are at the same time material evidence of their making but also of what they stand for. The very qualities of air pollution make it less tangible than other forms of detritus. In his works they occupy this in-between semiotic space, between signified and signifier. When commenting upon *Rain Steam and Speed*, a critic of Turner’s time mentioned the two different responses that this work triggered: ‘[...] It is Turner all over, which to one reader means ‘wild rubbish, looking as if he had flung his brush at the canvass [sic] instead of painting it;’ and to another, ‘imaginative composition of the highest

²³ ‘smudge, n.1,’ *OED Online*, <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 16 December 2013].

²⁴ Pierre Wat, *Pérégrinations: paysages entre nature et histoire* (Paris: Hazan, 2017), p. 203.

²⁵ David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 35.

order, and so true that uneducated eyes cannot comprehend its beauties'.²⁶ The materiality of the medium, made visible, is here couched in terms that compare it to waste. By exploring the medium and its different potentialities, Turner's textures appear as both technique and iconography; they are at the same time the object and subject of an embodied relation with the viewer. In this light, his late works shine through for their subjects. Their form and composition can then be perceived as engaging with the transformations of Victorian England.

Here we can put Jacques Derrida's key concept of 'supplement' to use. As the combination of two gestures, one of accumulation and one of substitution, the 'supplement' describes neither a representer nor a presence, a writing nor a speech, and stands for what comes in addition to something 'original' or 'natural'.²⁷ In Turner's paintings the 'supplement' is materialised in the froth of the waves, the smoky atmospheres, the dust-filled air: here one cannot differentiate between signified and signifier because what we see and experience is both. The uncouth or coarse features not only replicate but also interact with the polluted atmospheres of the environment in an intricate way. This reminds us of John Constable, who, as the conservator Sarah Cove has shown, would brighten the white spots of his paintings (what the critics called 'Constable snow') to prevent them from darkening due to the 'sulphurated' atmospheres of London.²⁸ In Turner's works the spots and streaks act as a 'supplement' which exceeds the economy of the artwork. They are present as an excess, which is offered, to take up the philosopher's phrase, 'into the bargain' (*par dessus le marché*).²⁹

Beautiful Excesses

In the absence of tall mountains or erupting volcanoes in Great Britain, Turner would find sublime beauty in what Simon Schama described as the 'industrial sublime', smog and sprays and soot-spewing machines.³⁰ In most of his paintings with steam-powered engines, Turner represents the beauty of air pollution. His

²⁶ Unknown, *The Royal Academy, Age and Argus*, 11 May 1844, p. 11.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967).

²⁸ Sarah Cove, 'The Painting Techniques of Constable's "Six-Footers"', in *Constable: The Great Landscapes*, ed. by Anne Lyles (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), p. 65.

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, '+ R (par-dessus le marché)', in *La vérité en peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), p. 202.

³⁰ Simon Schama quoted in Clare Beavan dir., *The Genius of Turner: Painting the Industrial Revolution (TV Movie 2013)* - IMDb, <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2748048/>>, [accessed 24 mars 2021].

works are at the same time a glorification of what was perceived at the time as the march of progress and a representation of the dirt and residues resulting from it, shown in art for the first time in his works. John Gage has interpreted Turner's representations of trains as testifying to his 'sympathy' for the Industrial Revolution.³¹ Later, Rodner countered this view by writing that Turner was rather 'cautionary' towards the latest technological developments of steam engines.³² In the same vein, one could also quote scholars such as Judy Egerton, with *Turner: The Fighting Temeraire* (1995), or James Hamilton, with *Turner and the Scientists* (1998).³³

Whether or not Turner saw the ravages of human influence on the world is a difficult question, but looking at the history of this consciousness can prove fruitful. Concerns with air quality had been long standing in Turner's time. In 1829, a parliamentary commission was appointed in London to reflect on urban smoke pollution. This may have inspired Turner's *The Thames above Waterloo Bridge*, c.1830–5 (fig. 5). In this work, billowing smoke contaminates the water by a mirror effect as it is reflected on the surface of the Thames. Turner's late works coincide with a moment when the consciousness of the injustices of air pollution was being voiced. Yet cultural histories of air pollution remind us that before the 1840s carbon filled air was generally perceived as beneficial. As Peter Brimblecombe has shown there was a prevalent ambivalence towards atmospheric pollution, which was perceived as a sign of affluence and warmth until the end of the nineteenth century.³⁴ Apprehensiveness towards tainted atmospheres mostly stemmed from the fact that they were seen as carrying the streets' foul smells, the emanations of cramped households, refuse, or drains to cite a few Dickensian examples. On that topic Stephen Mosley writes that '[t]o rid towns and cities of malodorous filth and ordure before it could breed disease and to secure adequate supplies of clean water for drinking and flushing sanitation systems were the sanitary reformers' main priorities, not the abatement of the "smoke nuisance".³⁵ Sulphur dioxide was praised for its deodorising properties,

³¹ John Gage, *Rain, Steam and Speed* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1972), p. 35.

³² Rodner, 'Humanity and Nature in the Steamboat Paintings of J.M.W. Turner', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 18.3 (Autumn 1986), 455-74 (p. 474).

³³ Judy Egerton, *Turner: The Fighting Temeraire* (London: National Gallery Publications, 1995); James Hamilton, *Turner and Scientists* (London: Tate Gallery, 1998).

³⁴ Peter Brimblecombe, *A History of Air Pollution in London since the Medieval Times* ([1987] London: Routledge, 2011), p. 92. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³⁵ Stephen Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 79. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

seen as cleaning the air and killing its germs, ‘[t]hus, sulphurous and sulphuric acids, although considered harmful to people’s health when present in the urban atmosphere in high concentrations, could also be depicted as powerful agents of purification’ (p. 79). There was a clear ambivalence as to the risk-benefits of urban smoke when the first anti-smoke groups appeared in the 1840s. While moves for smoke abatement legislation were made, they were marginal and resulted from the pressure of these small groups (Brimblecombe, p. 100). Efforts were then made to measure pollutants in the air of British cities, so Turner might have been aware of some of these concerns. In 1842 the Committee for the Consumption of Smoke at Leeds and the Manchester Association for the Prevention of Smoke were created. But it was only later, in 1872, that scientist Robert Angus Smith identified coal combustion as the principal cause of the great acidity of Manchester’s rainfall, a discovery that echoed throughout Great Britain.³⁶ Thus, air pollution represented an aesthetic opportunity for artists like Turner. There are multiple examples of his contemporaries commenting on the beauty of London’s polluted air: Charles Lamb referred to London’s ‘beloved smoke’ and Dickens called it ‘London’s ivy’ (p. 85).

While Turner’s politics often appear enigmatic, his most political work can be analysed through the eco-critical lens. Debates about Turner’s aestheticisation of the abject have been strongest around his most famous *Slave Ship*, subtitled *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon coming on*. It was displayed at the Royal Academy in 1840, seven years after the parliamentary abolition of slavery in the majority of the British Colonies, but the same year as the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in June, in London. It was also a time when in the United States abolitionists were fighting a similar battle, eventually leading to the Civil War. In this painting Turner tells the story of the captain of the *Zong*, who, during a journey from Africa to Jamaica in 1781, had ordered 133 slaves to be thrown overboard so that insurance payments could be claimed. A capsizing sail ship in the background gives way to a morbid, visceral foreground: engulfed in the rough sea are chains, cut off limbs, and amorphous globular-eyed fish seemingly nibbling at body parts. The unfolding scene creates a strong sense of destabilisation: not only do we fail at first sight to distinguish what is taking place in those intricate shapes battling in the waves, but also the horizon line merges with the sea. Here, elemental violence is compared to human violence. There is no fixation on nature as an overwhelming force that modernity tames.

³⁶ See Stephen Mosley, “‘A Network of Trust’: Measuring and Monitoring Air Pollution in British Cities, 1912-1960”, *Environment and History*, 15.3 (August 2009), 273-302.

Nature, in its blood-tainted substance, bears the guilt of society's slave trade. The painting is about the rationalising politics of industrialisation, the regime of calculation, quantification of life, and insurance schemes that have pushed the owner to throw slaves over the edge. Turner is doing something specific here: what this painting says is not that nature's violence justifies modernity, but that instead, violence is the result of an industrialisation process. While this painting does not show any air-pollution, its apocalyptic sun and vast array of hues, ranging from golden yellow to blue and rich red, figure the same type of aestheticisation of the abject that we find in Turner's representations of atmospheric pollution. In 2019, incidentally, this painting was chosen as the cover of a book that proposes a counter-narrative to dominant ecological thinking by Malcolm Ferdinand, a French researcher working on political ecology in the Caribbean.³⁷ Indeed, the painting may actually be read as a political critique where Turner shows the violence of industrialisation, yet he does that by painting a beautiful artwork. The bodies of the people who are thrown over are made invisible by the owners, but Turner decides to show what is left of them and this horror.

In a short essay entitled *The Invisible and Inalienable Wind*, and part of a conversation piece on arts and environmental justice, Julia Lum and Gabrielle Moser write that by looking at how wind was quantified, measured, and represented in the nineteenth century, we become aware of the origins of climate change and their colonial entanglement. Lum and Moser refer to Francis Beaufort who, in 1806, created a thirteen-level scale to visualise the effects of wind, which would have an effect on the speed of maritime colonisation, and therefore on global capitalism.³⁸ In Turner's time, coal was associated with wealth and trading interests. The development of steam engines was also what enabled him to extensively travel in Britain and on the continent.

Turner carefully selected what he would depict, yet his choice of representing the different substances of nature was unorthodox. In eighteenth-century aesthetics, and more specifically in Joshua Reynolds' third discourse, the concrete and material in painting was to be subjected to a more general idea, a

³⁷ Malcolm Ferdinand, *Une écologie décoloniale, Penser l'écologie depuis le monde caribéen* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2019).

³⁸ See Julia Lum and Gabriel Moser, 'The Invisible and Inalienable Wind' in Sria Chatterjee dir., 'The Arts, Environmental Justice, and the Ecological Crisis', *British Art Studies*, 18 (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-18/conversation/016>> [accessed 5 January 2021].

higher subject. Turner still agreed with this dictum. David Solkin writes that Turner

(...) followed Reynolds and other academic theorists in believing that the dignity of a fully realized art required a judicious selection from nature's raw materials, and their distillation into a painterly language whose breadth spoke for its author's capacity to abstract more general truths from the superficial appearances of nature'.³⁹

In the latter part of his career, contemporary criticism of Turner's works constantly referred to his excesses of matter, his overuse of pigments and the material accretion of substances in his works. Huysmans would say about Turner's works that they were 'celestial and fluvial celebrations' (*fêtes célestes et fluviales*).⁴⁰ His works empathise texturally with their subjects. They amount to quests for a better understanding of the primary substances of existence. While Turner carefully selected what he depicted, he was nonetheless faced with bafflement. Thus, one could argue that not only was Turner observing the changes happening in his time, but that he was showcasing the stuff that, in its march for progress, the industrial revolution was creating and pushing outside of the realm of the visible.

In his book *L'Exforme*, published in 2017 and translated in English in 2020, the French art historian Nicolas Bourriaud contends that both art and politics were indelibly shaped by the centrifugal force of the Industrial Revolution: social exclusion, on the one hand, and the rejection of certain objects, signs or images, on the other.⁴¹ According to Bourriaud this logic of exclusion which follows the movement of thermodynamics became then the dominant one as social energy produced waste. Here I want to address the flipside of this dynamic, the ways in which materiality, and its politics, came to the fore and informed Turner's works. As in *Slavers*, art that attempted to disrupt more traditional modes of representation from then on generally adopted the reverse movement, that is a centripetal motion bringing to the forefront everything that was excluded.

In a work such as *Snow Storm Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (fig. 6), Turner's vortex brings pure matter to the centre. By changing the rules of

³⁹ David Solkin, *Art in Britain 1660-1815* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 269.

⁴⁰ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Écrits sur l'art*, ed. by J. Picon (Paris: Flammarion, 2008), p. 367.

⁴¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *L'Exforme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2017).

conventional representation, the artist favours an awareness of surface – a sculptural depth rather than a planar one. In this work the representation of three-dimensional space no longer takes place on a two-dimensional surface but on a three-dimensional medium representing the landscape. Not only is there no line of horizon for the viewer to read the picture, but also Turner's sculptural technique of scraping off and paring down, of spots and streaks of impasto, emphasises disruption and favours a swirling of the medium. The chaos of the scene depicted is echoed by the turmoil of matter that draws the viewer into the picture in a hypnotic way. Foam and spume mix with the steam and fumes of the ship. By doing so, Turner figures humans and nature as co-terminous to precisely the extent that the figure as such is absent from the scene. The thickness of the paint leaves only one possibility for the viewer to engage with the work: he has to indulge in its depths. According to Sarah Monks, Turner suggests here what it might be to be beneath: beneath the horizon, water, and paint.⁴² In this sense, the work goes back to the very etymology of the sublime, i.e. '*sub limen*, up to a high threshold'.

Immateriality

About the painting *Regulus* (fig. 7), a commentator once wrote: 'Standing sideways of the canvas, I saw that the sun was a lump of white standing out like the boss on a shield'.⁴³ In this work Turner added white impasto in 1837 on *Varnishing Day*. Here, light that is at the same time visible and blinding, is made three-dimensional. Turner's modern attention to matter has to do with his constant endeavour to represent not only the material, but also the immaterial, i.e. the insubstantial, what is composed of unbounded, intangible matter. It is what Jennifer Roberts calls 'tenuous subjects', that is 'flows and stuffs and unbounded matter of all kinds'.⁴⁴ In such works the very quality of the subject as subject could therefore appear questionable.

Academics have focused on Turner's dialectics of light and darkness, his aesthetics of the visible and un-visible (John Gage, Jonathan Crary, or more

⁴² Sarah Monks, "'Suffer a Sea-Change": Turner, Painting, Drowning', *Tate Research Papers*, 14 (Autumn 2010), p. 10.

⁴³ See Lionel Cust, 'The Portraits of J.M.W. Turner, R.A.', *Magazine of Art*, 18 (1895), 245-51 (p. 248).

⁴⁴ Jennifer Roberts, 'Things: Material Turn, Transnational Turn', *American Art*, 31.2 (2017), 64-9 (p. 67).

recently Matthew Beaumont in *British Papers*),⁴⁵ but there are fewer studies on his representation of the material and immaterial. Eco-critical thinking invites us to conceptualise and make present what has for a long time been a source of embarrassment for Turner's critics. In his works Turner makes tangible not only the infra visible, but also the immaterial, the retreating light scattered by reflective particles in the atmosphere. While Reynolds and Gainsborough painted a form of mediated materiality, the materiality of objects, such as fabric and leaves, the generation that followed, and which included Turner (but also Constable), decided to depict the materiality of elements, that is, the materiality of less obviously tangible matter such water, light, or polluted air.

In his February 4, 1884 lecture at the London Institution, John Ruskin put words on the uncanny meteorological phenomenon he called 'the storm-cloud', or 'plague cloud'.⁴⁶ In his attempt to name something that had not yet been conceptualized – 'There is no description of it, so far as I have read, or by any ancient observer' – Ruskin manifested his anxiety with the atmospheric pollution produced by the age of industry that was becoming more and more of a concern. By doing so not only was Ruskin making his audience aware of the negative impact of the industrial revolution, but he was also coining a term which enabled him to point to a broad, European phenomenon and put words on something intangible. The moving, vaporous, and shifting essence of the 'storm-cloud' aptly echoes contemporary paradigms of ecological thinking such as Timothy Morton's concept of 'hyperobject', which describes out-scaling entities in time and space that defeat classical categories of thought.⁴⁷ How we handle the representation of air today, and the struggles to represent and materialize this 'global common',⁴⁸ generates critical reflections that invite us to look back at art's capacity to inform us on the air we breathe, as Turner's art did.

Conclusion

⁴⁵ John Gage, *Turner: Rain, Steam and Speed* (London: Penguin Press, 1974); Mark Francis and Jonathan Crary ed., *J.M.W. Turner: The Sun Is God* (Liverpool, UK: Tate Liverpool, 2000); Matthew Beaumont, 'Reason Dazzled: The All-Seeing and the Unseeing in Turner's *Regulus*', *British Art Studies*, 15 (2020), < <https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-15/mbeaumont>>, [accessed 5 February 2021].

⁴⁶ John Ruskin, 'The Storm-cloud of the Nineteenth Century', in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, vol. XXIV.

⁴⁷ Timothy Morton, *Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ To use Garrett Hardin's metaphor of 1968. Garrett Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science*, 13, (December 1968), 1243-48.

In September 2020, a front page from the *New York Times* representing the San Francisco fires' cataclysmic climate infuriated people on social media. The minimalist photo, a gradation of red, orange and black illustrating what this asphyxial air full of carbon looked and felt like, prompted reposts about the aestheticisation of this tragedy it promoted. The picture was in fact a painting by the artist Sho Shibuya who in his work reimagines *New York Times* covers using colour gradients. The work however echoes actual editorial choices, such as the French newspaper *Libération*'s front page for the 1st of July 2021, which, after the suffocating temperatures in Canada, showed a blazing white sun over a yellow to red background. What then differentiates such images from Turner's sublime representations of smog? Is this cover a form of contemporary sublime? Incidentally one of the comments that reappeared a couple of times was: "Not a Rothko", but how can we draw a lineage with Turner? There is Rothko's famous quip 'This guy, Turner, he learnt a lot from me'. In *A Paddle-steamer in a Storm* (fig. 1), the washes of blue, grey, and yellow recall the colourfield look of a Rothko, but while Rothko's works are abstract, Turner's come as close as possible to the reality of the elements they represent. Perhaps the *New York Times* photogenic picture of a combustion, which shows no horizon, no limit, in its beauty, has us, like a Turner, question our relation to atmospheric pollution. In an interview, Young Suh, a contemporary photographer and Professor at the University of California, Davis, talks about smoke as almost imitating painting and atmospheric perspective.⁴⁹ In its beauty it interpellates us at the same time it indicts.

In this article I have tried to look at how Turner's paintings were attempts to depict nature's residues, then being pushed aside from society by the centrifugal force of industrialisation. Present-day paradigms of ecological thinking can invite us to re-examine excessive facture not only metaphorically, that is, in light of modernist discourses which hypostatized materiality – but concretely and post-anthropocentrically. Perhaps ironically, it is only by doing so on the painters' own terms and resisting the anachronistic attribution of contemporary concerns with materiality to historical actors that we can excavate the genuine politics that shaped the art objects under study.

⁴⁹ 'Tornadoes of Fire in Northern California', *Umbigo Magazine* 75, (December 2020), 70-9.

Figures



Fig 1: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *A Paddle-steamer in a Storm*, ca. 1841, Watercolor, graphite and scratching out on medium, slightly textured, cream wove paper, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.



Fig. 2: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Staffa, Fingal's Cave*, ca. 1831–32, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

< <https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:5018> >



Fig. 3: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *London from Greenwich Park*, oil paint on canvas, support: 902 × 1200 mm, frame: 1285 × 1584 × 155 mm, © Tate Britain, London, Photo © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0

< <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-london-from-greenwich-park-n00483> >



Fig. 4: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Entrance of the Meuse: Orange-Merchant on the Bar, Going to Pieces; Brill Church bearing S. E. by S., Masensluys E. by S.*, exhibited 1819, oil paint on canvas, support: 1753 × 2464 mm, frame: 2110 × 2820 × 140 mm, © Tate Britain, London, Photo © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0

< <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-entrance-of-the-meuse-orange-merchant-on-the-bar-going-to-pieces-brill-church-n00501> >



Fig. 5: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Thames above Waterloo Bridge*, c.1830–5, oil paint on canvas, support: 905 × 1210 mm, frame: 1138 × 1457 × 82 mm, © Tate Britain, London, Photo © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0

<<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-the-thames-above-waterloo-bridge-n01992>>



Fig. 6: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, exhibited 1842, oil paint on canvas, support: 914 × 1219 mm, frame: 1233 × 1535 × 145 mm, © Tate Britain, London, Photo © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0

<<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-snow-storm-steam-boat-off-a-harbours-mouth-n00530>>



Fig. 7: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Regulus*, 1828 reworked 1837, oil paint on canvas, support: 895 × 1238 mm, frame: 1135 × 1460 × 93 mm, © Tate Britain, London, Photo © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0

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‘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*: ‘Given that the Victorian Empire’s world-spanning configuration was the first political project in history to be powered almost exclusively by fossilised plant life, it follows that the carbon-saturated atmosphere we breathe today is, in both metaphorical and brutally chemical senses, the atmosphere of the British Empire’. Hensley and Steer, ‘Introduction’, in *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.

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BOOK REVIEW

Energy, Ecocriticism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Novel Ecologies, by Barri J. Gold (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). XIII, 215 pp. Hardback 103,99€

Reviewed by Alicia Barnes
(University of Surrey, UK)

The global climate crisis we are currently facing has a history older than perhaps first thought. While the majority of us working in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies are well aware of the impact the Industrial Revolution, the turn to the use of fossil fuels, has had, reading the literature produced during this time as a part of the discourse on climate change is a relatively recent development. Barri J. Gold's *Energy, Ecocriticism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Novel Ecologies* takes a vital step in highlighting the necessity of re-reading fiction in order to understand and re-evaluate our place as humans within an ecosystem in crisis. As she makes clear, 'neither science nor literature can be disconnected from the larger cultural problems that surround, suffuse, and draw from them. Thus, in a time of both ecological and educational crises, this book also queries the ongoing role in the humanities in addressing problems that seem to call primarily for scientific solutions' (p. 3). Gold argues that if reading literature is to offer a solution to the ecological crisis, we must think of energy, that which underpins said crisis, 'as a *concept*, a form or structure, a way of thinking about the world' (p. 15, original emphasis). In doing so, she demonstrates how working in the humanities has the potential to destabilise the cultural myths that contribute to and sustain our climate crisis.

Novel Ecologies begins by questioning how we read, and how can we read differently in a world driving towards ecological catastrophe. Gold poses that by opening up the borders and crossing between the humanities and science, there may be novel potential for how we navigate nature in the Anthropocene. In exposing the issues related to reading nature/ 'nature' in fiction produced during an increasingly industrial century, evermore relying on fossil fuels, we must rethink our preconceptions of 'nature', those that consistently rely on ideas of borders, closure, backgrounds, stability and separateness. The purpose of this book is to 'essay' a form of experimental reading and thinking that requires us to reconsider ourselves as 'ecological beings' (p. 16).

Following the excellent work done by Val Plumwood and Dianne Chisholm on ecological thinking, and Heidi Scott, Allen MacDuffie, and Michael
Victorian Network Volume 10 (Fall 2021)

Tondre on the social and cultural shifts occurring with movements to different sources of energy or fuel, Gold pushes this discourse further by considering the nineteenth-century understandings and articulations of energy in scientific and canonical fiction writing. What makes this work an outstanding contribution to the developing field of nineteenth-century eco-criticism is Gold's foundational exploration of the construction of ecological discourse in the nineteenth century. The first half of *Novel Ecologies* is dedicated to outlining, explaining, and exploring the laws of thermodynamics, 'with their emphases on the conservation and dissipation of energy, as well as their problematic presumption of closure', and 'their historical connection to ecology and some of the problems, limitations and potential' they assume (p. 15). Gold does well to explore in depth the complex and detailed histories of thermodynamics, evolutionary theory, and ecological sciences, and develops a way of thinking about and approaching texts that is then employed in the second half of the book.

Chapter two, 'Energy, Form and the Novel', offers an overview of the laws of thermodynamics. A welcome discussion for those new to eco-criticism, and a necessary nuance for established eco-critical scholars, Gold connects our contemporary understandings of ecology to the historically specific scientific discourses that consolidated thermodynamics. '[O]ur truth is part of a larger picture', a picture that necessarily includes nineteenth-century culture (p. 19). Gold explores nineteenth-century concepts of energy and fuel, and reconciles the need to understand seemingly abstract scientific principles (p. 20). Importantly, this chapter demonstrates that the forms given to energy are quantifiable and socially imbued. In the nineteenth-century novel, these forms are enclosed systems, conclusions, individualisms, forms that, as the remainder of the book demonstrates, are incompatible with the reality of entanglement and connectedness of the ecological world.

After laying this foundation, exposing the cracks in the discursive conceptions of energy, chapter three, 'The Physics of Life: Darwin, Thomson, Joule, Blotzmann', looks at the scientists of the nineteenth-century who were contributing to those discursive conceptions. This chapter aims to facilitate an understanding of the science to see its limitations, and how that then informs the limitations of reading: 'scientific discourse is itself an act of, and subject to, interpretation' (p. 38). In returning to the impossible idea of separation, Gold demonstrates how the two burgeoning sciences of evolution and energy science deemed themselves separate but were unavoidably entangled. As such, this chapter works through four major scientists' conceptions of energy, evolution,

and thermodynamics, specifically where they interact, their limitations and contradictions, and unseen likenesses. This chapter then brings the conversation back to ideas of energy in nineteenth-century fiction, specifically on the notion of energy as individual characteristic in pre-thermodynamic literature and how this conception has affected our later understandings of ‘energy’. ‘Our interpretative choices thus matter considerably in how we understand the world around us. Do we insist on a stability and closure in natural systems that the laws of thermodynamics disallow, or do we embrace a potentially overwhelming sense of the interconnectedness of all things?’ (p. 53).

The second half of *Novel Ecologies* then proposes and puts into action an experimental reading practice focusing primarily on reading the networks of ‘energy’ in all its forms in nineteenth-century fiction. Chapter four, ‘Experimental Reading’, outlines a blueprint for such a reading. Gold argues that interpretation is so important because it directly affects how we view and interact with the world, and in a world experiencing ecological catastrophe, we need to rethink said interaction (pp. 69-70). The main angles of this experimental reading that facilitate a rethinking include: the dangers of reading nature; scarcity and closure; energy; entanglement; multiple and shifting perspectives; the metaphor; and human concerns.

The final four chapters each examine a widely read novel with the concerns of the experimental reading in mind: *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Great Expectations* (1861), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). In the first two texts, those that were written prior to the ‘consolidation of the principles of [...] the laws of thermodynamics’, we see how energy was not associated with fuel, but with character (p. 35). The latter two novels, Gold shows, possess anxieties of waste and toxicity, seemingly abated with an impossible self-sufficiency within the enclosed environments each novel, *Great Expectations* and *The War of the Worlds*, creates (p. 144). Her readings interrogate in each text ‘a different system that the novel struggles without success to close: the family in *Mansfield Park*, the individual in *Jane Eyre*, the nation in *Great Expectations*, and the planet and species in *The War of the Worlds*’ (p. 35).

Overall, this book has numerous strengths in its vital application of ecological modes of thinking to nineteenth-century literature. Gold is able to draw the nineteenth-centuryist in closely with her discussion of sciences through delightful, memorable and easily consumed similes and references to nineteenth-century culture. From Elizabeth and Darcy standing in for the ‘two nascent sciences: evolutionary biology and the science of energy’, to Herman Melville’s

cetology from *Moby Dick* (1851), Gold is explicit in the thorough entanglement of energy discourse throughout wider nineteenth-century literature (p. 38; p. 77). Her thorough grasp of both the literary culture and science means that this book truly adds to bridging the discourses of literary criticism and ecology. Further, she writes in a way that necessarily highlights and explores the very entanglements she describes while also guiding the reader through the narrative as if it were but one straight(ish) road. Her writing recalls and works with Ursula Le Guin's 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' (1986) as a way of 'opening up' and accepting the necessary entanglements of the ecological world as understood through fiction (p. 3).

In relating her ecological readings to both nineteenth century political contexts as well as our own, she notes that 'The language of ecology cannot be disentangled from the language of politics' (p. 173). This book's aim is to prompt readers into realising the necessity for scrutinising and undoing some of the cultural mythologies surrounding our conceptions of nature and energy, those which have contributed to our ecological crisis. It is essential that we 'undo the pervasive passivity of our cultural mythologies. It is a key contribution that the humanities can make to our current ecological crisis' (p. 151). 'In *Novel Ecologies*', Gold considers 'at length the challenge of imagining ourselves as entangled elements in an open set of open ecologies' (p. 194). The rhetoric of enclosure, individualism and self-sufficiency that pervade our understanding of 'nature' is a significant part of the ecological problems we face. We must 'relegate the human to the margins for a change' and 'let things be messy and open and possible, and to read as if our world depended on it' (p. 72).

BOOK REVIEW*Novel Cultivations: Plants in British Literature of the Global Nineteenth Century*

by Elizabeth Hope Chang (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2019). 240 pp. Hardback \$59.50.

Reviewed by Lauryn E. Collins
(Dalhousie University)

In positioning ‘plants as the transitory location between realism and fantasy within British fiction’ (p. 3), Elizabeth Hope Chang’s insight into the role of plants as subjects in diasporic Victorian ecologies sheds new light on the nineteenth century through a brilliant employment of contemporary ecocriticism. In *Novel Cultivations: Plants in British Literature of the Global Nineteenth Century*, Chang encourages us to regard plants as active participants in the narratives in which they appear, personifying them as subjects through their role in the creation of the naturalised globality of ‘English nature’ in Victorian Britain (p. 1; p. 10). Incorporating the object-oriented philosophy of Timothy Morton and work on thing theory by Elaine Freedgood, Jonathan Lamb, and John Plotz, Chang deftly examines the colonial realities of the act of cultivation itself through the floral landscapes of various Victorian fictional texts. Arguing that the naturalisation of exotic flora in Britain parallels the colonisation and assimilation of commodities, people, and culture by the British Empire, Chang invites us to view plants in Victorian fiction as ‘living things fostered by human intelligence’ that act as ‘mediators between nature and culture’ and form a ‘constitutive part of the local in the British genre novel’ (pp. 20-21). Often drawing from work by plant historians and making a clear distinction between ‘botany, horticulture, and agriculture,’ Chang effectively draws readers to the crux of her argument: that plants are agents in their own right and acknowledging them as such in Victorian fiction moves the field beyond the Anthropocene. Foregrounding the importance of global trade to the British Victorian literary culture, Chang’s study seeks to offer new understandings of how diasporic plants were treated in an era that was both a site of ‘science and a site of metaphysical speculation’ (p. 181).

Describing plants in Victorian fiction as ‘[buttonholes] between fiction and reality, existing in and following the rules of both realms’ (p. 2), Chang’s study is convincing and well-written, if broad in her approach. Discussing texts by Algernon Blackwood, Charlotte Brontë, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Wilkie

Collins, Arthur Conan Doyle, H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells, and Oscar Wilde, her evidence is informed by the depth and variety of examples she has identified that support her overall thesis, and her attention to some of the lesser-known works of these authors is refreshing. Even when Chang evaluates texts that have earned an extensive body of scholarship, such as Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, Chang's book breathes new life into current scholarly discussions and offers opportunities for further, overlapping inquiries in all directions. Chang begins her study with a chapter on globalism in Victorian plant culture, analysing discourses of exoticism and naturalisation and the use of plants as clues in the detective fiction of Collins, Conan Doyle, and Grant Allen. Moving from the global to the local, Chapters 2 and 3 examine the particularities of both city and country gardens in the Victorian era, pointing to the claustrophobia of cultivation and contained displacement in the image of the English greenhouse. Drifting into plants and their relationship to Victorian Gothic revival with a close reading of Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, Chang in turn invokes Burke's sublime—and, in turn, the attempt to avoid experiencing it—in the control of nature through human-centred gardens that eschew the wildness of plant life in favour of sanitised, beautiful, and fleeting rose gardens and decorative trees (pp. 75-77). Chapters 4 and 5 return to a discussion of the global and a fear of foreign, uncultivated (and therefore non-English) spaces, looking at nostalgia in an increasingly imperial Anthropocene in the latter end of the nineteenth century. With 'the fantasy of a cultivated colonial ecology' (p. 156) informing readings of Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, Haggard's *Allan Quatermain*, and Kipling's 'In the Rukh', Chang draws attention to the idea of 'feral nature' (p. 144) threatening the English subject. Unfortunately skirting an in-depth close reading of the exotic origins of the Orchid and other 'jungle plants' in this chapter in favour of offering insight on the fantasy plants of Victorian exploration fiction, Chang's probe into the implications of Orientalism in the treatment of Asian, South Asian, African, and Caribbean flora disallows a purely human-centric understanding of mobility and plant migration in the global nineteenth century.

Chang's ambitious, unique, and deeply compelling study into Victorian horticulturalism and its implications draws from a broad range of texts—sometimes too broad. Chang's interpretive work here is incredible, and I found myself wanting more detail in the possibilities she raises here, particularly in her discussion of cultivation and the treatment of flora by Victorian detective fiction. It could be the intention that these threads are picked up by other scholars in the field and developed into something more detailed using *Novel Cultivations* as a

foundational text; however, given the context of the book there may have been a benefit in narrowing the field ever-so-slightly to better evaluate Chang's conclusions in more detail. For example, how does the analysis of Wilde's iconic green carnation as a 'symbol of the perversion of nature' (p. 77) coexist with the body of scholarship that approaches the enduring image of the green carnation as a signal of queerness? It is impossible to expect a scholar to approach every analysis from every possible theoretical angle, of course; however, in this case I feel that at least a passing acknowledgement on the treatment of botanicals through other lenses in some cases would have made for a stronger and more well-rounded analysis.

Speaking to a desire for more details, although illustrations are not customary in literary criticism, I feel that a lack of inclusion of botanical sketches was a missed opportunity in this edition. Chang recurrently refers to the work of plant historians and well-known Victorian horticulturalists, so if there are any illustrations available from these figures' journals, notes, or other writings, I think they would have made a marvellous addition to an already compelling piece of research—particularly considering the reliance on plant history and horticultural ethnography as a foundational concept to Chang's truly groundbreaking work.

Although I have my qualms about the breadth involved in Chang's methodology, *Novel Cultivations* is an exceptionally unique insight into ecocriticism and ecological knowledge in the Victorian literary sphere. The emphasis on a globality inherent within British genre fiction through the naturalisation and assimilation of plant life is a fascinating branch in nineteenth-century ecocriticism. It seems to be particularly generative given the connections Chang has made to other established bodies of work, namely detective fiction, the Gothic, exploration fiction, and bildungsroman. In a world increasingly focused on the Anthropocene and its consequences, Chang's work is timely and engaging as we Victorianists look to the nineteenth century for the origins of our current, industrial reality. Plants as agents, responsible for their mobility and active in their participation with humans, is a bold step in the quest for this insight, 'since a plant with narrative agency radically alters notions about sentience, mobility, reproduction, and representation' (p. 161).