

**Between Wilderness and Number: On Literature, Colonialism and the Will to
Power**

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(English Literature) at the University of Stellenbosch.

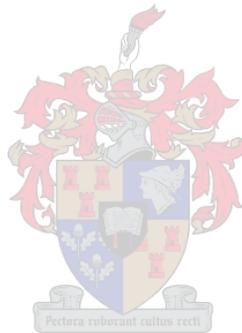
The crest of the University of Stellenbosch, featuring a shield with various symbols, topped with a crown and surrounded by a decorative border. The motto 'Pectus roburque spiritus res' is inscribed on a banner below the shield.

Supervisor: Dr . Jamal.

Prof D. Klopper

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.



Abstract

The eras of colonial expansion and the era designated the modern have been both chronologically and philosophically linked from the commencement of the Renaissance period and Enlightenment thought in the 15th century. The discovery of the New World in 1492 gave impetus to a new type of literature, the colonial novel. Throughout the development of this genre, in both its narrative strategies and the depiction of the colonist's relationship with the foreign land he now inhabits, it has been both informed and formed by the prevailing philosophical atmosphere of the time. In the context of this discussion it is particularly interesting to note what might be termed the level of regression of the modern ideal, and how it is reflected in the colonial novels written at the time. Commencing with the essentially optimistic *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island*, and progressing through the far darker imaginings of *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord of the Flies*, and eventually *Apocalypse Now* and *Blood Meridian*, it is possible to trace the effects of the declining power of Enlightenment thought. Whereas earlier texts deal quite unambiguously with the issue of the Western subject's subjugation of both the foreign environment and the foreign subjects he encounters there, and the relation between subject and object remains quite uncomplicated, in later, more self-reflexive texts the modern subject's relationship with both the alien land and alien people becomes far more problematic. Later texts such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord of the Flies* depict a world where the self-assurance of early texts is strikingly absent. Increasingly, as the initial self-confidence of modernism is eroded, secular moral values, too, come to be questioned. It is here that the works of Nietzsche come to play a prominent role in the analysis of how such a decline in modern confidence is reflected in later colonial works. Even later works such as *Apocalypse Now* and *Blood Meridian* provide a view of the colonial enterprise that is in striking contrast to the optimism of early texts. The chronological progression of texts dealt with here, spanning an era of almost three hundred years prove to be reflective, to a large degree, of the decline of modernity and the effects of this on the colonial enterprise as depicted in the colonial genre.

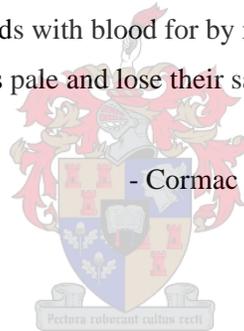
Abstrak

Die eras van koloniale uitbreiding en die era wat die moderne genoem word is albei beide kronologies en filosofies verwant vanaf die begin van die Renaissance tydperk in die 15de eeu. Die ontdekking van die Nuwe Wereld in 1492 het aanleiding gegee tot 'n nuwe soort letterkunde, naamlik die koloniale roman. Reg deur die ontwikkeling van hierdie genre is beide die narratiewe strategie en die voorstelling van die koloniale verhouding met die vreemde land wat hy nou bewoon gevorm and beïnvloed deur die filosofiese atmosfeer wat geheers het in die betrokke tydperk. In die konteks van hierdie bespreking is wat na verwys kan word as die regressie van die moderne ideal, en hoe dit reflekteer word in die koloniale tekste van die tydperk, veral interessant. Beginnend met essensieel optimistiese tekste soos *Robinson Crusoe* en *The Coral Island*, deur tot die veel donkerder verbeelding van *Heart of Darkness* en *Lord of the Flies*, en uiteindelik *Apocalypse Now* en *Blood Meridian*, is dit moontlik om die effekte van die verval van die moderne selfvertroue te bespeur. Waar vroeëre tekste ondubbelsinnig omgaan met die kwessie van die Westerse subjek se onderdrukking van beide die vreemde omgewing en die vreemde subjekte wat hy daar ontmoet, en die verhouding tussen subjek en objek heel ongekompliseerd bly, word hierdie verhouding in latere en meer self-refleksiewe tekste veel meer problematies. Latere tekste soos *Heart of Darkness* en *Lord of the Flies* beeld 'n wêreld uit waarin die self versekering wat vroeëre tekste karakteriseer treffend afwesig is. Meer en meer, soos die aanvanklike self-vertoue van die moderne ideaal verval, word sekulêre moraliteit ook moeiliker. Hier is die werke van Nietzsche van groot belang tot 'n analise van hoe so 'n verval in moderne selfvertroue gereflekteer word in later koloniale werke. Selfs meer onlangse werke soos *Apocalypse Now* en *Blood Meridian* verskaf 'n blik op die koloniale onderneming wat in treffende kontras is met die optimisme van vroeëre tekste. Die kronologiese progressie van tekste wat hier behandel word, en wat 'n tydperk van amper drie honderd jaar dek blyk om reflektief te wees, tot groot mate, van die verval van moderniteit an die effekte hiervan op die koloniale onderneming soos uitgebeeld in die koloniale genre.

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True evil has the power to sober the smalldoer against his own deeds and in the contemplation of that evil he may even find the path of righteousness which has been foreign to his feet and may have no choice but to go upon it. Even this man may be appalled at what is revealed to him and seek some order to stand against it. Yet in all of this there are two things which perhaps he will not know. He will not know that while the order the righteous seek is never righteousness itself but is only order, the disorder of evil is in fact the thing itself. Nor will he know that while the righteous are hampered at every turn by their ignorance of all evil to the evil all is plain, light and dark alike. This man of whom we speak will seek to impose order and lineage upon things which rightly have none. He will call upon the world itself to testify as to the truth of what are in fact but his desires. In his final incarnation he may seek to indemnify his words with blood for by now he will have discovered that words pale and lose their savour while pain is always new.



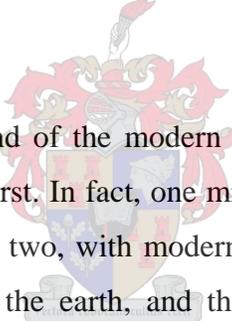
- Cormac McCarthy in *The Crossing*, 1995

Chapter 1

Colonialism and the Dreams of Modernity: An Introduction

Human sciences dissect in order to comprehend, and destroy in order to analyse.

-Tolstoy



The eras of colonial expansion and of the modern Enlightenment ‘project’ have been inextricably linked from the very first. In fact, one might argue that there exists a sort of symbiotic relationship between the two, with modern science and technology providing the means for the subjugation of the earth, and the subjugation of the earth in turn providing the raw materials (whether in lives or materials) that allowed the process to continue. Advances in technology, and the discovery of new worlds in which to use them, meant the promise of a world and nature subjugated entirely to the will of man, a world bereft of anything outside the objective. It promised also a playground where, as Lemaire puts it, one can become, enthusiastically, oneself (Lemaire, 1996: 17). It is this way of seeing the world (which will be further elucidated) that I shall designate the “modern”, or “modernity”. In fact, one might go as far as to argue that for the purposes of this essay the very terms “colonial” and “modern” can be used almost interchangeably, with the spirit of, say, “colonial expansion” not being all that different from what one might term “modern expansion”. Colonialism, like the ‘discovery’ of rational thought, is an integral part of the modern era. This, of course, is not to say that rational thought was a new invention. It is impossible to argue that rational thought had not existed prior to the

Renaissance. Yet with the advent of Renaissance thought, an emphasis was placed on reason and rationality that, under the older theological scheme, had not previously existed. That the Renaissance and colonialism is linked is similarly difficult to dispute. Habermas goes as far as stating that “The discovery of the new world, the Renaissance, and the reformation - these three monumental events around the year 1500 constitute the epochal threshold between modern times and the Middle Ages” (Habermas, 1996: 5).

It is difficult to argue with the assertion that the colonial enterprise (in whichever of its forms, whether relatively benign or utterly ruthless) is to an extent the result of an extremely specific way of seeing, experiencing, and approaching the external world, as well as the internal self. Poole writes of the 18th century’s

belief in a historical progress toward a commercial and civilised way of life. This belief provided a validation of the kind of society which was coming into existence in Western Europe, and also a justification for its ambitions towards the rest of the world (Poole, 1994: 24).

Such a world view, which held in awe the twin gods of Science and Progress, led inevitably also to a reflection on the self. Habermas speaks of

a twofold compulsion: the physical compulsion of nature and the moral compulsion of freedom, both of which become all the more intensely felt the more uninhibitedly subjects seek to master nature (outer nature as well as their own inner natures) (Habermas, 1996: 47).

In order to better understand this link between a dominant mind-set in (mainly) the West and colonial expansion in Africa, South America and all the other “savage” parts of the globe, it is first necessary to provide a summary of the salient characteristics of such a world view.

It is interesting to note that the decline of the modern Enlightenment world-view, what some would refer to later as the “the crisis of Enlightenment ethics (Larmore, 1997: 51),

should begin to occur at the same time that many people were starting to feel that the colonial and/or imperialistic projects then under way were no longer morally tenable. There are a number of very specific reasons for this. The Enlightenment, and modern thought in general, is characterised by an emphasis on reason and rationality. Nor is this emphasis an arbitrary quality. The modern fascination with reason stems from the power, the ability to control, that it imparts to those who use it. As Pippin puts it: “The will to power interprets, it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power...In fact interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something.” (Pippin, 1991: 100) Allied with this emphasis on control is an emphasis on knowledge, and understanding, which are the two essential prerequisites of any attempt at rational thought. In *Robinson Crusoe* the protagonist states

I must needs observe, that as reason is the substance and the original of the mathematicks, so by stating and squaring every thing with reason, and by making the most rational judgement of thins, every man may in time be master of every mechanick art (Defoe, 1985: 85).

This emphasis on control, in the work of Nietzsche, one of the earliest critics of modernity, is characterised by the spirit of the god Apollo, leading to the appellation “Apollonian”, an appellation that carries with it also strong overtones of the moral. In his earliest published work, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes: “As a moral deity Apollo demands self-control from his people and, in order to observe such self-control, a knowledge of self” (Nietzsche, 1956: 34).

The Enlightenment proved to be a shift away from the older, teleological view of the world, replacing it instead with the subjective world, the realm of the individual and his struggle in the world, with a strong emphasis on that individual’s power of becoming. Lemaire speaks of “the awakening modern spirit which seeks its salvation in ‘extraspection’, expansion and the exploration of the other, and for whom the space of the world is the realm where one, enthusiastically, becomes oneself” (Lemaire, 1996: 17). In strict contrast is the older, teleological view of medieval times, exemplified by the words

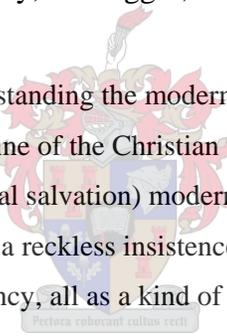
of Augustine: “And man will admire high mountains and the wide sea and mighty rivers and the immeasurability of the ocean and the course of stars, and thereby he will lose himself” (*ibid.*).

Rather, in modern times, man struggles to find himself, and this is in no small part due to, and under the influence of, the world-view of the era itself. The modern condition is essentially an isolated, lonely one, with all phenomena outside the self and the immediately observable being relegated to a less privileged position, or simply discarded. Allied with this rejection were “more and more ambitious claims for the supreme authority of reason,...[and] for the authority of natural science in the investigation of nature (including human nature)...[as well as] a belief in, if not the perfectibility, then the improbability of mankind” (Pippin, 1991: 4).

It was in this tradition of thought that the twin idols of the Enlightenment, Science and Philosophy, flourished. In science, but also in philosophy, Descartes epitomises the early modern thinker. In fact, in his famous conclusion *Cogito ergo sum* lies the entire seed of what was to come. More important than the conclusion, however, were the means used to arrive at it. In fact, with his invention of Cartesian doubt, the ultimate conclusion of which had been the *cogito*, Descartes had also discovered what was to prove the basis for all subsequent understanding of, and interactions with the world: method (Pippin, 1991: 23-24). That doubt was to prove the basis for Enlightenment thought had profound implications. With the *cogito* establishing rational cognition as the only viable opposition to such doubt, whether existential, ontological or spiritual, it follows that all that is not encompassed by the rational should be marginalised or discarded. In a succinct phrase, Habermas states “What is rational becomes real, and what is real becomes rational” (Habermas, 1996: 41). In contrast, anything not empirically verifiable must be questioned and doubted, including the very conclusions that are reached using this method. Doubt as the foundational principle necessarily must also inspire doubt in the conclusions reached using this method. However, the undoubted success of modern technology in subjugating and controlling the world seemed to indeed speak of a kind of rational order in the world, an order achievable, or perhaps more accurately controllable, by the proper use of the

intellect. Such a view removes God as the omnipotent being at the centre of the universe and replaces him instead with the rational, doubting subject, a step once again perilously close to hubris.

In large part this enterprise was aimed at improvement of life, at ease of living, an attempt to “master nature and enjoy the fruits of the earth without toil” (Pippin, 1991: 5). Pippin has no hesitation in referring to this aim as “entirely impious” (*ibid.*). Nietzsche has a far stronger word for it. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, he writes “our whole attitude toward nature, our violation of nature with the help of machines and the heedless ingenuity of technicians and engineers is *hubris*” [original emphasis] (Nietzsche, 1956: 245). It is here that one comes face to face with the effects of the secularisation of the world, the inevitable result of an exclusive focus on the rational. Pippin writes that, according to a later critic of modernity, Heidegger,



the central categories in understanding the modern experience are will and hubris, [and] that with the decline of the Christian view of human power and security (the potential for eternal salvation) modernity emerged as essentially an act of human self-assertion, a reckless insistence on human power, dominion over the earth and self-sufficiency, all as a kind of replacement for Christian security (Pippin, 1991: 144).

Close on the heels of Descartes followed Newton’s famous Laws, laws promising a full understanding of the workings of the universe, a set of rationally thought out equations that could seem to promise complete understanding. James Gleick, in his book *Chaos*, speaks of them as “appropriate tools for a clockmaker deity who could create a world and set it running for eternity” (Gleick, 1995: 12). Moreover, the rules seemed to imply that there were, indeed, laws controlling the universe, even if those laws were no longer the laws of God, but rather those of Science. Implied in this understanding of the world is the belief that through exercise of man’s rational facilities (and the allied suppression of all that is not rational) one is able to predict what will happen in the future and thereby exert control over it. In essence, one is able to take control of one’s own fate. And along with

the success of this knowledge came also an implied understanding of the phenomenal world that we inhabit.

Gleick, in *Chaos*, speaks of “the Newtonian promise that the world unfolded along a deterministic path, rule bound like the planets, predictable like eclipses and tides” (Gleick, 1995: 13). One might say that in its essence modernity promised a paradise, but not the original paradise from which man had descended in sin. Rather, it was the paradise of rationality, with each being self-sufficient and self-aware, and therefore, self-responsible and free. Pippin states “modernity promised us a culture of unintimidated, curious, rational, self-reliant individuals” (Pippin, 1991: 22), and, as a physical extension of that culture, a world obedient to our wills, sufficient to our needs, and boundlessly open to our manipulation.

In this brave new world of science, the individual came to prominence for the first time as the arbiter of his own world. With the optimism that one can expect only from the newly converted, this was initially seen in an entirely positive light. Kant, quoted in Pippin, promised that “the modern subject will determine for itself, completely and unconditionally, what to accept as evidence of the nature of things, and ultimately, what to regard as an appropriate evaluation of action” (Pippin, 1991: 47). Here one comes across the implications of Descartes’ *cogito* once again. If thought is to be structured, and identity constructed, entirely according to how I appear to myself, then there is an implicit gap between myself and others. And as Poole states:

Once the identity of the individual is conceived in abstraction from his relation with others, the assumption of pervasive self-interest becomes almost inescapable. Other individuals occur in the reasoning of such individuals only as means or implements to ends which are independent of them (Poole, 1994: 7).

In a sense, and paradoxically, the quest for objectivity ended in the victory of subjectivity. Whereas before God had been the ultimate arbitrator of actions in the world, individual subjects now sought to usurp ultimate agency for themselves, and to thereby

relegate all others into the realm of objects. One is reminded again of the first part of Descartes' modern dream, "to master nature", but here the drive is extended not only towards outer nature but towards inner nature as well. Yet this is not an innocent undertaking. Rather, it must be seen as an extension of the will to power, the modern drive to transform, and so to limit what may be accepted and what not. Allied to this drive is the fact that in a secular world where ethics are no longer the exclusive base for ethics and human will, too, enters the equation the power of the individual to exert it must come to be of greater and greater importance. In such a milieu it is not surprising that the ethereal nature of non-rational religious values should cause them to be superseded by the far more visibly effective mechanism of coercive power. Habermas states that "in modernity, therefore, religious life, state and society as well as science, morality and art are transformed into just so many embodiments of the principle of subjectivity" (Habermas, 1996: 18).

Such a world-view has a number of very important consequences. Perhaps most importantly for what we are concerned with, is the implicit hierarchy that results from the Enlightenment fascination with the rational, the Apollonian. The privileging of the rational that was central to the modern scientific project implies also a devaluation of all that is not rational, all that can not be controlled by the intellect alone. It is these kinds of chaotic, non-rational forces that Nietzsche refers to as the Dionysian. This dichotomy becomes extremely important in the analysis of the crisis of ethics that characterised, specifically, the late modern era. In fact, as the exact opposite of the Apollonian will to order, the Dionysian forces become a kind of escape from the extreme rule-bound rationality, with the focus on the individual, that is the order of the day under the influence of Apollo. Nietzsche writes that "Apollo himself may be regarded as the marvellous divine image of the *principium individuationis*" (Nietzsche, 1956: 22). It is in contrast to this that the Dionysian represents the *loss* of self, the negation of this principle, a principle which is central to modernity's view both of the subject and of his interaction with the world. Kurtz, in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*, represents the break-up of self-knowledge and self-differentiation – he would "forget himself amongst these people – forget himself" (Conrad, 1994: 81).

Taking his cue from the entranced, Bacchanalian revels of the early followers of Dionysos, Nietzsche states that “the individual, with his limits and moderations, forgets himself in the Dionysiac vortex and becomes oblivious to the laws of Apollo” (Nietzsche, 1956: 35). No longer subject to the restricting and stultifying rules of the rational, the Dionysian reveller is able to transcend the limitations of Apollonian morality and thereby to enter what Nietzsche later refers to as the “Dionysiac abyss” (Nietzsche, 1956: 86). It is precisely when the subject is no longer under the thrall of Apollo that he is able for the first time to enter the realm of the subjective, the non-rational, and it is this realm that the entire modern philosophical project strives to subjugate to the authority of reason. In contrast to the balanced, rational and moral influence of the Apollonian, Nietzsche writes that, during the Dionysiac frenzy, “all the savage urges of the mind were unleashed ... until they reached that paroxysm of lust and cruelty which has always struck me as the “witches cauldron” par excellence” (Nietzsche, 1956, 25-26). In the later development of the depiction of the colonial enterprise, as we shall see in texts such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord of the Flies*, the opposing values of the Apollonian and the Dionysian would come to play a central part in the eventual deconstruction of the modern/colonial ideal.

As stated earlier, in the Nietzschean scheme Apollo comes to represent the rule-making deity who gives to mankind the rational ability to construct a moral universe. In opposition, Dionysos represents the forces of primordial chaos and destruction, which in fact was only able to be overcome through the intervention of the rationality espoused by the followers of the Apollonian. Yet there are serious implications for the status of morality once the source of human power and authority are vested, no longer in the earlier, religious and teleological view of the world, but rather in mankind’s own sovereignty in the world. Poole writes:

To live in the modern world is to recognise that values and meanings only exist insofar as they are created by us. If science defines the realm of cognitive rationality, then questions of value fall outside that realm. Instrumental reason serves values; it does not say what they should be. Values are not therefore matters of objective existence of rational belief, but of subjective and non-rational choice

(Poole, 1994: 67)

Claims for the superiority of science and reason carried with them their own kind of ideological baggage, just like earlier, religious claims. One might even go as far as to say that one of modernity's central ambitions (and successes) was the replacement of the 'Religion of God' with the 'Religion of Science'. Once in this scientific sphere, a number of implications emerge that are of huge importance for the subsequent development of the subject, and perhaps more importantly, the subject's view of themselves and the world. Lemaire sums this up succinctly when he writes of modern man that:

He will come to understand himself as the origin of his own social orders, as well as of his own morals and customs, as arbiter of his own fate, as determiner of his own history. Finally, and with this he grasps at complete autonomy, he will learn to regard himself as creator of his own God, and thereby conclude to the death of God (Lemaire, 1996: 73).

Included in this statement are a number of very important assertions that will require further scrutiny, and indeed set the tone for much of what is to come. It is telling that Lemaire speaks of man as the "origin of his own social orders, as well as of his own morals and customs." This has widespread implications for the modern understanding of, and interaction with, the world. In fact, one of the central ambitions of early modern thinkers was the establishment of a secular grounding for morality, a grounding that would be based, no longer on the dictates of an absent (or possibly non-existent God) but rather on a set of rationally arrived-at principles. One of these attempts was to culminate in Kant's famous Categorical Imperative, an attempt to negate the so-called *horror vacui* that was fast overtaking the modern epoch. The problem, of course, is that once one is aware of this horror (a horror echoed in the famous last words of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*) one cannot help but also be aware that all subsequent attempts at constructing a secular ethic can only result in precisely that: constructions. Of Kant, Nietzsche has the following to say "Kant was, like every good German of the old stamp, a pessimist; he believed in morality, not because it is demonstrated in nature and history, but in spite of the fact that nature and history continually contradict it" (Nietzsche, 1982: 3). It is telling

that, especially in the works of Nietzsche, it is Enlightenment thought itself, as in the above example, that provides the basis for the critique of the Enlightenment. It is only through rationally following rational arguments through to their logical conclusions that it becomes possible to see the flaws inherent in any such logical/rational structures.

If, then, one wishes to construct a modern, secular morality in the face of such implacable opposition, it is necessary to both subdue and control that which opposes it, and to a large extent this is precisely what the modern project aimed at achieving. Now separated from Nature, and an individual subject, rather than an object amongst others, it becomes necessary for the modern subject to 'conquer' nature, so that the shaky foundations upon which it is constructed should not fail. Gleick writes that "at one time rain forests, deserts, bush and badlands represented all the society was striving to subdue" (Gleick, 1995, 117). By externalising the irrational, chaotic, Dionysiac forces of inner nature and projecting them onto wild, untamed outer Nature, Western subjects could feel that they were able, by subduing outer 'wild nature' to also control inner wild nature. In fact, through this externalisation, moralists were able to place a higher value on the subjugation of the Natural that would have been possible if the exercise were merely one in greed and avarice. Nietzsche states in this regard "Does it not seem that there is a hatred of the virgin forest and of the tropics amongst moralists? And that the 'tropical man' must be discredited at all costs, whether as disease and deterioration of mankind, or as his own hell and self-torture?" (Nietzsche 1923: 118).

In this context what is of particular interest to the present study are the effects of colonial exploration and exploitation on the colonists themselves. In a progression of texts, starting with the essentially optimistic *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island*, through to the nightmare of *Heart of Darkness* or *Lord of the Flies*, it is possible to see the crisis that was inevitably overtaking the modern ideal. The inherent confidence that characterises early texts (such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island*) is strikingly absent from the later texts. In his introduction to *Robinson Crusoe*, Ross states

he (Robinson Crusoe) is reduced to first principles and is able for the first time

in his life to generalise his ideas (indeed forced to do so). Starting as a heedless young man, who had “never handled a tool in my life”, he goes through, in a few years, all the long history of human technological inventiveness, solving almost every problem from the beginning (Ross, 1985: 17).

At the same time, despite his isolation from the world, he is able to increase both in moral rectitude and wealth. This is the modern dream in a nutshell – the imposition of control over an essentially chaotic system, and the eventual complete mastery of physical space, as well as nature and, eventually, people. Similarly, the boys in *The Coral Island* are endlessly resourceful, brave and morally upright. In fact, so naively optimistic is the viewpoint expressed, and so convinced of their own superiority are they, that one character is able to state, without any irony, after first landing on the island, that “we’ll take possession in the name of the king; we’ll go and enter the service of its black inhabitants. Of course we’ll rise, naturally to the top of affairs. White men always do in savage countries” (Ballantyne, 1995: 23).

There is no such optimism in *Lord of the Flies*. In fact the book, written roughly a century after Ballantyne’s, is a savage parody of the implicit faith in the rightness and rectitude of the boys in *The Coral Island*. Whereas the coral island in the earlier text provides the boys with everything they need materially (even as far as providing ready-made ‘candle-nuts’ and cloth, and a bewildering array of foods and diversions), the island in Golding’s work has an altogether darker aspect. Not only do the candle-like plants in Golding’s book not burn, but the boys cannot even keep a fire going. And in contrast to the vast array of good food available in the earlier text, the fruits in *Lord of the Flies* give the boys diarrhoea, and they are forced to eat half-raw pigs due to a lack of practical knowledge.

In contrast to the coral island of Ballantyne’s book, described by one of the boys as “the ancient Paradise”, the landscape itself comes to assume, in Golding’s version, a far more threatening aspect. One is reminded here of Turner’s Frontier hypothesis, where he writes (in connection with the experience of settlers on the American frontier) “at the frontier

the environment is at first too strong for the man” (Turner, 1921: 4). This is one of the founding premises of *Lord of the Flies*, of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and, of course, of McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*. It is in *Heart of Darkness* that the disillusionment with the modern view of the world, and the essential moral vacuum that underlies the modern focus on the individual, finds one of its first and most powerful expressions in colonial fiction. Pippin, in a book dealing with the modern condition, argues that Kurtz can be read as a manifestation of the entire modern project. Even if it is true that his methods had become ‘unsound’, and that his operations ruined the area for further ivory-collection after his death, he is nevertheless described as “a first class agent” and “a very remarkable person”. Even more importantly, he “sends in as much ivory as all the others together” (Conrad, 1994: 27). The point, of course, is that despite his madness and his various excesses, Kurtz is still the most efficient of all the ivory traders (Pippin, 1991: 40). The problem is that Kurtz (like his namesake in the Vietnam film *Apocalypse Now*) operates far from the moral authority imposed by society, and therefore has no meaning-giving entity to provide moral structures. The lack of such structures, combined with the moral relativism that is the result of the ‘death of God’, means that there is no hope of moral action. He is unable to rationalise his actions as anything other than a manifestation of what Conrad calls “the merry dance of death and trade” (Conrad, 1994: 20), and thus he becomes aware of the *horror vacui* that is so central to the modern project, an awareness made clear in his famous last words.

In Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*, Kurtz states “horror has a face, and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends. If they are not then they are enemies to be feared” (Coppola, 1979). An interesting progression of this theme of horror can be found in *Blood Meridian*, a bloody revisionist history of a scalp-hunting expedition into Mexico in 1848. In much the same vein, the Judge in *Blood Meridian* states: “only that man who has offered up himself entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his innermost heart, only that man can dance” (McCarthy, 1989: 331). Written in 1985, the book also features what one might term a “Kurtzian” character, namely Judge Holden. Apart from some striking physical resemblances to Kurtz (both are

described as tall, bald, and extremely able), the Judge is a character that faces up to the internal contradictions which unhinge Kurtz, but who is able, in contrast to Kurtz, to “make a friend of horror”.

The Judge, speaking to the book’s protagonist (referred to only as the kid and later as the “the man”) states “you of all men are no stranger to that feeling, the emptiness and the despair. It is that which we take arms against, is it not? Is not blood the tempering agent in the mortar which bonds?” (McCarthy, 1989: 329). The point is that once awareness of this *horror vacui* is reached, one becomes aware of the possibility of actions which would not be sanctioned in society. Once ‘outside’ society, and faced with the ‘savagery’ of the wild, it becomes easy to move beyond the spheres of traditional morality, or, as Nietzsche would put it “herd morality” (Nietzsche, 1923: 125). It is in this kind of milieu that the Nietzschean will to power comes to the fore. Faced with the failure of the Enlightenment to provide a secular and binding morality to replace the religious order it destroyed, the conclusion reached by Nietzsche is that all that remains is the will to power.

The Judge emerges as a kind of Nietzschean anti-hero, a nightmare manifestation of the modern impulse to control, classify and dominate. He too recognises the essential emptiness of modern attempts at morality. In phrasing that might have come straight from Nietzsche, he states: “Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favour of the weak. Historical law subverts it at every turn” (McCarthy, 1989: 250). In the modern world, the implication seems to be, there is no other right than might.

The modern obsession with knowledge and control, classification and order, manifests itself in the Judge’s incessant cataloguing of everything he encounters, whether birds, plants, fossils, rock-paintings or ancient pieces of armour. A similar theme is found in the early colonial novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, when Crusoe states: “every creature I killed I took off the skin and preserved them” (Defoe, 1985: 89), although this takes on a far more sinister aspect on an expedition aimed solely at the furnishing of human scalps for a bounty. When questioned about his incessant documentation, the Judge replies

Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent... These anonymous creatures... may seem little or nothing in the world. Yet the smallest crumb can devour us. Any smallest thing beneath yon rock out of men's knowing. Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth (McCarthy, 1989: 198).

Later he states:

The man who believes that the secrets of the world are forever hidden lives in mystery and fear. Superstition will drag him down. The rain will erode the deeds of his life. But that man who sets himself the task of singling out the thread of order from the tapestry will by the decision alone have taken charge of the world and it is only by such taking charge that he will effect a way to dictate the terms of his own fate (McCarthy, 1989: 198).

Of course, the will to control and dominate nature and the world, as well as the people in the world, is nothing other than the attempt to control one's own destiny, to remove the chaotic and the unpredictable from life. Yet, as Nietzsche argues, this whole attitude toward nature is essentially hubristic (Nietzsche, 1956: 248). And hubris is something that will not go unpunished for long. In their book *Order and Chaos*, Angrist and Hepler state "the ceaseless urge of man to bring order out of his experiences so that he may understand them give rise to science, which is a relevant example of entropy reduction". Later they state "though society can effect local reductions of entropy, the general and universal trend of entropy increase easily swamps the anomalous but important efforts of civilised man" (Angrist and Hepler, 1967: 177-178).

When there is a limited understanding of an alien environment, the efforts to produce a kind of order out of it become even more difficult. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow states of the forest through which they travel: "We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings...the earth seemed unearthly" (Conrad, 1994: 51). In fact, the experience of

environment plays a large role in the narratives mentioned above. Whereas in earlier texts the land is seen in a purely instrumental way (i.e. as something to be farmed, mined, explored and exploited) in later texts the experience of environment becomes far more complex. In *Blood Meridian* the Judge states: “this desert upon which so many have been broken is vast and calls for largeness of heart but it is also ultimately empty. It is hard, it is barren. Its very nature is stone” (McCarthy, 1989: 330). Even the island in Golding’s text is given a kind of delirious, nightmarish quality:

the glittering sea rose up, moved apart in planes of blatant impossibility; the coral reef and the few stunted palms that clung to the more elevated parts would float up into the sky, would quiver, be plucked apart, run like raindrops on a wire or be repeated as in an odd succession of mirrors (Golding, 1979: 73).

The very incomprehensibility of wild nature, and its resistance to modern rationalisation, is also mentioned in J.M. Coetzee’s *Dusklands*, in *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*, where the narrator states:

We cannot count the wild. The wild is one because it is boundless... Our commerce with the wild is a tireless enterprise of turning it into orchard or farm. When we cannot fence it and count it we reduce it to number by other means. Every wild creature I kill crosses the boundary between wilderness and number (Coetzee, 1998: 80).

Here once again the will to power comes into play – it is the ceaseless attempt of the Western subject to empower him/herself in the face of barren, savage or incomprehensible environments, in a world where God is dead.

It is easy to imagine that such conceits, such reversions to savagery, such hubris in the face of an essentially alien landscape, is a thing of the past. Yet this is not the case. One needs only to look at the foreign policy that informed the Vietnam and Iraqi wars (and at the resulting savagery of the various “civilised soldiers”) to realise that the effects of modern hubris is still very much with us to today. An increased awareness of our own

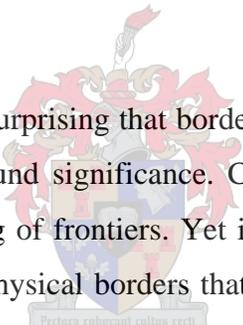
impotence to change the course of events or the face of the world has not prevented us from attempting to do so. It is conceivably only when we have reached a fuller understanding of our own abilities and limitations (if such a thing is even possible) and of the inherent savagery that underlies the façade we call civilisation, that a more consistent and effective means of interacting with the world, with each other and with ourselves will be possible (although perhaps unlikely). Until this happens we will do well to heed the words of Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby becomes a monster. And if thou gaze too long into an abyss, the abyss will gaze also into thee” (Nietzsche, 1923: 97).



Chapter 2

Islands, Deserts and Streams: Towards a Colonial Topography

The only way to become what one is, is through one's own resources. It is to assert oneself through the repudiation of others. But this is to destroy one of the essential foundations of self-identity. The attempt to construct oneself in these circumstances can only be a futile and self-destructive gesture of megalomania (Habermas, 1996: 130).



In colonial discourse, it is hardly surprising that borders, boundaries and frontiers should come to assume a place of profound significance. Colonialism is by its very nature a transcending of borders, a crossing of frontiers. Yet it is important to realise that in the colonial context it is not merely physical borders that are of significance. Pippin argues that the essential modern principle is that of absolute freedom (Pippin, 1991: 71). How this principle extends to the colonial experience is fascinating, and reveals to a large extent how a prevalent modern spirit informed and indeed formed the course of colonial expansion. It also serves to reveal how a growing disenchantment with such a modern spirit led to the decline of both projects.

Borders, boundaries and frontiers are not neutral concepts. According to Turner, in his famous "frontier hypothesis", the frontier, which is constituted by the edge of agricultural settlement, is "the meeting point between savagery and civilisation" (Turner, 1921: 3). This is an important definition, for it allows an understanding of what it entails, in the colonial scheme, to cross such a border. A statement such as the one above should make it clear that the concept of borders and frontiers in the colonial scheme has to do with more than mere physical space. They become representative also of a moral landscape,

within which certain acts are sanctioned and others not. The question then becomes: how does the crossing of such borders affect human behaviour? Nietzsche was rather unequivocal in his estimation. He writes in the *Genealogy of Morals*:

these same men who amongst themselves are so strictly constrained by custom, worship, ritual, gratitude, who are so resourceful in consideration, tenderness, loyalty, pride and friendship, when once they step outside their circles become little better than beasts of prey. Once abroad in the wilderness, they revel in the freedom from social constraints and compensate for their long confinement in the quietude of their own community. They revert to the innocence of wild animals: we can imagine them returning from an orgy of murder, arson, rape and torture, jubilant and at peace with themselves (Nietzsche, 1956: 174).

Nietzsche writes towards the end of the 19th century, and as such is a proponent of a more critical and self-conscious view of modernity than had existed during the early eras of colonial exploitation. As such Nietzsche's placement in history is extremely interesting with regards to the succession of novels dealt with here. Writing, as he did, between roughly 1870 and 1890, he spans neatly a gap between the generally optimistic colonial fiction of the preceding era (*Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719, and *The Coral Island*, published in 1858, for example) and the nightmare of colonial affairs first depicted in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1902. The progression of colonial literature seems to be a decline in the sense that the estimation of the possibility of successfully conquering the wild becomes less and less optimistic. Earlier fiction deals with the problem of the individual going beyond borders on a 'civilised' quest in an almost entirely unambiguous way. Yet to an extent there seems to be some consensus by the late 19th and 20th century that, out beyond the borders and boundaries of 'civilised' society, there lurks in even the 'civilised' Western subject a marked propensity for violence and degeneration. It is in this sense that borders come to play an important role in the analysis of colonial fiction.

In physical terms borders are relatively simple. They are lines (often arbitrary) drawn on maps, usually to indicate ownership. Yet psychologically they assume a far greater significance. In the case of one of the earliest colonial fictions, *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe's domination of the island is assured through the act of enclosing the land. This serves to create a microcosm of the civilisation from which Crusoe extends, and also, crucially, allows him to name the land, a decidedly colonial act. It is through the creation of borders, almost by definition arbitrarily, that it becomes possible to, as Coetzee puts it in *Dusklands*, cross "the boundary between wilderness and number" (Coetzee, 1998: 80). It is important to note that 'wilderness' must always be construed in opposition to 'civilization'. As the above quotation makes clear, the wilderness is all that cannot be contained because it cannot be comprehended or categorised. It is for this reason that the wilderness as a metaphor for or extension of the human psyche in the texts under discussion proves to be so important. The 'wilderness' is in itself a term constructed in opposition to 'civilization', and as such is not a neutral term. Rather, it comes to stand for everything (whether internally or externally) that opposes the order that must be the goal of the colonist if he is to remain intact, whether culturally, socially or spiritually. The creation of borders and boundaries is in an important sense indicative of a larger kind of will to power, which seeks to assert control over the wild. Through the creation of borders it is possible to break the land up into manageable tracts, and to thereby impose a greater level of control over the land. (Crusoe's positioning on an island is also important, a fact we shall return to later.) Angrist and Hepler write that "disorganisation may be interpreted as meaning how little the observer knows about the system. If an observer learns something about a physical system, its entropy is decreased, since for him it has become less disorganised" (Angrist & Hepler, 1973: 179). Similarly the enclosing of land so crucial to Crusoe is an act of organisation which decreases the entropy of the system and allows Crusoe a far greater level of control over the land than would have been possible otherwise.

In this sense Coetzee's reference to the boundary between wilderness and number is significant, for it hints at a rationalisation of the wild through the imposition of the tools of rationality (numbers, categories and names). Without the imposition of such categories

the wilderness threatens to consume the colonist, for it can not be contained or differentiated. Importantly, the wilderness is by definition the opposite of what the colonist must strive to represent, and as such it does indeed represent a significant threat to the cultural practices and values of which the colonist must strive, whether successfully like Robinson Crusoe, or unsuccessfully like Kurtz, to be a representative. Turner writes (of the American Frontier) that:

the wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries tools, modes of travel and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilisation and arrays him in the hunting shirt and moccasin. It puts him in the log cabins of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man (Turner, 1921: 4).

And perhaps the greatest strength that the wilderness has is its very inscrutability. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow, gazing at the primordial Congo jungle, says “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” (Conrad, 1994: 51). The emphasis here, as befits a critique of colonialism, is on the irreducible alienness of the environment. In the Congo, as on Golding’s island, the jungle of *Apocalypse Now*, and even the desert of *Blood Meridian*, there is no correlation between the known world and the new one encountered once the boundary of the known has been crossed. Even where a correlation is sought, it is necessarily a Eurocentric one, as is demonstrated by Crusoe’s references to his “country seat” and his “castle” (Defoe, 1985: 173). There is little knowledge of the new environment, and consequently even less understanding. It is this very ignorance, so anathematic to the modern spirit, that so threatens the colonist, and which would reinforce his desire to master the land, to colonise it and thus bring it within the sphere of the known. Yet there is also a moral aspect to this drive. As Marzec puts it, in an essay dealing with the enclosure drive in *Robinson Crusoe*:

It is in this taming of an excessive nomadic drive that we find the connection between imperial identity formation, the land, and capitalism. The ability to enclose will become the saving grace, that which will make the difference between a civilised zeal and a savage rambling (Marzec, 2002: 143).

There is a very close correlation here between the colonial impulse and what has been termed the *horror vacui* of the modern ideal. Just as in the moral sciences, especially towards the end of the 19th century, there was a gradual realisation and horror of the emptiness of the ethical grounding of the new empirical sciences, so there was in the colonial the hatred and fear of any empty, uncommodified space. Marzec writes (of *Heart of Darkness*): “Marlow describes the land as “featureless, “empty” and a “wilderness” that contributes to Kurtz’s madness. Unenclosed land at the edge of empire is discarded as aesthetically and mentally unthinkable” (Marzec, 2002: 134). It is almost as if the two developed in conjunction with one another. At the time of the writing of *Robinson Crusoe*, there was little ground for unease. The prevailing attitude, especially if one looks at the novel itself, seems to be that God is in his heaven, and all is right with the world. Nature is there to be dominated and exploited by those best able to do it. As Larmore puts it, the modern view is that “one has a right to something simply because one wants it a lot: rights are but expressions of strong preferences” (Larmore, 1997: 72). Allied with this philosophy, a necessary one when one is about the business of taking over other people's lands, comes a view of nature that is almost entirely repressive and exploitative. Yet there is a problem with this attitude. Pippin states that “insistence on the domination of nature requires a general view of reason and value that ultimately ‘delegitimizes’ itself, renders unavailable any rational account of the purposes and significance of such control” (Pippin, 1991: 152). Without such a rational account there is a significant danger of descending into what Pippin refers to when he says “much in modernity is a mere self-assertion, a kind of vain celebration of human power” (Pippin, 1991: 26). Without a valid ethical grounding, such a situation holds significant moral peril for the colonist. Without a valid ethical grounding, a descent into an unthinking objectification and ruthless exploitation in the service of self-assertion becomes all too easy, as is aptly demonstrated by the various excesses of Kurtz.

There is also an aspect of hubris contained in such a view of nature. Nietzsche recognises that the attempt by modern man to bend external nature to his will is to a large extent indicative of an attempt to also bring his inner nature completely under his sway. This, in the Nietzschean schematic, is the rise of the Apollonian, the rational. A consequence of this is the repression of the Dionysian aspect of the psyche, the part that revels in the irrational, the out-of-control, the chaotic. He writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

Imagine to yourselves a being like Nature, boundlessly extravagant, boundlessly indifferent, without purpose or consideration, without pity or justice, at once fruitful and barren and uncertain...In your pride you wish to dictate your morals and ideals to Nature, to Nature herself, and to incorporate them therein...With all your love for truth, you have forced yourself so long, so persistently, and with such hypnotic rigidity to see Nature falsely...and to crown all, some unfathomable superciliousness gives you the Bedlamite hope that because *you are able to tyrannise over yourself*...Nature will also allow herself to be tyrannised over (Nietzsche, 1923: 13-14).

The inability to tyrannise over nature awakens in the colonist the urge to greater and greater exertion. Yet with the exertion of will in a 'savage' environment, where acts normally beyond the pale for a civilised Western subject are suddenly no longer frowned upon, there is a very real chance of descending into the kind of madness that typifies many 20th century colonial texts, notably *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord of the Flies* and *Apocalypse Now*. The Dionysian, no longer constrained by the yoke of the Apollonian ideal, finds itself able to run wild, aided in no small degree by the wildness of the very environment itself.

In such a situation the role of morality as it is conventionally viewed becomes somewhat unclear. Marlow, in *Heart of Darkness*, dismisses Kurtz's madness quite easily when he states (of the skulls decorating Kurtz's compound): "they only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting

in him” (Conrad, 1994: 83). Marlow avows of the colonist facing the *horror vacui* of the wilderness that

he must meet that truth with his own true stuff – with his own inborn strength. Principles won’t do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags – rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief...of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe (Conrad, 1994: 52).

Marlow is certainly not a fool, and his grounding belief (apart from a sort of casual male chauvinism and the traditional British ‘stiff upper lip’) is somewhat unclear. Yet he comes through his experience relatively unscathed, despite also feeling the ‘call of the wild’. He states of his experience of the ‘savages’:

Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the slightest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you – you so remote from the night of the first ages – could comprehend (Conrad: 1994: 51-52).

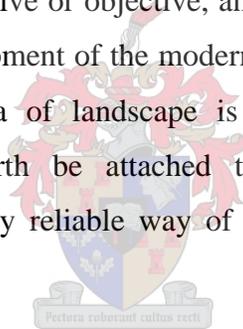
Once outside the confines of civilised space, and therefore deprived of the various sanctioning mechanisms of society, it is all too easy for the colonist to lose himself in the wild. The threat is not merely physical, but psychological also, and one is reminded of Kurtz who would “disappear for weeks; forget himself amongst these people – forget himself” (Conrad, 1994: 81). Beyond the boundaries of Western civilisation and the known, in a landscape that fascinates through its very emptiness, all sorts of things become possible that would have been unthinkable within the sphere of the known, of the mapped.

According to Hirsch and O’Hanlon, “the purest form of potentiality is emptiness itself” (Hirsch & O’Hanlon, 1995: 4). And there is a definite fascination with this space, this potentiality, as well as a very present danger; the danger of, like Kurtz, forgetting

yourself in the “heavy, mute spell of the wilderness” (Conrad, 1994: 94). Coetzee sums up this peril well in *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee* when he writes :

In the wild I lose my sense of boundaries. This is a consequence of space and solitude. The operation of space is thus: the five senses stretch out from the body they inhabit, but four stretch into a vacuum. The ear cannot hear, the nose cannot smell, the skin cannot feel...Only the eyes have power. The eyes are free, they reach out to the horizon all around. Nothing is hidden from the eyes. As the other senses grow numb or dumb my eyes flex and extend themselves (Coetzee, 1998: 78-79).

This emphasis on the importance of vision is no accident. Starved of intelligible sensual input in a space that is totally alien, the eyes become the primary means of interpreting the world. Vision, whether subjective or objective, and the ‘invention’ of landscape, had a great deal to do with the development of the modern ethos. Hirsch and O’Hanlon write that “the emergence of the idea of landscape is further connected to the central importance that would henceforth be attached to picturing, mapping, mirroring, representing the world as the only reliable way of knowing it” (Hirsch & O’Hanlon, 1995: 8).

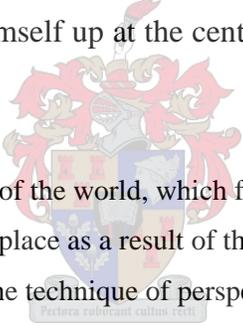


In a very real sense the imposition of boundaries and borders become a means of increasing the organisation of a system. Similarly, the invention of landscape as a way of interacting with and understanding the world becomes a means of reliable mapping that allows the individual to orientate himself in the world. Lemaire writes that

the subject freed himself by distancing himself from the world; he became autonomous by making one hidden dimension of himself visible and calculable as landscape. With the aid of and via the visible landscape he freed himself from his attachment to ‘mythical space’, and thus, as the observer of a new and profane space he recollected himself from his scatteredness in the world back to the unity of his consciousness of self (Lemaire, 1996: 30).

In a sense, we are back to the Cartesian *cogito*, albeit in a different form. And just like the *cogito*, the implications of this essentially solipsistic outlook would come to hold serious problems for the development of the modern consciousness.

Perhaps the most significant of these has to do with the implications of the relationship between subject and object that is implied by the invention of landscape. Lemaire writes that the appearance of landscape is “an expression of the subjection of the world space to the calculating and all-seeing human, as well as a sign of a certain remove between man and milieu, of a loss of intimacy and of the obvious, direct, belonging of the person to his landscape” (Lemaire, 1996: 30-31). This loss of intimacy is indicative of the movement from a subjective, religious, and mythically based understanding of the land towards a new, profane sphere. The mythical space is one in which there is clear recourse to a higher authority, and a religious grounding for ethical action is possible. With the invention of landscape man sets himself up at the centre of the world. Lemaire states that the



public revelation of the world of the world, which finds its strongest expression in landscape, could only take place as a result of the invention of perspective... Thus the hidden principle of the technique of perspective is revealed as perspectivism: the idea that all perspectives reveal a particular truth about the world, and no single position can be considered an absolute position (Lemaire, 1996: 52).

This is the root of modern relativism. Once no single position, whether physically or morally, can be construed as an absolute position, but rather as an extension of the principle of subjectivity, it is no longer possible to view the world in anything other but a light in which the subject is considered the originator of all perspective and values. In such a scheme the objective world must necessarily be relegated to an inferior status, or at least a status subservient to that of the subject. Habermas writes that:

A gaze that objectifies and examines, that takes things apart analytically, that monitors and penetrates everything, gains a power that is structurally

formative...It is the gaze of the rational subject who has lost all merely intuitive bonds with his environment and torn down all the bridges built up of intersubjective agreement, and for whom in his monological isolation, other subjects are only accessible as objects of nonparticipant observation (Habermas, 1996: 245).

The positing of the self as the absolute object carries with it what Marzec refers to as “a significant ontological dread” (Marzec, 2002: 137). Lemaire writes that the “profane adventure of western man makes him vulnerable precisely by making him autonomous; without reliance on a mythical time/space he is threatened with becoming a victim of the suddenly independent world of things” (Lemaire, 1991: 54). Within the borders of civilisation, such a possibility is worrying enough. Out beyond the fringes of society, it assumes an even darker aspect.

Nietzsche writes in *Daybreak* “that only when he has attained a final knowledge of all things will man have come to know himself. For things are but the boundaries of man” (Nietzsche, 1982: 32). This is a kind of logic of exclusion: only by excluding everything that I am not can I come to a final realisation of what I am. This kind of logic has two important consequences. Firstly, there is once again a fine line between such an argument and solipsism. The inescapable conclusion of both modern philosophy and modern art seems to be that man is irredeemably alone in the world. There is no longer any recourse to a God to provide a meaningful grounding for ethics. The individual finds himself, like the colonist, irrevocably cast back upon himself, and upon his contingency in the world. Without recourse to a mythical time-space he must learn to establish his own values in the world. Habermas writes that, “in modernity...religious life, state and society as well as science, morality and art are transformed into just so many embodiments of the principle of subjectivity” (Habermas, 1996: 18).

A more troubling consequence of this kind of reasoning has to do with the possibility of knowledge. If one accepts the logic of exclusion, then for complete knowledge of self it is necessary to first gain complete knowledge of everything that is outside the self. In a sense, this is what the rationalist tries to do. In addition, failure to establish such

knowledge results in a kind of ontological dilemma, where the identity that should be absolute is incomplete. Judge Holden, in *Blood Meridian* states that “the smallest crumb can devour us. Any smallest thing beyond man’s knowing. Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth” (McCarthy, 1989: 198). Contained in this impossible task are two motivating factors, especially in the colonial context.

The first has to do with power, and with what Nietzsche would term the will to power. Poole writes that in modernity, “the primary goal is power: the individual must take as an overriding end the pursuit of the means to pursue other ends. He must seek, as relentlessly and yet as unsuccessfully as those in Hobbes’ state of nature, power after power” (Poole, 1994: 141). It is easy to see what he means when he speaks of the “God-like status man has arrogated to himself as the privileged subject and object of knowledge” (Poole, 1994: 129). Of course, once god is dead, and mankind no longer has any divine authority to invest with such powers, it makes sense to simply ascribe them to yourself, and to thereby try to grasp at ultimate autonomy. Habermas writes that the modern period “is defined by the fact that man becomes the centre and measure of all things. Man is the *subjectum*, that which lies at the bottom of all beings, that is, at the bottom of all objectification and representation” (Habermas, 1996: 133). It is in this context that one can begin to understand what Marzec means when he refers to the appearance in the colonising power of a “*significant ontological dread*” (Marzec, 2002: 137).

It is this dread that forms the second motivating factor for the Western subject cast suddenly adrift in the world of pure potentiality. This is especially true of characters such as Robinson Crusoe, and the figure of Kurtz (in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*), all of whom operate in isolation, far beyond the boundaries of Western civilisation and who consequently do not have the easy access to a rule-bound rationality that could be said to be the basis for Western society. Without recourse to the meaning-giving structures of a social or religious authority it is up to the individual to create his own moral values and to thereby create himself. Habermas writes that

the compulsion toward rational domination of externally impinging natural forces has set the individual upon the course of a formative process that heightens productive forces without limit for the sake of sheer self-preservation, but lets the forces of reconciliation that transcend mere self-preservation atrophy. The permanent sign of enlightenment is domination over an objectified external nature and a repressed internal nature (Habermas, 1996: 110).

In *Robinson Crusoe* the protagonist's domination over the land is relatively easily achieved. Moreover, Crusoe works very hard to establish the land as English land, so that he may form a Eurocentric relation with it (Marzec, 2002: 131) As for Kurtz, however, when there is no easy domination over external nature and even the question of self-preservation (whether in a physical or psychological sense) is in doubt, it appears that the repressive hold of the Apollonian begins to weaken and to allow the Dionysian more influence. In a sense, this is what happens to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, aptly illustrated by the report to the International society for the Repression of Savage Customs which, ironically, Kurtz was working on while in the Congo. Beginning in the loftiest tones, it states that "by the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded" and goes on to illustrate just how difficult such an exercise in pure will can be to conduct morally in the famous closing words "Exterminate all the brutes" (Conrad, 1994: 72).

It is this context that Nietzsche develops his idea of the will to power. He writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

supposing that nothing is given as real but our world of desires and passions, that we cannot sink or rise to any other 'reality' but just that of our impulses... are we not permitted to make the attempt and to ask the question whether this which is 'given' does not suffice... for the understanding of our so-called mechanical (or material) world? (Nietzsche, 1923: 51).

As the quote illustrates, there emerged gradually a sense of discontent with the ethical grounding of the new empirical sciences. This led to various unsuccessful attempts to create a binding secular ethics. Yet in a very real sense empirical science was helpless when it came to the formulation of ethical standards. The crucial problem for modernity and morality lay in the former's absolute espousal of the principle of objectivity, thus rendering unavailable anything not empirically 'true'. Unfortunately, this shift away from the theological scheme (based on religious authority) to the rational scheme results in a breakdown of previous meaning-giving structures. The total recourse to science, and to empirically verifiable facts that characterised the modern era, as opposed to the authority of religion that preceded it, led to a number of significant changes in the world picture of the modern psyche. Larmore writes that: "modern thought is characterised by an increasingly disenchanted view of the world" (Larmore, 1997: 190). He argues that the shift from the older, theological concepts of 'cosmos' and 'creation', to 'universe' and 'world', led to the ultimate rationalisation and subjectivisation of the 'beautiful', and more significantly, of the 'good' (*ibid.*).

Such a shift from a theological to an empirical grounding for values has serious implications for the modern subject. No longer able to base morality on a religiously based idea of the 'good' or the 'moral', Western society would henceforth be forced to find a grounding for such values elsewhere. Nor does it help that the natural world does not easily conform to the ethical formulas based upon a religious ideal of, for example, altruism and mercy. Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "the world seen from within, the world defined and designated according to its 'intelligible character' – it would simply be 'Will to Power' and nothing else" (Nietzsche, 1923: 52). The point, of course, is that the operations of the world in its 'intelligible character' has very little in it to reflect anything that one might refer to as a moral character. This effect is even more pronounced once one is removed from known moral values and cast into an entirely alien milieu. In the wild, especially, the operations of the real world seem to reflect a kind of relentless dialectic where might is right and winner takes all. It is for this reason, amongst others, that attempts such as Kant's to create a binding secular morality did not come to any kind of successful conclusion. As Nietzsche puts it in *Daybreak*, "he [Kant] believed

in morality, not because it is demonstrated in nature and history, but because nature and history continually contradict it” (Nietzsche, 1982: 3). In *Beyond Good and Evil* he asks:

Does it not seem that there is a hatred of the virgin forest and of the tropics amongst moralists? And that the “tropical man” must be discredited at all costs, whether as disease and deterioration of mankind, or as his own hell and self-torture? And why? In favour of the “temperate zones”? In favour of the temperate men? The “moral”? The mediocre? (Nietzsche, 1923: 118).

This linking of the moral with the mediocre in the works of Nietzsche was to have profound influence of the progression of much of later colonial literature. It is only through rising above the limitations of conventional morality that the Western subject can take charge of his/her own life and assume control over his/her own fate. Not to do so is to surrender to the outside influences of ‘herd morality’, to lose one’s integrity of action and to simply act conventionally. In contrast, the “tropical man” seems to be the subject who, through attempting to act originally, to act according to the lights of one’s own reason, grasps at autonomy, attempts complete control. When faced with the spectre of Kurtz, and even of the boys in *Lord of the Flies*, it would indeed seem that such spontaneity of action, a spontaneity untempered by the precepts of Western rationality, would come to hold seriously negative associations for colonial fictions. One text that seems to be almost entirely founded on this premise is McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*. The Judge, a kind of pre-Nietzschean superman, states that:

the man who believes that the secrets of the world are forever hidden lives in mystery and fear. Superstition will drag him down. The rain will erode the deeds of his life. But that man who sets himself the task of singling out the thread of order from the tapestry will by the decision alone have taken charge of the world and it is only by such taking charge that he will effect a way to dictate the terms of his own fate (McCarthy, 1989: 199).

The will to power is not a neutral concept. Contained within the borders of a civilised society, with its various sanctioning and controlling mechanisms, there is a possibility

that the will to power will be able to be contained and channelled into positive force. In fact, one could argue that this is the foundation and most important function of society. Even reason, the basis for modern, Western science, is not exempt. Habermas writes that “reason is *nothing else* than power, than the will to power, which it so radiantly conceals” (Habermas, 1996: 56). Yet reason, once so construed, is largely powerless, even within society, to temper the anti-social desires of certain individuals. As Larmore puts it, “although individuals may restrain their wants for the sake of civil peace, such compromises will be inherently unstable, and no moral blame can attach to the ‘superman’ who casts social decency aside in order to indulge his exorbitant desires” (Larmore, 1997: 72). In the course of colonial literature there are a number of such supermen who, through a realisation of the *horror vacui* of the modern world, seek to do just that. Kurtz is an example of one such character who, through this attempt, goes mad. A more rational (if hardly more sane) version of the Kurtzian character is Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* although, significantly, he is able to absorb the contradictions that are the undoing of Kurtz. As the Judge puts it (almost parroting the character of Kurtz in Coppola’s *Heart of Darkness*-inspired *Apocalypse Now*) “only that man who has offered himself up entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at least that it speaks to his innermost heart, only that man can dance” (McCarthy, 1989: 331). Habermas writes that “only unthinking fear and horror could offer resistance in the face of boundless unbridledness” (Habermas, 1996: 232). The man who is able to rise above such fear and horror would undoubtedly be a sort of superman, but such an effort of will can have serious implications.

Remaining with Nietzschean typology, Habermas writes of

the Bacchanalian traits of an orgiastic will to power – the creative and exuberant activity of a mighty will manifested as much in play, dance, rapture and giddiness as in the kinds of stimulation aroused by destruction, by viewing pain that incites cruelty and pleasure, by witnessing violent death...in these explosive stimuli are joined the countervailing tendencies of longing and of horrified withdrawal into paralysing fascination. Loathing, disgust and horror fuse with lust, attraction and

craving. The consciousness exposed to these rending ambivalences enters a sphere beyond comprehension (Habermas, 1996: 100).

It is precisely the exposure to these rending ambivalences that, especially in later colonial literature, tends to drive the protagonist mad. Once removed from society, there is indeed the temptation to shrug off the cloak of civilisation and to revert to an older, more orgiastic and atavistic method of interacting with the phenomenal world. In fact, in a savage landscape where there is little knowledge of the environment and consequently little hope of understanding or acting meaningfully towards it, it may even be the case that such a reversion makes a kind of psychological sense. Unable to interpret the world through the filter of rational explanation, the urge to revert to a more primary interaction with the world and its inhabitants can be said to be a way of reconciling oneself to such an environment.

Once the world has been construed in such a light, the operations of borders and boundaries come to play an even more important role in the maintenance of society and of the colonial ideal. The very crossing of borders comes to play on the psyche in a way that could not have been the case in an earlier, theological scheme where the world in its entirety was seen as belonging to God. In the modern age, man would henceforth be called upon to accept greater and greater agency, and with it greater and greater responsibility for his actions. In this scheme the world is the way that man experiences it, and no longer 'given' by God. As Lemaire puts it:

[the subject] will come to understand himself as the origin of his own social orders, as well as of his own morals and customs, as arbiter of his own fate, as determiner of his own history. Finally, and with this he grasps at full autonomy, he will learn to regard himself as creator of his own God, and thereby conclude the death of God (Lemaire, 1996: 73).

This realisation has profound implications for the interpretation of borders and boundaries, both physical and psychological. It seems that the problem is not so much the crossing of borders into 'savagery', but rather in crossing the borders back into

civilisation, an experience consistent with the experiences of Vietnam War veterans, struggling to adapt back to civilian life (Bradshaw & Ohlde, 1993: online). It also has a significant effect on the interpretation of landscape henceforth. Mitchell states that

landscape might be seen more profitably as something like the dreamwork of imperialism, unfolding in its movements in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance (Novak, 1995: xiii).

Perhaps the greatest difference between this view and the older, theological view is that henceforth any utopias that might be encountered would have to be, almost by definition, secular utopias. This is perhaps what Mitchell means when he speaks of the “dreamwork of imperialism”. Landscape comes to represent, not so much an accurate perspective on the world, but rather an idealised version of it, a version consistent with imperial designs. It is in this sense that the utopian fantasies of, especially, earlier works such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island* and the distinctly more problematic depictions in later literature, come to stand in opposition to one another. In so doing, they set up the tensions that will eventually result in the nightmare imaginings of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

In contrast to earlier, theologically-based texts, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, where religion serves as a legitimating factor and the presence of God to the protagonist is never questioned, but even becomes a central factor in his ‘re-conversion’ Christianity, in the empirical, rational world, there is no longer hope for God’s intervention. In fact, even the fact of God’s existence would come to be doubted, with serious implications for the Western subject’s interaction with the phenomenal world. With reference to the Mitchell quotation above, one might argue that in a world seen to be ruled by God the kind of “unresolved ambivalence” contained in landscape is an impossibility, because as long as God, rather than the subject, is seen as the centre of existence, ambivalence towards landscape is unthinkable – it is God’s creation, and nothing else. It is with the ‘death of God’ philosophy made famous by Nietzsche that serious problems arise in constructing a unified vision of the world. Western travellers, with their newly acquired focus on

rationality, and with the use of empirical science and its consequent technology, would henceforth be solely responsible for creating an ideal world.

This brings us once again dangerously close to the idea of hubris. Throughout colonial literature one encounters individuals who strive through their labour (of whatever sort) to bring order to the flow of human experiences, to make sense out of the world by rational means. It also implies a privileging of the rational and a denial of anything that is not empirically observable. Here the invention of perspective, so crucial to mapping and to the whole concept of landscape, comes to play a significant part in the development of modern science. Lemaire writes that microscopes and telescopes would “destroy the trusted vision of the world and an enmity would arise between immediately observable nature, and nature as experienced through instruments and experiments” (Lemaire, 1996: 37).

This enmity would prove to be very dangerous for the colonist, cast adrift in a foreign land. The focus on efficiency, on the empirically verifiable, also necessarily excludes concepts such as “the good” or “the moral” which can henceforth not be categorised in anything other than utilitarian terms. Should such terms come to be synonymous with efficiency and production, rather than, say, altruism and charity, there is no rational basis to oppose such classification. The enmity between immediately observable nature and nature as observed through instruments will also hold serious implications, for it becomes the basis, as already mentioned, of perspectivism, where no position can be construed as absolute. Pippin speaks of the “the typical modern experience that ‘all that is solid melts into the air’ or ‘the centre does not hold’ ” (Pippin, 1991: 156). The earlier fictions dealt with here (*Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island*) to an extent, dodge the issue through geographical positioning. By placing their protagonists on uninhabited islands they are able to effect a kind of confidence trick. Islands have the topographical advantage that they are by definition centres. They allow an instinctive sense of belonging in the sense that their isolation in the sea makes them a defined unit. It is necessary for the castaways to further delineate their property (to a greater or lesser extent), but they never have cause to doubt where that property ends. It is far harder for someone on an island to feel

hopelessly adrift in the world (and after being hopelessly adrift in the sea it is no doubt doubly easy). In this sense the use of topographical locations would come to play an important part in the development of the colonial genre.

Significantly, alien topographical locations carry with them an inherent risk of danger, due precisely to the lack of any significant knowledge about them. In the context of this threat, and of the potentiality of space, topographical location becomes crucial to the colonial genre. Islands clearly have a topographical advantage in this sense, especially for earlier, more optimistically minded narratives like *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island*. Islands have a number of salient features that make them prime candidates for the creation of a secular utopia, or even for the representation of western subjugation of a savage land. Their very boundedness in the ocean makes them appealing because to a large extent it does away with the need to create external boundaries.

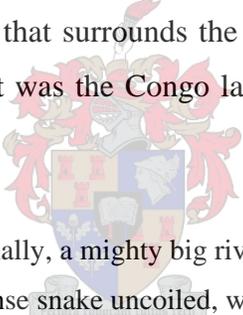
Islands have the crucial advantage for the colonist that he is able, at least in the older colonial scheme, to completely explore and eventually subjugate the island. The issue of exploration in itself is important, for it is the primary means of alleviating the dread of the unknown that is implicit in the discovery of an alien land. It is this, allied with much work in the way of fencing and enclosing, that allows Crusoe to state quite confidently of his island that “the whole country was my own meer property; so that I had the undoubted right of dominion. Secondly, my people were perfectly subjugated: I was absolute lord and law-giver; they all owed their lives to me” (Defoe, 1985: 240-241). To an extent both *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island* are reflective of what Larmore refers to when he says “the modern view...is that one has a right to something simply because one wants it a lot: rights are but the expressions of strong preferences” (Larmore, 1997: 72). Significantly, in earlier colonial discourse, this attribute of modern thought is viewed in an almost entirely positive light. Neither Crusoe nor the boys on *The Coral Island* seem to have any doubts about their rights to the land, a point we shall return to in later chapters.

Despite their initially positive, idyllic aspect islands can also come to hold a kind of darker fascination, especially for later writers. One need think no further than Golding's *Lord of the Flies* or Garland's more recent *The Beach* to realise that islands are not, especially in later eras, to be regarded as unambiguously as they are in *Robinson Crusoe* or *The Coral Island*. In part, this condition is a consequence of the very boundedness of islands, their extreme isolation. In *Lord of the Flies* the party of schoolboys who crash on the island are left to fend for themselves without the interference of any adults. This results, in contrast to the jingoistic bravery of the boys on *The Coral Island*, in a much darker experience. Crucially, the boys are not able to rise, in the approved British fashion, above the dictates of savagery. While bravely affirming that "we're English, and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right thing" (Golding, 1979: 55), the boys soon prove unable to do practically anything, and the island soon descends into a kind of Hobbesian state of nature. In contrast to earlier narratives, where the islands are seen in an almost entirely positive light, in later narratives unbridled nature comes to hold a far fiercer and more disquieting aspect.

In *Heart of Darkness* also this aspect of wild nature is felt, both by the narrator Marlow, but far more profoundly (perhaps solely due to length of acquaintance) by Kurtz. In *Heart of Darkness*, one of the earliest colonial novels to deal explicitly with the possible negative influence of wild nature on the colonist, the topographical location is, of course, the Congo River. Rivers are interesting in the colonial scheme for two main reasons. The first is that they are by their very nature natural boundaries. Yet travel along them, as experienced by both Marlow and his modern descendant, Willard in *Apocalypse Now*, is fraught with peril precisely because they represent travel *along* and not *across* a boundary line. One is reminded of Kurtz's radio broadcast in *Apocalypse Now*, where he states "I once saw a crawling, along the edge of a straight razor. That is my dream. That is my nightmare. Crawling, slithering along the edge of a straight razor...and surviving" (Coppola, 1979). Returning to the Nietzschean dichotomy of the Apollonian/Dionysian one could say that in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* the river represents the soul perilously attempting to steer a course right on the edge of reason. As such the boat, the means of remaining at a certain remove from the environment, becomes

representative also of the colonist's civilised descent. As Willard puts it: "Never get out the boat. Absolutely goddamn right. Unless you were going all the way" (Coppola, 1979). Departing the boat, in the colonial scheme, means leaving the last trappings of civilisation completely behind. In a way it becomes representative of leaving the light of the Apollonian and entering what Gide calls "the nightmare of the forest" (Gide, 1937: 98).

While the river does represent a border, travel along it also implies an eventual departure. The point is that at some stage the traveller will *have* to land, will be forced to encounter at first hand what is observable, from the boat, only as a vaguely threatening, alien landscape. It is also a means of motion towards what, in the plot of both *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*, would come to figure in the minds of the narrators as some sort of final reckoning with the Dionysian spirit of the wild. Marlow is frank about his fascination with the emptiness that surrounds the Congo. Speaking of poring over a map depicting the blank space that was the Congo late in the 19th century, he describes the river thus:



there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird – a silly little bird (Conrad, 1994: 12).

This fascination has much to do with the operations of uncharted wilderness on the human psyche. Marlow describes the forest thus:

Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging the bank against the stream, crept the begrimed steamboat, like a sluggish beetle crawling along the floor of a lofty portico. It made you feel very small, very lost, and yet it was not all-together depressing, that feeling (Conrad, 1994: 50).

This feeling of being lost in landscape has much to do with the fascination of a final colonial topography, the desert. In terms of colonial literature, in *Blood Meridian* the desert comes to represent pure undefined space. Significantly, it is also a space that to a very large degree defies definition. The first significant aspect of deserts lies in the fact that they are simply too big to be effectively charted and explored. This in itself holds a certain fascination, the fascination of losing yourself in the pure potentiality of ‘empty’ space. Yet uncharted, unknown space can be a perilous environment. Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* states: “This desert upon which so many have been broken is vast and calls for largeness of heart but it is also ultimately empty. It is hard, it is barren. Its very nature is stone” (McCarthy, 1989: 330).

The desert becomes, in the scheme of *Blood Meridian*, representative of the *horror vacui* with which modern man is fated to live. Yet, significantly, it also allows man to assert control over his fate. And the terms of fate in the war-like desert environment the characters inhabit are very strict indeed. As the Judge states, in phrasing that is remarkably Nietzschean in tone: “Moral law is an invention for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favour of the weak. Historical law subverts it at every turn...decisions of life and death, of what shall be and what not, beggar all questions of right. In elections of this magnitude are all lesser ones subsumed, moral, spiritual, natural” (McCarthy, 1998: 250). This, in fact, is the root cause of the *horror vacui* with which the colonist, trying to survive in the wilderness in an age increasingly without recourse to a god, would be faced.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche writes: “Few are made for independence – it is a privilege of the strong. And he who attempts it, having the complete right to it but without being compelled to, thereby proves that he is not only strong but daring to the point of recklessness” (Nietzsche, 1923: 110). Mottram speaks of the man who

lives close to death and maiming in that region of pornographic thrill at the body’s vulnerability to breakage and extinction. The villain and hero edge into each other at the point where stoicism and endurance demonstrate how a man

can take it, live beyond the worst, and anticipate the inevitable by mocking its approach (Quoted in Campbell, 1997: 58).

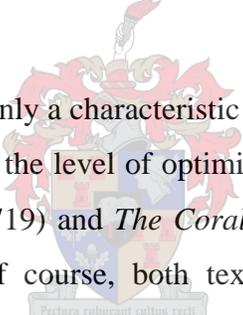
Often, it seems as if the colonial environment provides some sort of testing ground for modern man. For Crusoe and the boys on *The Coral Island* it is a test of their ability to impose their civilisation and religious beliefs on foreign lands. Kurtz strives to prove himself “an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and the devil knows what else” (Conrad, 1994: 36). The Judge in *Blood Meridian* strives for complete autonomy, complete freedom, to thereby approach the level of a deity, to prove himself “no godserver but a god himself” (McCarthy, 1989: 250). Yet progressively, the estimation of the possibility of such responsibility being handled in a way even remotely mirroring conventional morality becomes less and less positive. Gradually the will to power that was so successfully concealed under Christian and other rhetoric in earlier works comes to the fore, with profound consequences for the adventure of man in the now profane space of the unending potentiality of the new world.



Chapter 3

The Divine Naivete of *Robinson Crusoe* and the Colonial Imperative

Whenever we encounter “naivete” in art we are face to face with the ripest fruit of the Apollonian culture, which must always triumph first over titans, kill monsters, and overcome the sombre contemplation of actuality, the intense susceptibility to suffering, by means of illusions strenuously and zestfully maintained (Nietzsche, 1956: 31).



Naivete in colonial literature is mainly a characteristic of the earlier phases of the colonial movement. It is interesting to note the level of optimism with which early (and seminal) texts such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *The Coral Island* (1858) approach the entire issue of the isolated colonist. Of course, both texts deal with the issue somewhat obliquely, in the sense that in neither text is the initial colonisation of the island deliberate. Rather, both Robinson Crusoe and the boys on the coral island are stranded by shipwreck on their respective islands, and then forced to fend for themselves. What is relevant to the present discussion, however, is the extent to which their endeavours are successful, and also, the extent to which they are able to not merely survive, but to impose their will actively, not only on the virgin land, but also on the various ‘savages’ they encounter there.

Despite a similarity in theme and setting, there are several important differences between the two books. Of the two, the earlier, *Robinson Crusoe*, is perhaps the more influential, an influence made clear in Rousseau’s prescription of the book for the education of Emile (Schaeffer, 2002: 121). Perhaps the most important initial question that requires explication is the very claim that the text is naïve, and to this end it is necessary to

provide a working definition of the term. In the *Oxford Concise Dictionary*, 'naive' is defined firstly as "artless, innocent, unaffected", secondly as "foolishly credulous" and lastly as "(of art etc.) produced in a sophisticated society but deliberately rejecting conventional expertise" (Oxford Concise Dictionary, 1995: 903). While all three definitions are helpful and illuminating, it is in particular to the second one that we must turn for analysis.

Robinson Crusoe has come to be regarded as one of the greatest classics in modern times, and as such has achieved a kind of timeless appeal. Yet it is extremely important for the context of this discussion to view the text as a very specific product of its own time. Set during the very early stages of colonial expansion, the text deals with a shipwrecked sailor, loosely based on the experiences of a real-life cast-away, Alexander Selkirk, stranded on a desert island, and forced for the first time to deal with the contingencies of life on his own, and, importantly, in isolation from the society from which he has originated. This is not an innocent strategy. This is not to say that the book harbours any nefarious imperialistic designs. It is merely to state that, to a large extent, the text is an extension of a larger societal strategy for the depiction of the possibility of control over and subjugation of a foreign land by the Western subject, and by extension, Western civilisation. It is, one might say, an early example and explication of the 'myth of progress' which informed and indeed served as moral justification for much of the colonial project.

McInelly writes that

Crusoe gradually learns how to assert himself over land and people. In short, the colonial setting facilitates Crusoe's individualism as he comes to recognise the unique place he occupies as a British Protestant in a world in which he is surrounded by religious and cultural others (McInelly, 2003: 2).

Important also in this regard, and a point to which we shall return later, is Crusoe's espousal of the capitalist drive. Poole describes this as "the drive to transform, to create,

to control and organise, and to transcend limits” (Poole, 1994: 42). In a sense, this is exactly what Crusoe’s endeavours on the island are all about. In fact, his entire sojourn on the island is spent trying to achieve these goals, and as such, *Robinson Crusoe* comes to represent not merely a template for the colonial project, but also for the kind of capitalistic drive that underlies it. Not for nothing does Marx devote part of his work *Capital* to explication and analysis of the book (Defoe, 1985: 15). It is in its depiction of the creation of a successful capitalist society, with the means of production squarely in the hands of the ruling class (i.e. Crusoe himself) that the book serves as a template for Western domination over foreign lands.

In his introduction to the Penguin edition of the book, Ross states that

He [Crusoe] is reduced to first principles and is able for the first time in his life to generalise his ideas (indeed forced to do so)...Starting as a heedless young man, who had “never handled a tool in my life”, he goes through in a few years all the long history of human technological inventiveness, solving almost every problem from the beginning (Ross, 1985: 17).

No doubt he is generously aided by luck along the way, yet all the same Ross’ reference to ‘first principles’ is illuminating, and immediately reminds one of the rationalist, scientific mode of thought that underlies Crusoe’s seemingly boundless inventiveness. It reminds one also of the triumph of the Apollonian ideal referred to in the epigraph, and here already the kind of naivete that is evident throughout the book begins to become clear. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes “Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, there are valuations, or to speak more plainly, physiological demands, for the maintenance of a definite mode of life” (Nietzsche, 1923: 8). What then, in the case of *Robinson Crusoe*, are these valuations, these physiological demands? What is the definite mode of life being referred to? And, perhaps most importantly, what leads one in this context to characterise the gist of the book as ‘naïve’?

Crusoe descends from a “successful, mercantile civilisation” (Defoe, 1985: 21). As such he is very much a product of his time, and much of the time spent on the island is spent

trying to subjugate it, in its entirety, to his will. Ross goes as far as stating that “Crusoe sets out to subdue his new environment, to construct in his tropical island a standard of living (even a kind of living) equivalent to life in his native England” (Ross, 1985: 17). The mode of life he tries to re-construct is that of the ordered, rational society he has left behind him, and his means of achieving it, also, are very much based on the rules and mores of the society of which he is a product. It is no coincidence that this very same society was at the time engaged in the early phases of what would later become a colonial project that would span the globe. Essential to such a project is justification, whether moral, spiritual or financial, and it is in all these spheres that *Robinson Crusoe* provides a kind of working example of the possibility of progress in savage lands. McInelly writes that

Defoe’s debt to the colonial context takes place at the level of representing anticipations and premonitions of colonialism. Any influence he had on the colonial mentality is much more precisely that – a mentality – than a practice conducted by actual agents in history (McInelly, 2003: 4).

This description of the effects of *Robinson Crusoe* on subsequent colonial enterprise is telling, for it begins to illustrate the effects of the book, both on later colonial literature, as well as on the colonial enterprise itself. Further, it aids in the typification of the book as naïve because it helps to point us to a larger narrative strategy that underlies and indeed informs the course of the book’s narrative. Returning to the chapter’s epigraph, one is reminded of the assertion that Apollonian culture must always first conquer titans and defeat monsters before it is possible for this culture to attain the kind of over-arching legitimacy that it strives for. One must also not forget Nietzsche’s reference to “illusions strenuously and zestfully maintained” for it is here that we can come face to face with the “foolishly credulous” aspect of the text that lends itself to the classification of the book as a whole as naïve.

It is important not to regard naivete in this sense as necessarily a negative aspect. Rather, it should be examined as a kind of legitimating context for the novel, and the illusions

strenuously maintained in the book would in fact not come to be seriously questioned and examined until nearly two centuries later, with the publication of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In contrast to this later text, no ambiguities are ascribed to either the landscape, or to the main character and his eventual interactions with the 'savages' he encounters. A similar lack of ambiguity is present in Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, which once again goes unchallenged until the writing of Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, almost a century after the publication of the original text. The naivete of *Robinson Crusoe* is of a sort aimed at the exposition of the possibility of the imposition of control and ultimately the attainment of complete hegemony over the land and its inhabitants. McInelly states:

In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe transforms colonialism through the power of fictional representation into the adventures of a single man who masters an island, his native companion, and himself. His formal realism works to enfold the myths of psychological and economic self-sufficiency (McInelly, 2003: 3).

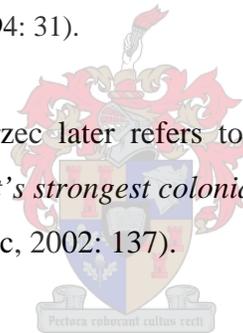
Once again we are in the domain of the mythical, and once again these myths serve to form a legitimating structure for what Crusoe strives to achieve on his island. The myths of psychological and economic self-sufficiency are essential to the novel, and also, on a broader level, to the ideal of colonialism itself. In fact, such myths serve as a legitimating structure for the entire colonial undertaking, for without belief in them there is little hope of success for the Western subject removed from the milieu of society and forced to reinvent society on his own terms. It is to an extent these myths, which would come to be seriously questioned in later texts such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord of the Flies*, that are representative of the foolishly credulous aspect of the text that aids in its typification as 'naïve'. And perhaps the first and most meaningful act that initiates the process of the establishment of such self-sufficiency (i.e. psychological and economic) is that of enclosure.

In an article entitled *Enclosures, Colonisation and the Robinson Crusoe Syndrome*, Marzec writes of "the generalised fear of the land" (Marzec, 2002: 137). This is reminiscent of Lemaire's statement in *The Philosophy of Landscape* that "the adventure

in this new space of the unending world brought/brings with it the risk of failure: who could guarantee that the earth would not end somewhere beyond the horizon, what barbarous people might not attack the western travellers?" (Lemaire, 1996: 31). The Western travellers are, by definition, not part of the landscape. They are, in fact, wholly Other, whether culturally, or racially. It is no wonder, then, that given the dominance of Western technology, and specifically weaponry, over the 'primitive' cultures that they encounter, that Western subjects should seek to impose their control to as large an extent as possible over landscape that is threatening to completely subsume all that they are. Berman, quoted in Poole, states that

to be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us
adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and,
at the same time, threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know,
everything we are (Poole, 1994: 31).

It is in part this threat that Marzec later refers to when he speaks of "*the onerous presence, at the heart of the planet's strongest colonial order, of a significant ontological dread*" [original emphasis] (Marzec, 2002: 137).



Crusoe is subject to this dread, perhaps more so due to his extreme isolation, and indeed cannot rest until he has found some means of assuaging it. After building his shelter, he states "And so I was completely fenced, and fortified, as I thought, from all the world and consequently slept secure in the night, which otherwise I could not have done" (Defoe, 1985: 77). The problem for Crusoe is precisely that he is not a "natural man". Rather, he is "a social man in isolation" (Schaeffer, 2002: 121). As such he is to a large extent ignorant of his surroundings, and afraid of them. This fear, as Marzec states, is both a generalised physical and a more specific ontological dread. Furthermore, and psychologically more significant, he is, as a social man in isolation, suddenly bereft of all that gives him a grounding for his belief not just in the phenomenal world, but in himself. One is reminded once again of one of the dilemmas of the Cartesian *cogito*: the characteristic modern problem of solipsism.

Damisch writes that

in the quickly grasped solitude of his island, this man, reduced for the first time to the state of “nature”, will not be able to flatter himself...of being assured of his existence. To the contrary, he will be forced to guarantee it by all sorts of bastions, fortifications and defences that will be able to protect him even during sleep, in order subsequently, by dint of caution, economy and material provisioning, to arrange a future (Damisch, 1998: online).

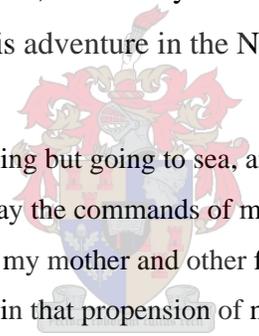
The erection of barriers, fortifications, and fences becomes, for Robinson Crusoe, of far more than just practical importance. Rather, they reveal a deep-rooted need to assert himself over the landscape of which he has unwillingly become a part. Marzec writes

Uncontrollably thrown into the space of uncultivated land, he is unable to immediately establish a frame of reference, which triggers a response of dread... that bewilders Crusoe’s sensibility and by extension the order of the British Empire that he carries on his back (Marzec, 2002: 130).

It seems that the modern adventure is not a one-sided affair, but rather one of imminent threat and danger, not just to the physical subject, but the psychological subject as well. One is reminded of the words of Augustine, (a member of the religiously based, contemplative medieval school of thought) who wrote that “man will admire high mountains and the wide sea and mighty rivers and the immeasurability of the ocean, and thereby will he lose himself” (Lemaire, 1996: 17). For Crusoe, as increasingly for subsequent figures in literature, the problem is not so much losing himself as finding the self that has been lost. This is not to say that Crusoe displays a disassociated self, but rather that, in his isolation, he has only himself to depend on for identity-creation. No longer able to depend on society to define the limits of his subjectivity, it is up to Crusoe himself, as Damisch states, to define himself through the creation of all sorts of external boundaries. It is a measure of his success that, as McInelly states, “in *Robinson Crusoe* we get, perhaps for the first time in English prose fiction, a work that asserts the primacy

of the individual human subject” (McInelly, 2003: 4). The point is that, for Crusoe, finding his place in the world and making a success of a colonial venture are, while perhaps not always easy, certainly achievable. Through hard work and economy he is able to succeed. Crucially, he is never tempted to heed any impulses that would place him outside the sphere of acceptable, civilised conduct. It is in its depiction of the possibility and relative ease of such conquest, both over external and internal nature, that one is able to characterise the novel as naïve, especially in the light of later, less optimistic texts.

Crusoe’s descriptions of his young self are not particularly flattering. Furthermore, there is a fine religious thread running through most of the commentary that seems to indicate Crusoe as following a path not entirely that of God’s. He ascribes his decision to go to sea to temptation: “the devil not omitting to set some traps for them [young men] very early” (Defoe, 1985: 39) Furthermore, he directly defies his father and his father’s advice, and decided recklessly to pursue his adventure in the New World. He states:



I would be satisfied with nothing but going to sea, and my inclination led me so strongly against the will, nay the commands of my father, and against all the entreaties and perswasions of my mother and other friends, that there seemed to be something fatal in that propension of nature tending directly to the life of misery which was to befall me (Defoe, 1985: 1).

The theme of fate, mentioned for the first time on the first page, continues throughout, even through his later adventures in China and Russia. Speaking of his decision to go to Africa for the procurement of slaves (a move precipitated almost entirely by greed and laziness) he describes himself as “born to be my own destroyer” (Defoe, 1985: 60). And indeed, the young Crusoe is much set upon by the forces of fate, surviving storms, shipwrecks, capture by pirates, escape and finally a shipwreck that kills everyone aboard but him and deposits him, alone but well armed and provisioned, on the shore of a desert island.

Once again it is interesting to note that Defoe does not choose to abandon Crusoe to his fate unarmed and unprovisioned. Rather, he allows him what Crusoe describes as “the biggest magazzin of all kinds that ever were laid up, I believe, for one man” (Defoe, 1985: 74). Crusoe, while bereft of the society from which he comes, is not bereft of the fruits of its inventions, and as a result there is little temptation for a reversion to savagery. Indeed, in contrast to later books, his isolation leads him to a kind of conversion, a somewhat spurious one, no doubt, prompted by a fevered vision of a vengeful God, but a conversion none the less. After the dream, Crusoe repents of what he calls “the general course of my wicked life” (Defoe, 1985: 103) and comes to view all his trials and tribulations as just punishment by God. He even states that, in the fever which prompts this vision,

conscience, that had slept so long, began to awake, and I began to reproach myself with my past life, in which I had so evidently, by uncommon wickedness, provoked the justice of God to lay me under uncommon strokes, and to deal with me in so vindictive a manner (Defoe, 1985: 105).

In fact, having arrived on the island as a heedless young man, to all intents and purposes an agnostic, or at the least a lapsed Protestant, Crusoe increases in both moral and spiritual stature until he attains a state where he is able, towards the end of his stay on the island, to convert both Friday and the mutinous crew of the ship that is to be his salvation, to Christianity. Returning to the theme of fate, McInelly states that

Crusoe’s mastery of himself and his creation of an imaginary kingdom prepare him for his re-encounter with human beings of an alien (to him) culture and eventually for the recovery of his property and revenues and his renewed trading ventures. The trajectory of Crusoe’s colonial experience, then, is clear: master yourself and you master your destiny, master your destiny and you master others, master these and you master the economic contingencies of life (McInelly, 2003: 6).

Once again there is a kind of divine naivete at work here (though it might not have been considered so at the time) which illustrates the maintenance of a mode of life that is commensurate with that which Crusoe has left behind. In contrast to later texts, there is never any substantial doubt that Crusoe will overcome the obstacles in his way to establishing a standard and mode of life commensurate with that expected of the civilised Western subject. In addition, Crusoe is never in doubt as to the existence of his God, or that God is watching over him, even when he perceives himself as being punished by God. It is important for the success of the novel that Defoe shows us a hero that is capable of such moral and physical growth, in addition to the attainment of material wealth, because only thus, through progress and improvement of the spiritual subject, and the spiritual subject's subjects, can the colonial project be justified in terms other than mere greed.

It is here on the island, for all intents and purposes, that Robinson Crusoe comes into his own, and begins to refine the traits of rugged individualism that underlie the text. There are plenty of indications of Crusoe's individualism early on – his decision to defy his family and go to sea, his escape from slavery, the establishment of his estate in the Caribbean, his decision to go slaving. Yet it is only in isolation on the island, and with the aid of his discovery of the Bible, that he is able to attain the kind of balanced, Christian individualism that one could view as the hegemonic force that Defoe wished to champion. Of course, this individualism is not a state to be arrived at lightly. It carries with it the implicit risk of arriving at a solipsistic state, where the individual subject is construed as absolute and consequently all else is doubted.

This is where the importance of God in *Robinson Crusoe* comes to the fore. Rather than descending into a kind of nihilistic barbarism (which seems to be the fate of many later protagonists, notably Kurtz), Robinson Crusoe is able to construct for himself a moral universe, based upon the will of God. Even his (somewhat spurious) 're-conversion' to Christianity follows a vision of a vindictive God about to punish him for his lack of repentance, his lack of conformity with the accepted, divine order. Damisch writes that "Robinson [takes] elaborate pains neither to discover in himself nor to expose anything of

himself that could exclude him from the company of his fellows; nor to commit any deviation consistent with expelling him from his own humanity” (Damisch, 1998: online).

There are, to use the Nietzschean dichotomy, examples of the Dionysian force coming to the fore and threatening to engulf Crusoe, specifically after his discovery of the cannibal feasting place. Crusoe states (with admirable bloodlust) that “I made no doubt but that if there was twenty, I should kill them all. This fancy pleased my thoughts for several weeks, and I was so full of it that I often dreamed of it” (Defoe, 1985: 175-176). He is saved from this kind of Kurtzian extreme only through a realisation of moral relativism (ironically, almost the same relativism that would eventually cast doubt upon the entire moral grounding that informed the colonial ideal). He states “they think it no more a crime to kill a captive taken in battle, than we do to kill an ox; nor to eat humane flesh, than we do to eat mutton” (Defoe, 1985: 177). And his decision not to engage in all out war on the cannibals is formed by as effective a piece of rationalisation as one can hope for: “they had really no knowledge of me, and consequently no design upon me: and therefore it could not be just for me to fall upon them” (Defoe, 1985: 179).

Crusoe is saved from the Dionysian frenzy indicated in his above statement by the combination of moral relativism and Apollonian reason – he is loathe to engage in slaughter because of his rational, Apollonian approach. Ironically, it is precisely the realisation of such a moral vacuum that drives Kurtz over the edge of Dionysian frenzy in *Heart of Darkness*, two centuries later. And of course, unlike the boys in Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Robinson never loses sight of the possibility of rescue, and never stops rationally hoping for and working towards his salvation. He hopes to be re-united with these ‘fellows’ that he has tried so assiduously, in their absence, to please. In fact, one might argue that an eventual escape from the island is essential to the very intent of the book, for without it Robinson’s moral rectitude and material success would never be recognised, would go, in the teleological scheme, unrewarded.

In his progress towards eventual prosperity, the importance of Robinson Crusoe's attitude towards the land cannot be overestimated. If he is to succeed in a wild and savage country, and moreover a country of which he has no initial knowledge or understanding, it seems to make sense that he must make the island conform to his will rather than he to the island's. Here we return to what Marzec refers to as "the logic of enclosure". He writes that within this logic

instead of the human subject *being set up* by the land, the human *subject* sets up the land, territorialises it with its positive presence, places an individual name upon the land. Land is deprived of its foundational offering, and that foundation is placed subsequently on the self (Marzec, 2002: 142).

In this sense Crusoe's isolation on a deserted island is important tactically – one man can scarcely be expected to tame a continent. An island is more manageable, especially when (initially) there are no native inhabitants with whom to contend trivial matters of ownership or status. This absence of original inhabitants also seems to grant Robinson Crusoe a God-given right to farm and utilise the island, a right never questioned by Crusoe himself. Larmore writes that the modern view "is that one has a right to something simply because one wants it a lot: rights are but the expression of strong preferences" (Larmore, 1997:72). McInelly states that "religion provides a legitimating narrative context" (McInelly, 2003: 15), a context that places Crusoe, as a civilised, Protestant male, in the centre of the world, with the importance of all other subjects shifted to the periphery. It is through this centring of Crusoe as a subject that the text is able to provide an example of successful colonial domination that could serve as a paradigm for later colonial expansion.

Donoghue states that "Crusoe is virtually obsessed with reassuring himself that everything in his political world is his property, and that everyone is properly subjected and completely under his control" (Donoghue, 1995: 2). This, of course, is nothing other than an extension of the generalised fear of the savage land and its savage inhabitants mentioned earlier. Only through complete, unequivocal domination can the Western

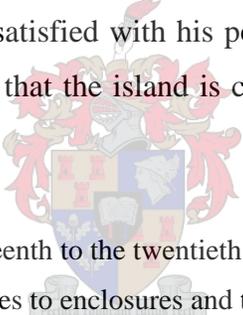
subject feel safe so far removed (both spatially and culturally) from his origins. Towards the end of the novel, he catalogues his rights over the island thus: “First of all, the whole country was my own meer property; so that I had an undoubted right of dominion. Secondly my people were perfectly subjugated: I was absolute lord and law-giver: they all owed their lives to me” (Defoe, 1985: 240-241). The ‘undoubted’ right of dominion can be undoubted only in a context where Crusoe’s vision of his own position on the island is an unambiguous one. He cannot allow himself to doubt the primacy of his status, as this would allow doubt concerning his right to claim the status at all. Rather, he must ensure that all doubts are perpetually at a remove from consideration, so that his position can remain absolute. In addition, it is important that he maintain a monopoly of force, which, through his possession of firearms and of the means of production, he is able to do.

This is not to say that Crusoe arrives at this state easily. In fact, it takes him the better part of his stay on the island (in total some twenty-seven years) to arrive at such a position. And crucial to the success of his endeavour is his attitude towards the land. As already mentioned, one of his first acts is an act of enclosure or ‘taming’, surrounding his tent (and later his cave) with fortifications and defences so that he may rest easy in the knowledge that at least this small part of the island is completely under his control. This ambition towards enclosure and eventual taming of the wilderness reveals in Crusoe a propensity that was to be found also in later colonists, namely a propensity towards a re-creation, or at the very least a re-structuring of the land according to a vision of landscape with which the colonist is familiar.

McInelly writes that “in mastering his own selfhood, Crusoe simultaneously masters his environment and (re)creates a world to his liking - a decisively colonial act” (McInelly, 2003: 18-19). Not content to merely enclose his dwelling, Crusoe soon sets about creating, for all intents and purposes, a series of enclosures that allow him a level of control over the land and its (at this stage) animal inhabitants that could not be achieved over mere open space. Marzec writes that “only from within the pale of enclosures does Crusoe establish a relation to the land, a relation that is at the same time paradoxically *not*

of the land, for the land must become *English* land before he can connect to it in any substantial fashion” (Marzec, 2002: 131). The extent to which Crusoe subscribes to this can be seen in his rather grand reference to his “coastal” and “country” houses, which he refers to as if they were mansions and estates rather than a glorified cave and a kind of leafy bower. Yet it is through this very exigency of naming, and more importantly naming with familiar names, that Crusoe is able to bring the land within a recognisable framework and thus exert some sort of control over it, as well as being able to feel himself a part of it. In fact, even this seemingly innocent naming of the island is part of the larger strategy of domination. McInelly states that “In making laws and giving names to places and things on the island, including himself, Crusoe both creates and assumes control over his island home” (McInelly, 2003: 5).

More significantly, the land must be enclosed because to a large extent enclosure implies ownership, and Crusoe cannot be satisfied with his possession of the island until he has made sure (as he eventually does) that the island is completely under his sway. Marzec writes that



English novels from the eighteenth to the twentieth century contain a surprising number of significant references to enclosures and to the chaotic nature of unenclosed savage common lands. These references indicate the extent to which the English novel itself is inscribed in the midst of a new imperial formation of land (Marzec, 2002: 131).

Written as it was near to the beginning of significant English and European ambitions towards the so-called ‘savage lands’, it is not surprising that *Robinson Crusoe* sets out to chronicle the possibility and relative ease of controlling and exploiting such lands by the hands of the morally upright and hard-working European settler.

At the same time, through his attitude towards the land, Crusoe places himself, with his effort to gain control over and use of the virgin land, squarely in the modern mould. Marzec writes that

the idea of a singular, uncommodified territory of land stands on the stage of modernity as an outlaw. Land – its material heterogeneity, its geographical geopolitical variations, its embedded historical relations to tribes, clans, ethnicities, cultures, religions and nations – has become, in the conceptualised “world picture” of a global order, a phenomenon to be erased (Marzec, 2002: 151).

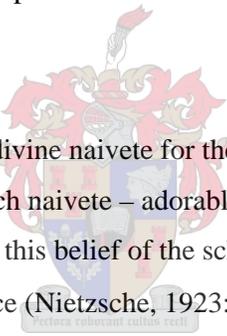
Within such a setting, the economic implications of Crusoe’s actions and attitude towards the land also become significant. One could argue that his entire relation with the land is focussed on commodification, on the erasure of heterogeneity of the land so that it may become a single, commodified whole over which Crusoe, through the exercise of enclosure, can exert control. Damisch writes that “he has vested all his happiness in use and consumption, immediate or deferred, to wit in the stockage of goods and produce and in an abundance he has discovered could be raised” (Damisch, 1998: online).

Crusoe not only inhabits the land and farms it, but also sets up a kind of capitalist system of production, where he consciously raises an excess of crops so that he may have increasingly bigger ‘capital’ returns. This stands him in good stead later, firstly with the arrival of Friday, and later with the appearance of the ship that takes him off the island. The surplus that he has raised not only allows him to feed these new arrivals on his island, but indeed provides Crusoe with the means of controlling them. His ownership of not only the means of production, but also of the knowledge of how to best make use of them, elevates Crusoe above the level of these later arrivals and allows him to assert his complete mastery over them. (Of course, the fact that he is provided with a monopoly of force, in the form of abundant firearms, does not hurt either.)

It is a measure of his level of control over the land that he is able to so easily raise such an excess, and indeed never lacks food or sustenance while on the island. And Crusoe is, as has been demonstrated, a character that slips very easily into the capitalist mode. Poole writes that “the forces which capitalism generates are much more potentially destructive than those at work in the market. What is at work is not merely a rational concern to further one’s self-interest, but an insatiable drive towards power” (Poole, 1994: 41). Yet Crusoe never allows himself to be overcome by the will to power in the way that latter-

day protagonists such as Kurtz or the Judge in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* do. Through strenuous application of Apollonian principles of rational thought he is able to keep the more savage aspects of his human nature at bay, and consequently remain recognisably a part of the cultural milieu from which he descends. Yet it is important to note that for all his espousal of rational principles, "reason is *nothing else* than power, than the will to power, which it so radiantly conceals" (Habermas, 1996: 56).

It is here that we must turn again to the issue of naivete, specifically in the sense of "foolishly credulous" or "contrary to perceived wisdom". Crusoe is able to subjugate the land with (initially) no help and very little knowledge. This would seem to be somewhat against the perceived wisdom that states knowledge to be a necessary component of any attempt at understanding and mastery. And here we are face to face again with the promise of reason and rationality to provides us with the means of ruling over the earth. Nietzsche writes:



Every age has its own type of divine naivete for the discovery of which other ages may envy it: and how much naivete – adorable, childlike and boundlessly foolish naivete – is involved in this belief of the scholar in his superiority, in the good conscience of his tolerance (Nietzsche, 1923: 77-78).

Crusoe, while perhaps no scholar, certainly views himself as an inherently superior being. He states, after first discovering the remains of a cannibal feast, that he "gave God thanks that had cast my first lot in the world in a part of the world where I was distinguished from such dreadful creatures as these" (Defoe, 1985: 172). In his firm belief in himself as a morally and otherwise superior being, he sets himself up as the arbitrator of right and wrong in his 'kingdom', and indeed later refers to himself variously as "governor", and "king". Even his tolerance of the cannibals is to a large extent fostered by a belief in tolerance, for he believes that to fall upon them "could justify the conduct of the Spaniards", whom he sees as "a race of men who were without principles of tenderness, or the common bounds of pity to the miserable, which is reckoned to be a mark of generous temper in the mind" (Defoe, 1985: 178).

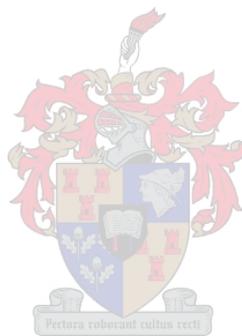
Yet his ability to reason in the approved, rationally and scientifically based manner of the time allows him to attain a greater degree of understanding of and ultimately control over the land, and his eventual subjects, than would be possible for someone not trained in this brand of logical and reflective thought. Once again the naivete of Crusoe's interaction with the island is not an arbitrary or negative quality – rather it is an important aspect of his eventual control over the island and its inhabitants. Yet he never succumbs to the temptation of a free and unbridled will to power, and here, once again, it is the influence of a theological framework that saves him. One can inquire into the possibility of such temperance in the face of the wilderness, and one is strongly reminded of Turner's assertion that "at the frontier the environment is initially too strong for the man" (Turner, 1921: 4), but the fact remains that in *Robinson Crusoe* there is no thought of any aspiration to anything other than a decent, civilised way of life.

This is not to say that that all goes smoothly from the start. Arriving on his island, Crusoe is indeed subject to some failures and disappointments. But he is also able, in the words of Ross, to go through "in a few years all the long history of human technological inventiveness, solving almost every problem from the beginning" (Ross, 1985: 17). There is no question here of the kind of bumbling attempts at order and creation that typify the story lines of later novels like *Lord of the Flies*. Rather, Crusoe has a boundless faith in the power of reason and rationality to enable him to take full control of his own destiny. He states of his endeavours:

So I went to work, and here I must needs observe, that as reason is the substance and the original of the mathematicks, so by stating and squaring every thing with reason, and by making the most rational judgements of all things, every man my in time be master of every mechanick art (Defoe, 1985: 85).

One cannot help but contrast this to the experience of the boys in *Lord of the Flies*, who cannot even make shelters that will stand up, not to mention build boats, make furniture

and pottery and subjugate an entire island to their will. As we shall discuss later, the progress of modern science, paradoxically, seems to lead to a lesser and lesser estimation of the possibilities of attaining complete control. And it is perhaps when contrasted with other narratives of a similar order that the “divine naivete” of *Robinson Crusoe* comes most strongly to the fore.



Chapter 4

An Escape from the 'Real' World: The Colonial Ideology of *The Coral Island*

They told me of thousands of beautiful fertile islands that had been formed by a small creature called the coral insect, where summer reigned nearly all the year around; where the trees were laden with a constant harvest of luxuriant fruit; where the climate was almost perpetually delightful, yet where, strange to say, men were wild, bloodthirsty savages, excepting in those favoured isles to which the Gospel of our Saviour has been conveyed (Ballantyne, 1995: 10).

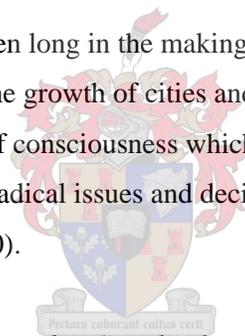


First published in 1858, Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* became a sort of instant classic. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least of which is that it is an extremely readable adventure story. Yet part of its enduring legacy has to do with the fact that it slots in neatly with an almost completely chauvinistic Victorian view of culture and of the superiority of the British Protestant over practically anyone else on the globe. The evidence for such a description of the book is substantial and will be entered into in more depth later. In fact, it is from this very chauvinistic outlook that the first aspect of the book's relevance to our present discussion can be approached. Written some 140 years after *Robinson Crusoe*, arguably the seminal text in the desert island canon, *The Coral Island* provides an invaluable insight into the progression of a colonial rhetoric of justification. What is particularly interesting in this regard is the process of myth-making that had one of its most powerful initial impetuses, at least in the colonial scheme, with the writing of *Robinson Crusoe*. With the Victorian penchant for feelings of superiority, if not outright snobbery, texts like *The Coral Island* fulfil a very important role in the establishment and propagation of British hegemonic designs over the rest of the globe. It provides, moreover, a testimony to British moral strength and rectitude (although never

entirely losing sight of the fact that many atrocities, too, were ascribable to British sailors in the South Seas).

Moreover, the idyllic setting facilitates a very appealing kind of myth. In a sense one could say that *The Coral Island* is a simple extension of the myth of a kind of attainable Paradise that was still to be found, somewhere, on the Earth. In fact, to bring this theme into stark relief, one can point to the assertion by the youngest of the three protagonists, Peterkin, after arriving on the island, that “it must be the ancient Paradise” (Ballantyne, 1995: 36). Coming, as it does, from a society recently caught up in the grasp of industrialisation and colonial expansion, this assertion has about it something of a nostalgic ring. It also goes some way towards expressing a significant disenchantment with the modern world that was slowly being called into existence. Williams writes that

the changes in society had been long in the making: the Industrial Revolution, the struggle for democracy, the growth of cities and towns. But these also, in the 1840's, had reached a point of consciousness which was in its turn decisive...the sense of crisis, of major and radical issues and decisions, was both acute and general (Williams, 1973: 9-10).



So in a sense one could argue that *The Coral Island* also expresses a kind of yearning towards what essentially turns out to be a nomadic, pre-agrarian life-style.

While superficially merely an escapist novel in the *Boy's Own* tradition, there is much more to *The Coral Island* than initially meets the eye. While ostensible simply an adventure story, the book can also be read as a fable of Victorian Britain's ambitions towards the rest of the world. Dutheil writes that

the confusion between imagination and fact in the novels of empire serves powerful ideological, political and economic interests, and Ballantyne's novel proves particularly revealing in this respect. On one level, *The Coral Island* affiliates itself with a long tradition of desert island stories by deploying its characteristic *topoi* (shipwrecks, tropical setting, self-sufficiency, cannibals

and return to 'civilisation') (Dutheil, 2001: 108).

Yet on another level the novel aims to affirm its ideological stance through reference to many of the same properties. In contrast to another ideologically-minded narrative, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, (1719), the form of myth-making has altered and the myth that is propagated has evolved. In *Robinson Crusoe* we are faced with a very different kind of situation to the one encountered by the boys in *The Coral Island*. In the earlier book the emphasis is very much on the figure of Crusoe as he struggles to impose his will on the environment into which he has been thrown. So, one might argue, do Ralph, Jack and Peterkin in the later text. The great difference lies in the approach to this imposition of Western/Christian values over an alien land.

In this regard Crusoe's isolation is important, because it allows him the scope for spiritual, moral and economic growth. Nor is this work easy – it takes Crusoe the better part of thirty years to eventually arrive at a position of some stature. Apart from that fact, it also takes much hard work and continuous industry for Crusoe to be able to recreate, with whatever degree of efficacy, the society of which he still feels, despite complete isolation, a part. The lot of the boys on the coral island is much easier. The island is a cornucopia of delights, ranging from the diversions it offers to the food that they are able to procure. In distinct contrast to *Robinson Crusoe*, where survival does not come easily and farming and careful husbandry are required, the situation on *The Coral Island* approaches a level nearing that of a holiday resort. It almost seems, in fact, as if the island has been specifically designed for a return to an even older order than the one that *Robinson Crusoe* espouses.

At no time, other than during Jack's labours to build a boat, is there a need for serious labour. Farming is not necessary, for they find that "most of the trees on the island were ever-greens, and that we might, if we wished, pluck the blossom and the ripe fruit from the same tree" (Ballantyne, 1995: 53). The hunting, too, is good and accompanied by none of the messiness that would later be so evident in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Indeed, it seems to be more of a diversion than a necessary aspect of survival. Their diet

is anything but a boring one. Ralph describes one of their feasts as follows: “a roast pig, roast duck, boiled and roasted yams, cocoa nuts, taro and sweet potatoes; which we followed up with a desert of plums, apples and sweet plantains” (*ibid.*: 152). They are even so fortunate as to find a tree that bears nuts that serve perfectly as candles (*ibid.*:76-78) and a kind of cloth on the coconut trees (*ibid.*: 80). In short, they really want for nothing, despite being cast away on the island with only an axe, telescope, a penknife, a pencil-case, and an oar bound with a piece of hoop-iron.

And, fortunately for them, the island is uninhabited. While still unaware of this fact, Peterkin, the youngest of the three, boldly states “We’ve got an island all to ourselves. We’ll take possession in the name of the king; we’ll go and enter the service of its black inhabitants. Of course we’ll rise, naturally, to the top of affairs. White men always do in savage countries” (Ballantyne, 1995: 23). The arrogance inherent in such a remark is enough to make one smile, yet it reveals a deep-seated chauvinism that allows for very little argumentation. This chauvinism, however, is of a very different sort from that of *Robinson Crusoe*. McNelly writes of the latter that: “religion provides a legitimating narrative context” (McNelly, 2003: 15), and it does indeed serve a similar function in *The Coral Island*. Yet there is a crucial difference.



In the earlier work *Crusoe* is to be judged as superior to the natives he eventually encounters because he attains, through the process of much labour, soul-searching and reflection, in the eyes of Defoe a higher moral standard than those around him. The boys on the coral island, by contrast, seem to be admirable merely because they are British and, in the eyes of the narrator at least, embody all that is positive about the British Empire. Their attitude to the land, also, is very different from *Crusoe*'s. *Crusoe* ‘proves’ his right to the land by being the one most capable of exploiting it. He consciously imposes his will upon the land, exerting every effort to tame it, and the process is not a quick, nor an easy one. The boys on the coral island do nothing of the sort, except in a kind of lazy, instinctive, pre-agrarian manner (a way of life that would be savagely questioned in *Lord of the Flies* some 100 years later). Marzec states that

He (Crusoe) sets himself up on the land *by refusing to inhabit it*, ,planting enclosures in order to colonise a savage land that paradoxically contains the same unruly forces that give Crusoe his excessive drive to constantly explore new territory. The two processes – of individuation and the constant expansion of physical enclosures upon uncultivated space – cannot be separated. It is in this taming of an excessive (nomadic) drive that we find the connection between imperial identity formation, the land, and capitalism. The ability to enclose will become the saving grace, that which will make the difference between a civilised zeal and a savage rambling (Marzec, 2002: 143).

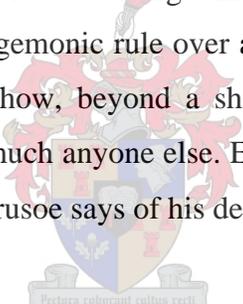
In *The Coral Island* we find no such taming of the nomadic drive. In fact, from the name of the narrator himself, Ralph Rover, we find a clue to the kind of nomadic spirit that animates the novel. Like a young Crusoe, Ralph Rover finds his freedom in precisely that, roving. He even states, in the first lines of the book, that “Roving has always been, and still is, my ruling passion, the joy of my heart, the very sunshine of my existence” (Ballantyne, 1995: 7). Yet unlike Crusoe, Ralph entertains no notions of going against an established order in doing so. While initially (at least before initiating his ‘project’ on the island) Crusoe finds himself victim to all sorts of existential doubts concerning the path he has chosen in life, Ralph is, as we can see, quite cheery about his nomadic existence. Of course, this view of the romantic wanderer is consistent with the phase of colonialism with which the book concerns itself. Lemaire writes that “the romantic seeks the nature of the spirit and the true nature of reason in nature itself, as if he can escape the city in the direction of rural areas, as if to exchange western culture for that of the ‘good wild’ ” (Lemaire 1996: 56).

While *Robinson Crusoe* is a manifestation of the earlier phase of colonial domination, when (in this case) England was just starting out on the process of taming foreign lands and subjecting them to her rule, at the time of the writing of *The Coral Island* the process was far more advanced. In this context Marzec states (of *Robinson Crusoe*) that

the colonialist/imperial opposition between a self who is governed by an unruly

nomadic impulse and one who has domesticated this impulse by becoming an agriculturalist (settler) is a structural imperative of Western teleological narratives of identity formation. The movement of nomadic desire must come under control through the commodification of that desire in a colonialist apparatus. The specific form of that commodification is the enclosure act – the grounding of a previously open subjectivity in a fabricated (colonised) land (Marzec, 2002: 132).

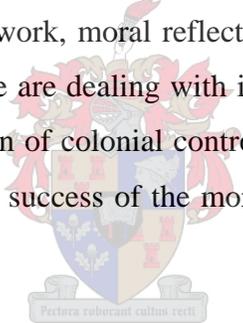
In *The Coral Island*, by contrast, the emphasis is placed very much on the avoidance of such a commodification or even on enclosing, and thereby taming, the land, and this reveals a growing self-satisfaction with the idea of colonial settlement. As stated before, the book reveals an astounding chauvinism, bordering on hubris, about the value of British civilisation and culture in a savage land. Here it becomes clear how the strategies of *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island* diverge. In the earlier text, the focus was very much on the establishment of a hegemonic rule over a savage (is)land. One of the main concerns of the early text is to show, beyond a shadow of doubt, the superiority of British culture over that of pretty much anyone else. Even other Western civilisations are not spared, as is illustrated when Crusoe says of his desire to attack the cannibals:



They had really no knowledge of me, and consequently no design upon me; and therefore it could not be just for me to fall upon them. That this could justify the conduct of the Spaniards in all their barbarities practised in America, where they destroyed millions of these people...as a meer butchery, a bloody and unnatural piece of cruelty, unjustifiable either to God or man (Defoe, 1985: 179).

The point is not merely that Western civilisation is superior, but more specifically that *British* civilisation is superior, and by extension Crusoe, too is a being of a superior order. Some commentators have even gone as far as to state, of Crusoe's first encounters with the natives, that "he is mistaken for a god" (Donoghue, 1995: 4), an assumption that was to have serious repercussions for later protagonists in the colonial genre, notably Kurtz, both in *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*.

A hundred and forty years later, with the writing of *The Coral Island*, there is no such emphasis on the portrayal of the enclosure/agriculturalist drive. Rather, the boys wander around the island at will, and inhabit a kind of pre-agrarian paradise where food is easy to find, the climate favourable, and once again, as in *Robinson Crusoe*, there are initially no original inhabitants with whom to dispute ownership or status. From Peterkin's following comment, one can already deduce the status that the boys would have ascribed to themselves, had it been necessary. He declares "you shall be king, Jack; Ralph, prime minister" before going on to state "I shall merely accept a highly responsible situation under government; for you see, Jack, I'm fond of having an enormous salary and nothing to do" (Ballantyne, 1995: 23). Apart from the somewhat worrying premonition of colonial corruption, the message is clear: when it comes to three subjects of the British Empire their standing in a foreign country is something of a God-given right. And unlike Crusoe, there is no need for hard work, moral reflection or spiritual growth before they can attain these positions. What we are dealing with is an unthinking chauvinism that in large part results from the depiction of colonial control in earlier texts such as *Robinson Crusoe*, and other examples of the success of the morally and spiritually upright British subject in the tropics.



One might argue that the work of justification for the colonial project has already been done by the time of the writing of *The Coral Island*. Thus Crusoe, through his successful domination of his island, the natives and even his fellow Europeans, seems already to have 'proven' the superiority of the British subject over and against anyone else that one might encounter. Therefore there is no need in *The Coral Island* for the same illustration of cultural superiority. McInelly writes that "in *Robinson Crusoe* we get, perhaps for the first time in English prose fiction, a work that asserts the primacy of the individual human being" (McInelly, 2003: 4) and, importantly, of the individual British subject. And it is through mastering his selfhood, that Crusoe simultaneously masters his environment and is able, for all intents and purposes, to recreate the world he has left behind (*ibid.*). This reveals once again a differing strategy in the two texts. Crusoe, in the words of Donoghue, is "virtually obsessed with reassuring himself that everything in his political

world is his property, and that everyone is properly subjected and completely under his control” (Donoghue, 1995: 2).

The boys on *The Coral Island* suffer from no such obsession. Rather than, like Crusoe, working ceaselessly for the betterment of their lot and in hope of escape, they are able to merely enjoy the luxuries of the land. After arriving on the island, the irrepressible Peterkin (after his suggestions that they ensconce themselves as rulers over the natives), is asked by Jack “But suppose there are no natives?” and replies “Then we’ll build a charming villa, and plant a lovely garden round it, stuck all full of the most splendiferous tropical flowers, and we’ll farm the land, plant, sow reap, eat, sleep and be merry” (Ballantyne, 1995: 23). Yet this is as far as the agrarian impulse carries them, and for the remainder of the book there is no focus at all on organised agriculture. Rather, they only seem to get as far as the “eat sleep and be merry” part, with the addition of hunting and fishing, which serve in the book almost more as a diversion than a necessary enterprise.

One must return here to the theme of myth-construction mentioned above, and by now the differences in mythical character between *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island* are becoming clear. The earlier myth is very much one cast in the Protestant mould, where hard work, piety and moral reflection are necessary for the eventual spiritual improvement of the protagonist. In the later work we are dealing to a far greater extent with a myth of return to a kind of Edenic pre-agrarian lifestyle, where, contrary to perceived wisdom in the civilised world, there is really no need for work or exertion and where superiority in every sense is guaranteed by the mere fact of being British. It is not surprising, perhaps, that this myth should arise in the kind of society that was then being called into existence, and the very bleakness of a worker’s life in newly industrialised England is perhaps enough to explain the enthusiasm with which such a myth was received.

Ballantyne finds no need to re-iterate once again the superiority of his protagonists. Rather, he merely accepts the fact that the British are superior, and assumes that his readers will too. In his time, perhaps, this assumption was justified. Looking back, after

the tropical nightmares of *Lord of the Flies* and even Garland's *The Beach*, the situation is different, and his self-assurance seems almost laughable. Yet it is part of a larger narrative strategy designed (like *Robinson Crusoe*) to illustrate the inevitable superiority of a particular form of life and culture over others, and to thereby help legitimate the colonial project as a whole.

As in *Robinson Crusoe* this legitimisation project has largely to do with religion, and of course specifically with Christianity. Once again there is a significant difference between the two texts. Crusoe's initial Christianity is sketchy to say the least, and he even emerges as something of an early modern version of the prodigal son, spurning his father's advice as he sets off on his adventures. Nor does his growth in spiritual stature, which eventually allows him to convert first Friday, and then even the lapsed Christian mutineers, come quickly or easily. Rather, it is the end result of a long process of spiritual reflection and meditation, allied with a vision of God coming to claim vengeance for Crusoe's sins that eventually paves the way for his 're-conversion' to Christianity. There is also a kind of utilitarian approach to conversion displayed early in the book, when Crusoe, despite being "very loathe to sell the poor boy's liberty" (Defoe, 1985: 54), sells his companion on his escape from Salée to the Portuguese captain on condition that he be emancipated after ten years should he convert to Christianity. One might well debate the efficacy of such a forced conversion, but it almost seems as if both the requirement for conversion and the stipulation of emancipation are devices to salve a conscience that is not quite easy with its actions. By forcing Xury's conversion to Christianity, Crusoe is able to justify his actions and to thereby ease his conscience.

His relationship with Friday, of course, is more complex. As a representative of an older order, Crusoe has no qualms about claiming the service of another for his own. This is demonstrated throughout the book: his treatment of Xury, his decision to go slaving in Africa, and ultimately his treatment of Friday. Before Friday appears, Crusoe has a premonition of his arrival in the form of a dream presaging almost precisely the manner of Friday's arrival (Defoe, 1985: 202). He becomes somewhat obsessed with the idea, and a few pages later resolves to "get a savage into my possession" (Defoe, 1985: 207).

The casual ease with which this is said reveals a deep-seated opinion about the rights of one human over another, and of his own position in this scheme. After his rescue, Friday “at length came close to me, and then he kneeled down again, kissed the ground, and laid his head upon the ground, and taking me by the foot, set my foot upon his head; this it seems was in token of swearing to be my slave forever” (Defoe, 1985: 207).

Although this might seem to the contemporary eye a somewhat slim token by which, given the absence of a mutually comprehensible language, to assume ownership over another human being, in *Robinson Crusoe* there is no intimation of any doubt whatsoever. Friday is presented throughout as essentially child-like, both trusting and trustworthy. Yet he is also accorded a level of respect for his knowledge of the lands and his fighting prowess. He knows the local fauna and flora, knows which trees to use for a canoe, and is even able to use a firearm, with scarcely any training, better than Crusoe himself (Defoe, 1985: 234). Crusoe says of him (amongst other compliments) that “never man had a more faithful, loving, sincere servant than Friday was to me; without passions, sullenness, or designs. Perfectly obliged and engaged, his very affections were ty’d to me, like those of a child to a father” (Defoe, 1985: 211-212).

Yet despite professing true affection for Friday, Crusoe still views him, as illustrated above, in a predominantly utilitarian, paternalistic light. Above all else, Friday is *useful* to him, and it is for this very reason that he saves Friday’s life in the first place. As befits a romantic novel, there is a very different approach to the questions of ownership and slavery in *The Coral Island*. When Jack, Ralph and Peterkin embark upon a rescue mission, it is for strictly humanitarian reasons – to save women and children from slaughter. There is one girl in particular who impresses them with “the modesty of her demeanour and the gentle expression of her face, which, although she had the flattish nose and the thick lips of all the others, was of a light brown colour, and we conjectured that she must be of another race” (Ballantyne, 1995: 201). So it is predominantly feelings of chivalry that motivate their attack on the cannibals, and this is a telling point. They only attack when the life of the *girl* is endangered, and this reveals a level of gentlemanly behaviour that is profoundly strange considering that they have casually watched the

execution of several men. Nevertheless, they spring into action, and the results are very revealing. In an essay dealing with representation of the cannibal in *The Coral Island*, Dutheil writes that

unlike *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Coral Island* systematically draws attention to the innate, essential savagery of the natives, which implies that the origin of cannibalism is not so much cultural but natural. Because of this essentialist, irreducible and demonic otherness, the Fijian native must therefore be destroyed or converted (Dutheil, 2001: 117).

And in the case of the rescue, the former certainly holds true. A similar attitude is found in Coetzee's *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*, where the narrator states:

I am an explorer. My essence is to open what is closed, to bring light to what is dark. If the Hottentots comprise an immense world of delight, it is an impenetrable world, impenetrable to men like me, who must either skirt it, which is to evade our mission, or clear it out of the way (Coetzee, 1998: 106).

What is particularly interesting in *The Coral Island* is the way in which the ensuing violence is portrayed. Ballantyne writes:

Jack uttered a yell that rang like a death-shriek among the rocks. With one bound he leaped over a precipice full fifteen feet high. ...with one blow of his staff Jack felled the man with the club; then turning round with a look of fury, he rushed upon the big chief with the yellow hair (Ballantyne, 1995: 201).

In this description we can begin to see something of what Dutheil means when she writes: "Jack's replication of the signs of cannibal violence highlights the contradictions inherent in Ballantyne's attempt to reconcile the heroic mode of adventure with the alleged moral superiority of the white subject" (Dutheil, 2001: 113). The point is relatively clear: despite having, perhaps, claim to a superior motive for the violence they perpetrate (chivalry, etc.) the nature of the violence itself is not all that different from that

practised by the cannibals. This gives rise to an interesting tension, for it hints at, for perhaps the first time in the genre, the descent into savagery under the colonial condition that would later give their impetus to texts like *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord of the Flies*.

Dutheil writes that “He [Ralph] goes so far as to realise that the frontier between the civilised subject and the cannibal other is threatened by the possibility of ‘moral contamination’ ” (Dutheil, 2001: 117). This is a significant realisation, because for the first time one is dealing here with a kind of moral ambiguity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Crusoe is able to overcome such speculations through what essentially amounts to a moral subjectivism. The chauvinism that underlies *The Coral Island*, on the other hand, means that there is no such room for ambiguity, and what is ‘other’ in the cannibals of the latter text cannot be explained away so glibly as it is in *Robinson Crusoe*, when Crusoe says: “they think it no more a crime to kill a captive taken in war, than we do to kill an ox, nor to eat humane flesh, than we do to eat mutton” (Defoe, 1985: 177).

At the same time the narrator of *The Coral Island* is not unaware of the fact that many atrocities, too, are committed by his own country-men, a realisation further intensified by his capture by the pirates and their subsequent slaughter of the natives (Ballantyne, 1995: 244-246). Once again there is a difference between the later text and *Robinson Crusoe*. As is clear from the epigraph, there is little choice but to regard the work of the missionaries in the tropics in anything but a favourable light (and it is through their actions that the boys are eventually saved). Yet there is also a utilitarian edge to the admiration for the missionaries – their work placates the natives and thereby gains access to new lands for exploitation. That this is indeed the case is made clear by the epigraph. A more interesting question concerns the state of the boys on the island and their reaction, as emblems of a civilised order, to the savagery that they encounter around them.

Despite their good Christian upbringing there is in the boys of *The Coral Island*, as there never is in Crusoe, a latent fascination with the acts that as good Christians and civilised British they must abhor. Dutheil writes that “the narrator’s fascination with savage

practices extends well beyond the traditional topos of the cannibal barbecue” (Dutheil, 2001: 114). It also, at times, takes on an almost voyeuristic aspect, as during the execution of the men before the rescue, as well as the actual rescue and the description of the fight (Ballantyne. 1995: 199-203). This aspect of voyeurism is interesting, because it prepares the way for acceptance. Dutheil argues that

by acknowledging his morbid attraction to the spectacle of dismembered and consumed bodies, Ralph recognises its appeal. Later, however, having “supped full with horrors”, he will admit that the consumption of cannibal scenes is morally unsafe. Gradually, the narrator becomes aware of his (and the reader’s) complicity with the bloodlust he is supposed to be condemning (Dutheil, 2001: 118).

This is a realisation that was to have a profound impact on the subsequent development of the colonial genre, in later texts such as *Heart of Darkness* and, specifically, Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. One is reminded of Nietzsche’s statement in *Beyond Good and Evil* that “dreadful experiences raise the question whether he who experiences them is not something dreadful also” (Nietzsche, 1923: 89) and in the case of the colonial novel the gradual realisation seems to be that it is all too easy to be seduced by the ‘call of the wild’. Even in cases where the initial impulse is positive and well-meaning, there lurks always a fascination with the savagery of the new environments, and the very incomprehensibility of the environment aids in the breakdown of the subject. *The Coral Island* is a particularly interesting book in this regard. Dutheil states that it “illustrates the transition from early Victorian optimism and relative naivete in the depiction of colonial relations to a more brutal, self-conscious and anxiety ridden discourse” (Dutheil, 2001: 119).

This realisation, which finds one of its greatest expressions in Golding’s savage reply to *The Coral Island*, was to shape the course of subsequent colonial literature profoundly. It is perhaps not surprising that *The Coral Island* falls into a era that just precedes that of Nietzsche, and some time later, Conrad’s nightmarish fiction of colonial exploitation, *Heart of Darkness*. The challenge would no longer lie in merely imposing a kind of control over an alien land. The focus now would have to be also on maintaining moral

and cultural integrity while engaged on this enterprise. It is here that what some commentators have referred to as the “crisis of Enlightenment ethics” (Larmore, 1997: 51) comes to the fore. At the time of the writing of *The Coral Island* Nietzsche and his famous statement “God is dead” (1885) was barely thirty years away. It was a ‘death’ that was to have a profound influence on the progression of modern morality, and as a result on the progression of the colonial project.

In a world where God is dead it is no longer possible to rely on religion as a legitimating authority, and Crusoe’s clumsy relativism becomes the only tenable position. The problem is that, in contrast to Crusoe, the colonist of the late modern era (roughly 1850 onwards) no longer has an ultimate belief in God with which to validate his own moral position. Pippin speaks of the typical modern experience that ‘all that is solid melts into the air’ or ‘the centre does not hold’ ” (Pippin, 1991: 156). Such an experience can be disturbing enough in the safety of a familiar culture. Cast out into the wilds, into lands of infinite possibilities, it assumes an even more sinister aspect. Lemaire states that “this profane adventure of western man makes him vulnerable precisely by making him autonomous: without reliance on a mythical time/space he is threatened with becoming a victim of the suddenly independent world of things” (Lemaire, 1996: 54).



Increasingly, as what Nietzsche called “the total success of modern science and the total failure of modern philosophy” (the failure to provide a binding secular ethics) became apparent, there would be a growing unease about the possibilities of moral rectitude in the face of savagery. As Larmore puts it: “the history of modern thought was one of moral decline and the unbridled will to power” (Larmore, 1997: 20). The unbridled will to power, once accepted in lieu of religious security, gives serious cause for doubt about the possibility of moral action in the world. And it was this doubt that provided the impetus for Golding’s nightmarish re-envisioning of *The Coral Island* in *Lord of the Flies*, some 100 years and two world wars later.

Chapter 5

The Road to Hell... *Heart of Darkness* as Subversion of the Colonial Ideal

“He is a prodigy”, he said at last. “he is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and the devil knows what else” (Conrad, 1994: 36).

First published in 1902, and inspired by the author’s real-life experiences in the then Belgian Congo, *Heart of Darkness* is perhaps the first colonial novel to deal critically with the colonial ideal, and the means used to achieve it. It was also written at a time when information concerning the atrocities being committed in the Congo was just starting to appear. The exposure of these atrocities had a profound effect on the justifications for colonial expansion. Brown writes that “it was not the case that reports of atrocities in the Congo Free State shocked their European audiences simply because they reported hideous events; rather, what was so abhorrent about these events was that they occurred as part of a civilising mission” (Brown, 2000: 17). Andre Gide, who undertook his own journey in the Congo some time after World War One, and wrote of his experiences in a book titled *Travels in the Congo*, writes of *Heart of Darkness*: “there is no exaggeration in his picture; it is cruelly exact” (Gide, 1937: 11).

Employing a complex double narrative structure (with the narrator offering his own narrative but also narrating that of Marlow) the book deals with the latter’s journey up the Congo River in order to retrieve Kurtz. The figure of Kurtz has come to assume an almost mythical status in colonial literature. This is due to a number of reasons, perhaps the most important of which being the contradictions in character that prove to be his eventual downfall. One is reminded of the Greek term *hamartia*, or tragic flaw. Elbarbary writes that “Kurtz is seen in a double focus; genius and nobility of personality find

themselves in easy partnership with insanity and monstrosity” (Elbarbary, 1993: online). While the reference to an ‘easy partnership’ seems odd considering the course of the novel and Kurtz’s eventual demise, one could argue that the double focus to which Elbarbary refers is a valuable tool for understanding the character of Kurtz. In an article titled *Combat and Personality Change* Bradshaw and Ohlde write:

when individuals are placed in a novel environment, they are forced to develop an effective personality, or double. Most of our daily environments do not require much change. But in extreme conditions, such as unremitting combat or the Nazi death camps, more radical adjustments are required (Bradshaw and Ohlde, 1993: online).

It could be argued that the Congo at the turn of the 20th century, largely unexplored and unknown as it was at that stage, represents just such extreme conditions, and that for Westerners attempting to adapt to such an environment, substantial adjustment is indeed required. One is reminded of Hobbes’ definition of the state of nature. In the *Leviathan*, he writes:

during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition called Warre; and such a war, as is of every man against every man...So the nature of Warre, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no reassurance to the contrary (Hobbes, 1904: 64).

One could argue with reasonable assurance that this is indeed the situation that obtained in the Congo. Administered as a kind of personal fiefdom for King Leopold of Belgium, the colonisation of the Congo was little better than rape. Conrad describes it thus: “they grabbed what they could for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery, with violence, aggravated murder on a grand scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness” (Conrad, 1994: 10).

In such a context it seems clear that the conventional morality of civilised society should come to be questioned, for without doubt it reduces the efficiency of such an overtly exploitative operation. We are back here to the consequences of the moral vacuum that underlies the modern ideal with its exclusive focus on the empirically verifiable. Poole speaks of “the God-like status modern man had arrogated to himself as the privileged subject and object of knowledge” (Poole, 1994: 129). Yet this view, so crucial to the philosophical grounding of the modern dream of absolute control, is one which ultimately delegitimizes any possibility of a rational grounding for ethics or morality. The problem lies in the privileged status that empirical science accords to the objective. Nietzsche’s great step was to realise that the so-called objective basis of modern science was in itself no more than a construct. As Larmore puts it “the values of science, that is, of systematic knowledge in general, are themselves in no way objective. They, too, are values that we create and could create differently” (Larmore, 1997: 83).

With God dead and the growing realisation of the *horror vacui* of the modern dream, it seems that once again there is cause for modern man to experience some form of dread. In distinct contrast to *Robinson Crusoe*, the fear is now very much that there is no God, no heaven, and consequently no real reasons for, or even possibility of, moral action. Marlow even goes so far as to refer to the Congo as a “God-forsaken wilderness” (Conrad, 1995: 19). Cheatham states that “an important point in *Heart of Darkness* is not just what Marlow sees at Kurtz’s death – evil – but also what he does not see during his interview with the Intended – God, or a least some real and transcendent good to counterbalance the evil” (Cheatham, 1986: 304). Yet to some extent there must be some grounding objective that provides meaning and impetus to the colonist. In *Robinson Crusoe* it is the drive to enclose and tame the land that animates Crusoe. In *The Coral Island* it is mainly a form of cultural chauvinism, coupled with a Christian missionary statement. Yet the very vastness and impenetrability of the Congo forest makes such a project futile. Its size and incomprehensibility makes domination over the land through enclosure, in the mould of *Robinson Crusoe*, impossible. Marzec writes that “Marlow describes the land as “featureless”, “empty”, and a wilderness that contributes to Kurtz’s madness. Unenclosed land at the edge of empire is discarded as aesthetically and

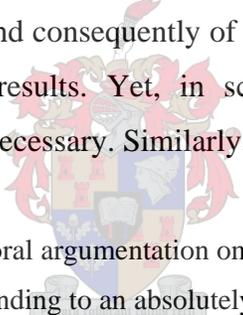
mentally unthinkable” (Marzec, 2002: 134). Nor is Kurtz able to avail himself of the easy chauvinism that marks *The Coral Island*.

In identity, as in so much else, Kurtz is essentially fractured. Seemingly English, his surname is German and he works for a commercial Belgian company. There is no easy recourse to agriculturalism, nor to jingoistic optimism and ‘jolly old England’, nor to Christianity, in the primeval forest of *Heart of Darkness*. The driving force in *Heart of Darkness* comes in the form of the acquisition of wealth. And in this acquisition, “what saves us is efficiency - the devotion to efficiency”, as Marlow puts it quite close to the beginning of his tale (Conrad, 1994: 10). Yet as with so many secular bases for morality and action, this one has a fundamental flaw. In his book *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, Pippin argues that far from being viewed as an aberration of the modern ideal, Kurtz could to a very large degree be said to be its logical conclusion (Pippin, 1991: 40-44). Despite his “methods becoming unsound”, Kurtz is still described by one of the Company’ administrators as “a first class agent”, and “a very remarkable person”. This, it seems, is mostly because he “sends in as much ivory as all the others put together” (Conrad, 1994: 27).

Elbarbary writes that “Kurtz embodies all forms of an urge to be more or less than human. He employs his faculties for aims in the opposite direction from the idealism announced in his self-deconstructing report as a civiliser” (Elbarbary, 1993: online). The key problem for Kurtz lies in the fact that he is *not* primarily a civiliser. He is primarily an agent for a commercial company. And although he is described as having ruined the area for those after him, the point is that while *he* is operating he is, at least in commercial terms, doing superbly well. What are not contained in this perspective are the methods which he uses to achieve these results. Like his descendant, Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, Kurtz has separated himself from the system that is supposed to support him. The harlequin Russian says “I went a little farther...then still a little farther – till I had gone so far that I don’t know how I’ll ever get back” (Conrad, 1994: 78). One could argue that the same experience applies to Kurtz, but while the Harlequin is speaking in merely geographical terms, Kurtz is lost in a far more dangerous sense. When Marlow

tells him: “You will be lost... – utterly lost” (Conrad, 1994: 94) he is not referring to the fact of being lost in a merely physical sense.

Departure from a familiar milieu into an alien one carries with it what Marzec refers to as "*a significant ontological dread*" (Marzec, 2002: 137). This has to do as much with being removed from familiar surroundings and cultural values as it does with being removed from a sense of history. Even once the mythical sphere has been eroded there remains available to a culture historical precedence which is valid because it is true. Even where there is no longer recourse to the deeds of God or, say, a Hercules or Ulysses, there is still recourse to the deeds of a Horatio Nelson or even a Robinson Crusoe. Yet removal from the sphere of the familiar carries with it the risk that such examples become redundant or no longer of any use. Historical fact serves as a basis for action precisely because it *is* fact, or at least is perceived by the majority as fact. Empirical science functions according to the Cartesian ideal of method, and consequently of predictability. An effective method is one that provides consistent results. Yet, in science and in history, a detailed knowledge of initial conditions is necessary. Similarly, as Larmore states



reason becomes capable of moral argumentation only within an already existing morality. Not by ascending to an absolutely detached point of view, but only through belonging to a moral tradition, or to a variety of moral traditions and practices, can we find our bearings. When we try to rise above our historical situation, reason loses its substance and becomes mute (Larmore, 1997: 51).

A similar experience obtains in the primal forest of the Congo, as Marlow journeys up the river into the heart of the jungle. He states:

We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no

memories (Conrad, 1994: 51).

So while there are indeed, within society, various structuring mechanisms to keep what Nietzsche calls the 'blonde beast' at bay, such mechanisms very quickly lose their power once outside the familiarity of known culture. Brown writes that

once the civilised soul is displaced onto the colonial frontier of the Congo, these structuring and screening mechanisms too are displaced and ultimately distorted into mere shadows of their original forms as the policing practices and institutions necessary to uphold them are markedly absent. The wilderness becomes then, in opposition to the state of instituted civilisation in Europe, a lawless, thoroughly uncivilised place: it manifests as an unrestrained savagery which by its very nature threatens as a massive presence that will "block" the imposition of civilised order (Brown, 2000: 19).

And there is also a fascination with this 'blocking' of order, the impossibility of control. It has to do, perhaps, with the idea of freedom: freedom from restraints, freedom from responsibility, the freedom of the pure potentiality of empty space. Marlow, describing "a decent young citizen in a toga" coming to the new Roman colony of England (some two thousand years before) says:

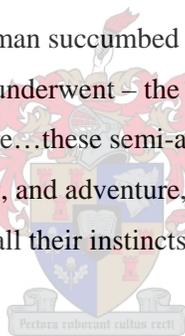
Land in swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery had closed around him – all the mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungle, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either to such mysteries. He has to live in the middle of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination – you know, imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate (Conrad, 1994: 9).

With the wilderness therefore blocking the imposition of any kind of order that 'civilised' man would try to impose there, including the (initially) extremely humanistic aims of Kurtz, there remains little option but to impose the kind of order that it is possible

for Western man to achieve. It is in this context that Nietzsche's concept of the will to power comes to the fore in a nightmarish sense. He writes in the *Genealogy of Morals*: "Deep within all these noble races there lurks the beast of prey, bent on spoil and conquest. This hidden urge has to be satisfied from time to time, the beast let loose in the wilderness" (Nietzsche, 1956: 174). It is precisely this urge that is fulfilled by the wild, where the colonist, aided by superior technology and the use of Western weaponry, can truly aspire to a nearly god-like status. The Russian says of Kurtz: "he came to them [the tribe] with thunder and lightning, you know – and they had never seen anything like it – and very terrible" (Conrad, 1994: 80).

A useful Nietzschean term for the basis of Kurtz's demise is that of 'bad conscience.' Nietzsche describes 'bad conscience' thus in *The Genealogy of Morals*:

a deep-seated malady to which man succumbed under the pressure of the most profane transformation he ever underwent – the one that made him once and for all a sociable and pacific creature... these semi-animals, happily adapted to the wilderness, to war, free roaming, and adventure, were forced to change their nature. Of a sudden they found all their instincts devalued, unhinged
(Nietzsche, 1956: 217).



Yet abroad in the wild, it is possible for the Western man to return, albeit at significant psychological risk, to such a basically rapacious state. Kurtz's downfall lies perhaps in his very understanding of how much he is giving away to the demands of the wild. Lesser men, perhaps, would not have been so severely afflicted, and it is even possible that Kurtz's *hamartia* lies in his potential greatness. As Marlow says: "Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe" (Conrad, 1994: 52).

What a return to the wild presents, in the Nietzschean scheme, is a return to the kind of pre-societal state envisaged in the quote above, a quote reminiscent once again of Hobbes' state of nature, where the condition that obtains is "a perpetual and restless desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death" (Hobbes, 1904: 49). It is easy to see why Bradshaw (referring to *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*) speaks of "the way in

which a particularly Nietzschean kind of moral and philosophical dilemma is not merely projected or exhibited by these works, but is imbedded within their narrative and structural complexities” (Bradshaw, 1991: 160). As far as the theme of the return to the wild is concerned, there is little to contest this evidence. Unlike the Judge in *Blood Meridian*, Kurtz reverts to a more atavistic relationship with the world around him, a more basic form of interaction which has little to do with morality and much with a kind of relentless, primal dialectic. In this exercise his main goal is, above all else, *success*. It is through successful domination of external nature that Kurtz will win esteem and rise in the company in which he is already so well favoured. It is only in retrospect that one comes to realise the irony inherent in the statement of the chief agent down-river: “Oh, he will go far, very far” (Conrad, 1994: 28).

And indeed Kurtz does go far, further perhaps than most men would. Kurtz is described variously as a kind of all-round genius. He is able to paint, write, his eloquence is praised, he is a more than competent musician (and in all these qualities linked to what one might term his fictional descendant, Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*). Moreover, he is, according to the brickmaker of the Central Station “a prodigy...He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and the devil knows what else” (Conrad, 1994: 36). In his primary role as commercial agent it is indeed true, as Elbarbary states, that Kurtz “employs his faculties for aims in the opposite direction from the idealism announced in his self-deconstructing report as a civiliser” (Elbarbary, 1993: online). The question, of course, is why. The answer has something to do with the above-mentioned aim of the modern ideal - “the devotion to efficiency”. Poole writes that

the values generated by capitalism – consumption, power - do not provide criteria in terms of which the historical dynamism of modern society can be conceived as the progressive realisation of some ideal. If there is a direction to modern history, it is one which is not available to us. But without a concept of progress or direction, there is only change and chaos. It is as if the power that other ages have ascribed to nature and which has long been tamed by capitalism has reasserted itself at the level of history (Poole, 1994: 44).

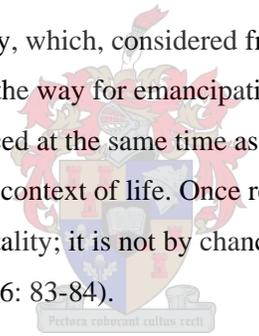
Kurtz, despite his initial humanistic aims for the repression of savage customs, ironically falls victim to them himself. Yet to a large degree his reversion to savagery has to do with the efficiency with which he is able to perform his job. Similarly, there is a kind of twisted logic to his final scrawl – “Exterminate all the brutes” – across his report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. Without doubt, the extermination of all savages will bring an immediate and permanent end to all savage customs. That a report for the repression for such customs should be able to lead to Kurtz’s outburst, is one of the greatest ironies of the novel. The fact that rational contemplation (of the same sort that would create death-camps and initiate genocides in the 20th century) could lead to such a conclusion is one of the novel’s greatest indictments of the colonial ideal. It would seem that in the context of *Heart of Darkness*, the road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions.

Lost in the pure potentiality of ‘empty’ space, Kurtz soon comes to lose all ideas of progress. Finding his attempts at civilising the locals unsuccessful, he is forced to resort to other means. In order to fulfil his function as an agent and collector of ivory more effectively, he gets the tribe to follow him. He also arrogates to himself a God-like status amongst the uncivilised tribesmen, a status greatly aided by his possession of Western firearms. In his report Kurtz states that white people “must necessarily appear to [the local people] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might as of a deity” (Conrad, 1994: 71-72). In terms of possession, also, there is little doubt that Kurtz has claimed for himself absolutely the area that he has conquered. The accusation of hubris is not difficult to make. Marlow says of him

‘My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my - ’ everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their place. Everything belonged to him – but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own (Conrad, 1994: 70).

Habermas states that “the permanent sign of Enlightenment is domination over an objectified external nature and a repressed inner nature” (Habermas, 1996: 110). Yet in the Congo jungle at the turn of the 20th century such an objectification of nature becomes extremely difficult, if not in fact impossible. As a consequence, the repression of inner nature that is so important to the functioning of civilised society is also compromised. Within civilised society there exists a cultural and historical framework from which it is possible to detect a certain mode of operation. Even once the sphere of the mythical has been eroded there remain still historical precedents and national legends which provide a basis for action. Such action, however, only makes sense within a familiar environment, history and culture.

Habermas writes that



separation and self-sufficiency, which, considered from the standpoint of philosophy of history, paved the way for emancipation from age-old dependencies, were experienced at the same time as abstractions, as alienation from the totality of an ethical context of life. Once religion had been the unbreakable seal upon this totality; it is not by chance that this seal has been broken down (Habermas, 1996: 83-84).

Such an emancipation represents both the dream and the nightmare of the modern ideal. As Habermas puts it: “the mythic world is not the homeland, but the labyrinth from which one has to escape for the sake of one’s own identity” (Habermas, 1996: 108). Once outside the mythical world, however, the operations of conventional morality and ethics become somewhat more troublesome. Here once again the structuring mechanisms of society are essential if the newly emancipated subject is not to fall into the trap of an exclusively selfish and self-orientated point of view. Vattimo writes

humanity can take leave of its own subjectivity, which is defined in terms of the immortality of the soul, and can instead recognise that the self is a bundle of ‘many mortal souls’, precisely because existence in a technologically advanced society is no longer characterised by continual danger and consequent

acts of violence (Vattimo, 1988: 41).

Identity formation, too, becomes somewhat problematic. Poole states that

The only way to become what one is, is through one's own resources. It is to assert oneself through the repudiation of others. But this is to destroy one of the essential foundations of self-identity. The attempt to construct oneself in these circumstances can only be a futile and self-destructive gesture of megalomania (Poole, 1994: 130).

One is reminded once again of the implications of the Cartesian *cogito* on the development on the modern subject's self-awareness. Exclusive focus on the self as the basis of identity results in a skewed vision where ultimately everything in the world, including fellow human beings, is relegated to the status of objects under the sway of the subject. In such a scheme the only tenable position is one where power, above all, is the focus of all action. In short, one is back to the old Hobbesian state of nature. Poole writes that "the primary goal is power: the individual must take as an overriding end the pursuit of the means to pursue other ends. He must seek, as relentlessly and yet as unsuccessfully as those in Hobbes' state of nature, power after power" (Poole, 1994: 141).

Poole's reference to "one's own resources" is especially interesting in the context of *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow seems to attach great importance to them. He states of the Romans, who invaded England some two thousand years previously: "they were man enough to face the darkness" (Conrad, 1994: 9). The emphasis seems to be to a very large degree on the manly virtue of being able to keep a stiff upper lip despite anything that life may throw at you. In short, he does not have much sympathy for those who lack the strength to face the darkness, or to withstand the primal call of the wild. He states, after seeing the local tribesmen dancing on the shore:

Yes, it was ugly enough, but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise...What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion,

valour, rage – who can tell? – but truth – truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder – the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must be at least as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own inborn strength. Principles won't do (Conrad, 1994: 52).

At the same time one cannot help but wonder whether, if the story of the young Roman above is meant to represent Kurtz, how far from the turning point Marlow himself really was. In the end Marlow's judgement of Kurtz is severe. This is revealed in a number of places in the text. He states, somewhat coolly, of the severed heads that surround Kurtz's compound: "They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him, some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence" (Conrad, 1994: 83). The message is clear: in Marlow's view Kurtz lacked the strength to achieve what he set out to do. Yet Marlow is human enough to realise that he too, although relatively unscathed by his experience, is also not entirely immune to the 'call of the wild'.

Marlow's saving grace, perhaps, is the fact that he is never required to leave the boat, the last bastion of his civilisation, for extended periods of time. Kurtz, in contrast, would "disappear for weeks, forget himself amongst these people" (Conrad, 1994: 81). Lost in the primordial depths of the Congo jungle, and surrounded only by cultural others, his exposure to the Dionysian effects of the wild would have been far more pronounced than Marlow's relatively limited exposure. As the Russian states: "he would forget himself" (Conrad, 1995: 81) and in so doing forget also the *principium individuationis* which is the basis of the Apollonian ideal. Even so, Marlow too feels a strange affinity for the savagery he witnesses. He is all too aware of the effects that the wilderness is having on him, but his awareness allows him, perhaps more so than the idealistic and almost certainly arrogant Kurtz, to achieve a level of reflection and hence of control. He describes the effects of fever (itself perhaps in no small way responsible for Kurtz's demise) thus: "I had often 'a little fever', or a little touch of other things – the playful paw-strokes of the wilderness, the preliminary trifling before the more serious onslaught"

(Conrad, 1994: 59). His awareness of the potential psychological dangers of exposure to savage climates makes him less vulnerable to them. One is reminded once again of Nietzsche, who wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

Does it not seem that there is a hatred of the virgin forests and the tropics amongst moralists? And that the “tropical man” must be discredited at all costs, whether as disease and deterioration of mankind, or as his own hell and self-torture? And why? In favour of the ‘temperate zones’? In favour of the temperate men? The ‘moral’? The mediocre? (Nietzsche, 1923: 118).

There is little doubt that, in Marlow’s opinion at least, Kurtz is indeed some sort of aberration of the modern ideal. Yet as Pippin points out, Kurtz could also be read as representing the inevitable outcome of the modern ideal – megalomania, greed, and insanity.

Kurtz himself is all too aware of what he has lost, what he has become. Elbarbary writes that

Kurtz’s humanity is visible only in expressions of self-disgust. When close to death he reflects, with a sense of loss, on his brutality. His words, “The horror! The horror!” show the Promethean shame that follows pride, and further constitute ‘a judgement upon the adventure of his soul on this earth’. It is both ironic and revealing that Kurtz dies in the moment of self-knowledge (Elbarbary, 1993: online).

Marlow says of Kurtz’s last words: “I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror – of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again, in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge?” (Conrad, 1994: 100-101). But perhaps the horror does not purely concern with self-knowledge. Perhaps the horror that Kurtz mentions is precisely the realisation of the ultimate emptiness of it all, the *horror vacui* that both underlies and undermines the modern ideal.

It is said that nature abhors a vacuum, and similarly the effects of the moral vacuum of modernity prove to be of significant peril and abhorrence to the colonist. Brown argues that in *Heart of Darkness* the ‘emptiness’ of the African jungle comes to represent also a larger societal emptiness of which Kurtz, as a Western subject, is a part. And Kurtz, even after his ‘rescue’ by Marlow, is unwilling or unable to shake off what Marlow calls “the fascination of the abomination”. Brown writes:

in leaving the steamer to return to the jungle, Kurtz becomes utterly lost, as the darkness of the wilderness overtakes him, sucking him into a void beyond recognition and beyond any code. This is the horror as foreclosure, the horror of a void resulting from the voiding of civilisation; and this is Africa as the first term in Marlow’s ironic ‘perversion’: the primal site of the void (Brown, 2000: 25).

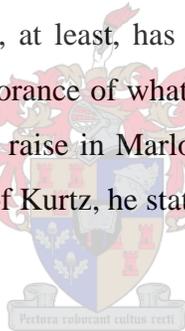
It is this void that is referred to in the title of the book, and which is, throughout the novel, equated with darkness. And Kurtz is a man who has fallen much under the sway of the darkness. Marlow, visiting Kurtz’s “Intended”, recalls him as follows:

I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived – a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadows of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence (Conrad, 1994: 105).

What is important to note is that the darkness is not limited to Africa. The effect of the meeting with Kurtz’s “Intended” seems to bring home to Marlow the fact that the darkness is a condition that permeates not just the primal African bush, but the cities of Europe, too. The intended is described as follows: “She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning...The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the early evening had taken refuge on her forehead” (Conrad, 1994: 106). Yet the Intended is anything but a figure of light. If it is true that, as she avows, “no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I

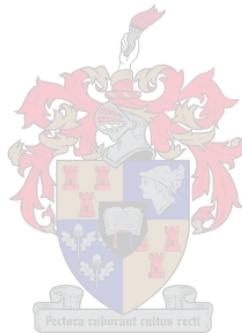
knew him best!” then one must wonder what role she played in what Kurtz became. While they speak thus “the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the inextinguishable light of belief and love” (Conrad, 1994: 107).

The entire episode is one of increasing darkness and, increasingly for Marlow, extreme discomfort. He is unsure what to reply when she says “he drew men towards him by what was best in them...It is the gift of the great... But you have heard him! You know!” (Conrad, 1994: 108). Much earlier, Marlow states: “You need a deliberate belief” (Conrad, 1994: 52), and even earlier, he argues that “what redeems [the colonial enterprise] is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea, and the unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to” (Conrad, 1994: 10). It seems relatively clear what the Intended’s sacrifice is, and that she, at least, has a deliberate belief, albeit only in the inherent greatness of Kurtz. Her ignorance of what he had become before his death, and her excessive eulogising, eventually raise in Marlow “a dull anger” and, in perhaps the most final and complete judgement of Kurtz, he states: “His end was in every way worthy of his life” (Conrad, 1994: 110).



When she asks for his last words, saying “I want – I want – something – something – to – to live with” once again Marlow is unsure how to respond: “I was on the point of crying at her, “Don’t you hear them?” The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. “The horror! The horror!” When Marlow states “The last word he pronounced was – your name”, one has to wonder whether it is merely a deliberate lie designed to comfort her or, as has been suggested, (Cheatham, 1986: 305) due to the fact that in the rising dark of that claustrophobic meeting, Marlow has indeed come to equate the Intended and all that she represents with the horror that accompanies Kurtz’s demise (Conrad, 1994: 110). If this is indeed the case then it is perhaps not surprising that the narrator, in one of his few direct insights, looks at the Thames and states: “The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth

flowed sombre under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an impenetrable darkness” (Conrad, 1994: 111). The heart of the darkness, Conrad seems to be suggesting, does not lie so much in the jungle itself, as in the kind of society that could breed a man like Kurtz. It is in this final depiction of the darkness of society that Conrad firmly establishes his critique of Western imperialism, and of the results of its ambitions towards the rest of the world.



Chapter 6

The 'Real' World Revisited: *Lord of the Flies*

There was, indeed, no note of discord whatever in the symphony we played upon that sweet Coral Island; and I am now persuaded that this was owing to our having been all tuned to that same key – namely, that of *love*!
(Ballantyne, 1995: 143).

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, first published in 1954, is the first text under discussion that does not have, at first glance, an overtly colonial theme. Firstly, although the topographical location is, like *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island*, that of a tropical island, the book was published towards the end of the colonial era. Secondly, of extreme significance, and uniquely in this discussion, there is no reference in *Lord of the Flies* to any encounter with any form of Other, other than, perhaps, the naval officer at the end of the novel. The boys are isolated in a sense that is not found in any of the other texts under discussion here, and it is perhaps this that makes the ensuing claustrophobia and terror so disturbing.

It is also interesting to note that *Lord of the Flies* is the first text under discussion that was written after the Second World War, in the age that had seen two World Wars and witnessed the death of millions, and seen, too, the advent of the nuclear age. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the course of the book's action is in fact determined by just such a nuclear catastrophe, and that the subsequent course of the book proceeds in suitably apocalyptic fashion (Selby, 1983: 58). In the atomic age questions of innate aggression and violence would come to hold an ever-greater significance. The fact that the boys' presence on the island is itself caused by war is no accident. The point is that the modern,

generally humanistic view which was only starting to be questioned at the time of the writing of *Heart of Darkness* was starting to fall into greater and greater disrepute.

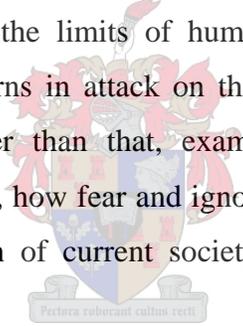
A further key fact for the course of this discussion is that the novel was written in large part as a response to the naïve optimism of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, written more than a hundred years before. There are a number of telling similarities which makes the resemblance obvious: In both texts two of the key protagonists are named Jack and Ralph, and there is even an overt reference to the book by the boys themselves, and again by the naval officer who saves them at the conclusion. But whereas Ballantyne's characters are endlessly brave and resourceful, Golding attacks *The Coral Island* "as a book which uncritically voices the ideology of 19th Century politics, allegedly marked by an absolute faith in British moral and cultural superiority and a belief in the progress of Western civilisation" (Dutheil, 2001: 120). Although it is perhaps more complex than that (as she indeed argues) it is nevertheless true that the book does to a great extent focus on the overall rectitude of the boys. They are portrayed as brave, resourceful and intelligent. Their time together is completely harmonious, as the epigraph suggests. All in all, in the face of savage lands and people, they never fail to display proper British rectitude, and even manage to aid the conversion of some of the savages they encounter.



It is, in part, this that makes the isolation of the boys on the island such a key strategy of the novel. Unlike the protagonists in *Robinson Crusoe* or *The Coral Island*, there is no contact with outside influence in the novel until the eventual rescue. Crucially, there is no one to feel superior to, or to gain power over, except each other. One is reminded of Dutheil, who wrote of the danger (in *The Coral Island*) that the characters go "so far as to realise that the frontier between the civilised subject and the cannibal other is threatened by the possibility of 'moral contamination' " (Dutheil, 2001: 117). In both *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island* the protagonists have extensive contact with local people encountered on their particular islands. This both exposes them to alien cultural practices and, if the case of *Heart of Darkness* can be believed, does indeed threaten them with moral contamination. This is in fact revealed both in Crusoe's blood-thirsty dream of making war upon the savages, and in what Dutheil, writing of *The Coral Island* calls

“Jack’s replication of the signs of cannibal violence” (Dutheil, 2001: 113). Yet in both these cases the savages also fulfil another role. They give, above all, an easy dichotomy for the Western traveller to embrace. Crusoe, while isolated on his island, never thinks of himself as anything other than a representative of Western civilisation. Similarly, the boys on *The Coral Island* are able to state with complete self-assurance that “of course we’ll rise, naturally, to the top of affairs. White men always do in savage countries” (Ballantyne, 1995: 23).

By the time of the writing of Golding’s book, the situation and indeed the outlook was somewhat different. Recent events in African and other colonies, indeed the entire dismantling of the colonial project had begun or was about to begin, and it was becoming increasingly clear that, in savage countries, white men did not rise to the top quite so readily. The atrocities of the World Wars and the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima had left a lasting impression of the limits of human compassion. Perhaps it is not surprising that Golding’s book turns in attack on the naivete of the earlier work. Yet Golding’s work also goes deeper than that, examining how power corrupts, how environment determines behaviour, how fear and ignorance trigger violence. As such his book is as much a condemnation of current society as it is of the earlier work by Ballantyne.



The novel begins, innocently enough, with a boy walking along a tropical beach. Yet there are already signs of violence, a “long scar smashed into the jungle” (Golding, 1979: 11), the signs of the boy’s arrival on the island. With the heat and the sand, and creepers and broken tree trunks and sweat, the overall scene is one of discomfort and confusion. Throughout the book, the heat and discomfort of the island environment are emphasised, and it is interesting to note how this compares with *The Coral Island*, where the environment is almost entirely pleasant and luxurious. This factor, too, must prove to have an impact on the boys in *Lord of the Flies*. Baron writes that “high temperatures are accompanied by several other conditions that may also underlie the apparently direct relationship between aggression and heat” (Baron, 1977: 41). Consistently with a far more critical view of the experience of the modern subject in the tropics, the landscape

and environmental conditions in *Lord of the Flies* will come to seem far more sinister than its bright, sunny aspect would suggest.

And the scene is set very early on, the second page in fact: “This is an island. At least I think it’s an island. That’s a reef out in the sea. Perhaps there aren’t any grown-ups anywhere” (Golding, 1979: 12). Also, significantly, there is already reference to the pilot, the sole authority figure available to the boys. But he, they think “must have flown off after he dropped us. He couldn’t land here” (Golding, 1979: 12). And although the island has already been cast as the sort of tropical island that the boys in *The Coral Island* chance upon, there are disquieting murmurs in the text, such as a subtle reference to “skull-like coconuts” (Golding, 1979: 15) that create an underlying tension. Nor is the landscape quite so hospitable as in the earlier work: Piggy already experiences diarrhoea from the fruit that so nourished the boys on *The Coral Island*. Clearly, the island is not quite of the same sort as that frolicked upon by the other Jack and Ralph.

Yet the boys are initially quite happy to be deserted, as they find delight after delight, particularly a deep pool for swimming. Only about ten pages into the text is their (admittedly somewhat bizarre) presence on a tropical island dressed in school uniform explained. Ralph, ever the optimist, maintains that his father will find them. But Piggy, the more realistic of the two, states: “Didn’t you hear what the pilot said? About the atom bomb? They’re all dead” (Golding, 1979: 20). It is not long before this is followed by the terrifying realisation: “We may stay here till we die” (*ibid.*). Nevertheless the urge is, at this stage at least, one towards order. With the realisation that there must be other children on the island, and the discovery of the conch, Piggy and Ralph succeed in calling a meeting. Ralph, as the originator of the sound that convenes the children, finds himself cast inevitably as the leader, although it is Piggy who “moved among the crowd, asking names and frowning to remember them. The children gave him the same simple obedience that they had given to the men with megaphones...Something was being done” (Golding, 1979: 25).

The arrival of the choir is somehow unsettling. As a group, they are described thus:

Within the diamond haze of the beach something dark was fumbling along. Ralph saw it first, and watched till the intentness of his gaze drew all eyes that way. Then the creature stepped from mirage on to clear sand, and they saw that the darkness was not all shadow but mostly clothing (Golding, 1979: 26).

Contained within this passage there are already several premonitions that will come to have serious consequences for the boys. The first, of course, has to do with the fact that the choir is described as “something dark”, although as it approaches the boys realise that it is “not all shadow”. Yet the initial impression remains. The second has to do with the description of the choir as in some way a unified whole. One is reminded of McCarthy, who writes of the scalp-hunters in *Blood Meridian* that “conjoined they made a thing that had not been before” (McCarthy, 1989: 152). The suggestion of the individual will subsumed in the collective will come to have profound implications for the progression of the novel.

It is perhaps this aspect of the unity of the choir that gives rise to the sort of dumb fascination that is manifested in Ralph’s stare. It is as if already the “creature” holds some fascination for both Ralph and the other children. Given the further course of the novel, this has severe implications. The choir presents itself in almost military fashion, accepting curt orders from their leader, Jack, and doing nothing without his authority, which verges on arrogance. On encountering Ralph, he is overbearing and brusque, quite assured of his power over a unified support base. Such unity, as contrasted to what is essentially a disparate, frightened group of boys, will come to have serious implications for the establishment of order on the island. It is to this task that the boys next turn. Yet somehow they fail to impress one as true democrats. Golding writes: “the toy of voting was almost as pleasing as the conch”, yet one of the early suggestions to Ralph on how to silence Jack is “Hit him with the conch!” (Golding, 1979: 29). As might be supposed, the boys’ first attempts at the creation of order are somewhat fumbling.

It is telling, further, that when they decide on a leader they refer to him as ‘chief’, indications already of what will become a complete descent into a more atavistic, older form of communal life. Of course, Ralph is chosen as leader, while “the freckles on Jack’s face disappeared under a blush of mortification” (Golding, 1979: 30). Yet Ralph is by no means the autocrat that Jack will become, and in a moment of sympathy with the other boy’s embarrassment he offers him control of the choir. Jack’s impulses towards violence and authoritarianism become instantly clear as he immediately states “They could be the army”, despite the fact that it is not at all clear that there is something to fight (Golding, 1979: 30).

The militant enthusiasm already present here bodes ominously for the establishment of a civilised community on the island. Nevertheless, common sense does, at this stage, prevail, and it is decided that the choir will be the hunters. Already the community, as yet perhaps a couple of hours old, is being arranged into structures and classes, with each member (except, later, the ‘littluns’) having a relatively fixed position in an essentially democratic society. It is here that the absence of cultural Others on the island presents a problem. Because of their isolation, there is no one to fight with for control and dominance, except themselves. In addition, their relative impotence as children renders them impotent to effect any significant levels of control. Baron writes that

there can be little doubt that most individuals wish to be masters of their own fate. That is, most wish to exert control over the events and outcomes that befall them. Largely because of this strong desire to exert control, individuals generally find situations in which they cannot influence their outcomes to be both unpleasant and unsettling (Baron, 1977: 184).

As in most colonial fictions, especially those of the desert island variety, the first impulse, once stock has been taken, is to explore. Ralph, ever focussed on rescue, realises that the first thing to ascertain is whether the island really is an island; if it is not “we might get rescued straight away” (Golding, 1979: 31). To accompany him, Ralph chooses Jack and, somewhat surprisingly, Simon, the boy who fainted on the march. When a hubbub arises, Jack has no doubts as to what to do in order to quell it: “Jack seized from

behind him a sizeable sheath-knife and clouted it into a trunk. The buzz rose and died away” (Golding, 1979: 32). This early reliance on intimidation, and the very real means of backing it up with the threat of physical violence is a worrying premonition, for it hints already at a kind of power-based society that has very little to do with the egalitarian principles that Ralph and Piggy attempt to create.

When Jack, Ralph and Simon set off up the mountain, their walking arrangement harks back to the that of the three boys in *The Coral Island*, right down to the fact that Jack and Ralph, the taller characters in both novels, walk on the outside so that they may conveniently talk over the head of Peterkin and Simon respectively, should they wish to do so. But, while in *The Coral Island* this is merely a practical and somewhat humorous innovation, and Peterkin, the smallest and weakest, is usually seen as the bigger boys’ responsibility, the same will not apply on Golding’s island, with catastrophic results. Deprived of an external outlet for their aggression, it is increasingly towards the weak and powerless in their own group that the aggressive drive of the boys in *Lord of the Flies* will be directed.

Nevertheless, at the start of this expedition all is in harmony, and there is a “kind of glamour” to the process of exploration (Golding, 1979: 33). As the expedition proceeds, however, things take on, once again, a more premonitory tone, once again related to *The Coral Island*. Whereas in the earlier work “an enormous rock came crashing through the shrubbery” (Ballantyne, 1995, 50-51) almost crushing them, in the later novel the destruction is entirely of their own making: “‘Heave!’ The great rock loitered, poised on one toe, decided not to return, moved through the air, fell, struck, turned over, leapt droning through the air and smashed a deep hole in the canopy of the forest”. The response is uniformly enthusiastic, and there is a kind of tragic irony in their own fascination with its destructive power, which one of the boys refers to as “Like a bomb!” (Golding, 1979: 37). Once the fragile harmony of the island is disturbed, this destructive power will come to assume a far more threatening aspect than the mere fun and games it represents now.

As in *The Coral Island*, they find bushes that resemble candles. But while in the earlier book the boys are able to make actual working candles out of them, here “You couldn’t light them...They just look like candles” (Golding, 1979: 40). Again it seems that the current island is not, perhaps, quite so friendly and amenable to human habitation as its literary predecessor. Soon after this discovery, they run into a piglet, which gets trapped in the creepers, presenting an easy target for Jack with his knife. Yet he cannot bring himself to kill it, “because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood” (Golding, 1979: 41). Interestingly, there are no such qualms in *The Coral Island*, and the hunts are pursued with a cheerful bloodthirstiness, that nevertheless never descends into outright cruelty. The opposite is true of the boys in *Lord of the Flies*. With practice, the joys of spilling blood, too, will become much more seductive. As the protagonist in Coetzee’s *The Vietnam Project* puts it: “One can grow addicted to anything, anything at all” (Coetzee, 1998: 11).

Their next meeting with the rest of the children, too, is revealing. Ralph informs them that they are on an island, with “no houses, no smoke, no footprints, no boats, no people”. Jack breaks in: “All the same you need an army – for hunting”. Soon there is another attempt at the creation of order: “I’ll give the conch to the next person to speak. He can hold it while he’s speaking” (Golding, 1979: 43). Jack is immediately excited by the power that rules bestow on the already powerful: “ ‘We’ll have rules!’ he cried excitedly. ‘Lots of rules. Then when anyone breaks them - ’ ” (Golding, 1979: 44). Rules, of course, are nothing but power made solid, and Jack, already intoxicated with the promise of coercive power, is excited more by the power they impart than the order they promise. With the enthusiastic response of the boys (*ibid.*), it begins to seem, already, that the object of the rules is just as much about the pleasure of punishment as it is about the maintenance of order.

When Ralph tells them that “While we’re waiting we can have a good time on this island” there are once again ominous echoes of the words of the Beast in later sections of the book. He continues “‘It’s like in a book.’” The canon of desert island stories is

immediately accessible to everyone – *Treasure Island*, *Swallows and Amazons* and of course *The Coral Island* (Golding, 1979: 45). Cole writes that

the adventure tales that formed the light reading of Englishmen for two hundred years and more after *Robinson Crusoe* were, in fact, the energising myth of English imperialism. They were, collectively, the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night; and in the form of its dreams, they charged English will with the energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer, and rule (Cole, 1998: 253).

This legitimating myth of the will to power will come to hold severe consequences once this drive is no longer directed outwards, as in *Robinson Crusoe* or *The Coral Island*, but rather inwards, towards each other.

There are a number of other factors that add to the systematic build-up of unease that so characterises the book. The first is the first mention of the “snake thing” (Golding, 1979: 46). There is once again an interesting echo here with *The Coral Island*, where the pirate Bloody Bill expressly tells Ralph that there are no reptiles at all, save “a lizard or two and some sich harmless things” (Ballantyne, 1995: 260). The Edenic reference seems relatively clear, and is in complete keeping with the utopian vein of Ballantyne’s novel, and indeed of the classical desert island canon as a whole. Once again Golding’s world is not so simple. It is telling that the “beastie”, in snake form, is the first explicit threat faced by the children in what is starting to seem less and less like Paradise (Golding, 1979: 46-47)

The next disquieting event has to do with the first concrete plans towards rescue. Partly in order to get their minds off the “beastie”, Ralph suggests that they should make a fire on top of the mountain. This is met with universal approval – “At once half the boys were on their feet. Jack clamoured among them, the conch forgotten” (Golding, 1979: 49) – and soon they are tearing off up the mountain, giving no thought to how they will start the fire once they are there. It is only later that Jack will resume responsibility for law and order again, then to say with supreme irony “We’ve got to have rules and obey them.

After all, we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things" (Golding, 1979: 55). This chauvinism, so similar to that of the boys in *The Coral Island*, will prove to be a very poor limitation to the eventual will to power that completely masters Jack.

Eventually, similarly to *The Coral Island* where use is made of a telescope to light the fire, the boys use Piggy's glasses as a magnifying glass, although, as the notes in the Faber edition point out, "myopia is corrected with a concave lens and this, of course, will not concentrate the sun's rays in the manner suggested" (Golding, 1979: 252). Nevertheless, in the book the glasses work and the boys soon have a huge bonfire, entirely in keeping with the destructive tendencies shown to date. But in contrast to *The Coral Island* where their first fire is "carefully put out" (Ballantyne, 1995: 47), here the fire soon springs out of control (Golding, 1979: 57). When they take stock, one of their number is missing. Soon they realise that, having been on the island for less than a day, their casually destructive behaviour on it has already claimed its first life (Golding, 1979: 60).

There could not be a sharper contrast with the first day on Golding's island compared to the arrival of the boys in *The Coral Island*. And perhaps not surprisingly, things soon begin to fall apart. Jack, as leader of the hunters, is particularly susceptible to the call of the wild. He tries to explain to the other hunters "the compulsion to break down and kill that was swallowing him up", but fails (Golding, 1979: 65). Soon, when Ralph states that "the best thing we can do is to get ourselves rescued", Jack will reply " 'Rescue? Yes, of course! All the same, I'd like to catch a pig first -' " (Golding, 1979: 67). It is clear that order is, already, on a very precarious grounding. It is soon after this that the first signs of strain begin to appear in the relationship between Jack and Ralph (Golding, 1979: 69).

The island, too, is becoming more and more nightmarish and surreal:

The glistening sea rose up, moved apart in planes of blatant impossibility; the coral reef and the few, stunted palms that clung to the more elevated parts would

float up into the sky, would quiver, be plucked apart, run like raindrops on a wire or be repeated as in an endless succession of mirrors (Golding, 1979: 73).

There is very little about it that in any way conforms to any form of life that the boys have ever known. Hirsch and O’Hanlon speak of the difficulty the colonial subject experiences “in bringing the country into focus: in constituting in new territory a recognisable conjunction between their here and now-ness and a background or horizon to which this could be related” (Hirsch & O’Hanlon, 1996: 3). In *Lord of the Flies*, as in *Heart of Darkness* and *Blood Meridian*, an essential part of the problem is the irreducible alienness of the landscape, a landscape that holds no relation to the civilised order the boys descend from. As such, the wildness of the land itself will prove to have agency in their deterioration towards anarchy and death. Brown writes that

once the civilised soul is displaced onto the colonial frontier...these structuring and screening mechanisms too are displaced and distorted into mere shadows of their original forms as the policing practices and institutions necessary to uphold them are markedly absent. The wilderness becomes then, in opposition to the state of instituted civilisation in Europe, a lawless, thoroughly uncivilised place: it manifests as an unrestrained savagery which by its very nature threatens as a massive presence that will ‘block’ the imposition of civilised order (Brown, 2000: 19).

Apart from the incomprehensible and slightly threatening aspect of the landscape, even “the north European tradition of work, play and food right through the day, made it impossible for them to adjust themselves wholly to this new rhythm (Golding, 1979: 74). This tension is most obvious in Ralph and Piggy, while with Jack the acquiescence to this new way of life is almost immediate, and easy. Given the complete otherness of the life they now lead from anything they have known before, it is perhaps not surprising that the old system of morals will also soon begin to show definite signs of wear and tear. One is reminded of Poole, who wrote that

the national landscape is something more than a physical space; it is endowed

with spirit and personality...At the same time, those characters and ways of life which are assigned a role within the national culture take on something of the substantiality of the land which has formed them (Poole, 1994: 96).

It is clear that the landscape encountered by the boys in *Lord of the Flies* has very little affinity with their origins. It is unsurprising that that, once outside this familiar sphere, as *Lord of the Flies* and a host of other late modern texts imply, things fall apart all too easily. Faced with a landscape that is palpably different from their 'national landscape', the way of life to which the boys have been accustomed should come to lose, for everyone except perhaps Piggy and Ralph, its substantiality and ability to guide action. Instead, a compromise must be found in which the character of the new landscape must be accommodated in the boys' new way of life.

As yet, however, there is still some reference to the ways of the world that they have left behind. Henry, playing with small sea-creatures (again in echo of *The Coral Island*, where the narrator constructs a 'tank' to keep his collection), "(becomes) absorbed beyond mere happiness as he felt himself exercising control over living things" (Golding, 1979: 77), itself an indication of the inherent will to order and control that the boys cannot be rid of. Roger, throwing stones at him where he plays, nevertheless throws to miss because

Here, invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law. Roger's arm was conditioned by a civilisation that knew nothing of him and was in ruins (Golding, 1979: 78).

It is also at this time that Jack first experiments with a mask of mud, "a thing of its own, behind which Jack hid" (Golding, 1979: 79-80). The reversion to a kind of pre-modern hunter, armed with only a sharp stick, is almost complete. Jack's increased removal from the responsibilities of the society which he helped form is becoming clearer and clearer, and in fact it seems, at times, that it is only Ralph and Piggy who still try to bear any responsibility at all.

The first hope of rescue, a ship on the horizon, coincides with the first kill of the hunters, and consequently there is no fire and no signal. Jack is so caught up in his blood lust that he hardly seems to care. The hunters' fascination with the act of killing is evident: "There was lashings of blood," said Jack, laughing and shuddering, "you should have seen it" (Golding, 1979: 87). Ralph, aloof from the killing frenzy the hunters share, is not suitably impressed, and it is here too that the first serious schism occurs between Jack and Ralph. Ralph ignores Jack while the fire is rebuilt, and "by the time the pile was built, they were on different sides of a high barrier" (Golding, 1979: 91). When Ralph goes to Piggy to take his glasses to re-light the fire "not even Ralph knew how a link between him and Jack had been snapped and fastened elsewhere" (Golding, 1979: 91). Jack attempts to re-assert his authority through boasting about his hunting, and starts to describe the hunt. As the story progresses, with suitably savage interjections from the crowd, a kind of primitive ritualistic fervour enters the atmosphere, with Maurice taking the role of the pig, and the rest of the hunters re-enacting the successful hunt. It is here too that the chant, the effect of which will be so ominous later, is first heard: "*Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Bash her in.*" ". As the boys dance, it seems that the reversion to savagery is almost complete. It is in the face of this rapidly rising savagery that Ralph breaks up the assembly, and calls a meeting (Golding, 1979: 94).

Down on the beach, he has a sort of epiphany: "He found himself understanding the wearisomeness of this life, where every path was an improvisation and a considerable part of one's waking life was spent watching one's feet" (Golding, 1979: 95). Nor will this meeting be an easy one. He tries to sum up the situation: " 'Things are breaking up. I don't understand why. We began well; we were happy. And then - ...then people started getting frightened' " (Golding, 1979: 102). In the style of a true rationalist, he says "We've got to talk about this fear and decide there's nothing in it (*ibid.*). The problem is that the fear is not a rational one. Fitzgerald and Kayser write that "the plight of the boys becomes an allegory for the plight of modern man, who denies and fears the irrational. Mankind's essential illness is irrational fear" (Fitzgerald & Kayser, 1992: 78). No amount of talking about it will do the slightest amount of good, because the boys lack the

knowledge to assuage it. It is for this reason that the boys' imperfect knowledge of the island is so dangerous.

Especially for the modern mind, the unknown is perhaps the most frightening thing of all. Yet even Jack, who has been all over the island and affirms that "there is no beast in the forest" (Golding, 1979: 104) initially tells the 'littluns': "As for the fear – you'll just have to put up with that like the rest of us" (Golding, 1979: 103). The theme of knowledge (or the lack thereof) is also important, for it leads us to the idea of entropy. Angrist and Hepler state that "disorganisation may be interpreted as meaning how little the observer knows about the system. If an observer learns something about a physical system, its entropy is decreased, since for him it has become less disorganised" (Angrist & Hepler, 1973: 179). In contrast, knowing nothing about a system increases the chances of things spinning rapidly out of control. They state further that "the entropy of an isolated system must increase or at least remain constant" (Angrist & Hepler, 1973: 183). In a situation like the one that obtains in *Lord of the Flies*, where knowledge and understanding are scant, it would seem that the only way to deal with such a tendency towards chaos is to try and arrogate as much power as is humanly possible to the human subject. Yet the ethical vacuum that underlies the modern world will mean that such a reckless insistence on human power and domination will come to hold strictly Dystopian connotations, and will come to represent more what Pippin refers to as "a vain celebration of human power" than anything else (Pippin, 1991: 26).

Piggy, always the rational one, attempts to calm down the meeting. "Life...is scientific, that's what it is" (Golding, 1979: 105) he states, and so attempts to prove to the boys that there can be no beast on the island, that they are frightened of shadows. Yet, as Fitzgerald and Kayser point out, "Piggy's reason ill equips him to understand the nature and origin of evil. Indeed, Piggy's scientific humanism precludes him from seeing the beast in us" (Fitzgerald & Kayser, 1992: 83). Here again the imperfect knowledge that the boys have is their downfall. Simon, of all the boys, is the one who seems intuitively to understand what is going on. Even at this stage, before the full truth of his intuition has been revealed, he states "maybe there is a beast...What I mean is...maybe it's only us...Simon

became inarticulate in his efforts to express mankind's essential illness" (Golding, 1979: 110-111). Yet perhaps the illness is not so much the darkness itself, but rather man's refusal to accept the fact of its existence.

It is also at this stage that the idea of the beast perhaps being a ghost first enters the picture. The easy acceptance of such a superstitious belief (significantly, one which does not allow for itself to be proved or disproved) is indicative of the extent to which the boys have already started falling prey to non-rational fears (perhaps not surprisingly, for a group so young). It is for this reason, amongst others, that all Piggy's rational arguments against the existence of the beast fall on deaf ears. Even his attempt to appeal to their pride – "What are we? Humans? Or animals? Or savages? What's grown-ups going to think?" (Golding, 1979: 113) – fails in the face of this all-encompassing and uncombatable fear. The problem, of course, is that in a very real sense they are an uneasy mix of all three. As the novel progresses the influence of the scientific humanism espoused by Piggy becomes less and less pronounced in the face of the demands, whether physical or psychological, of their new environment.

The extent of their reversion from a democratic, rules-based society in favour of a more 'tribal' sense of values is revealed when Ralph accuses Jack of breaking the rules, "the only thing we've got" and Jack contemptuously shouts him down: "Bollocks to the rules! We're strong – we hunt" (Golding, 1979: 114). Whereas in the early days the focus was on order, rules and the hope of rescue, as well as on the maintenance of western values of democracy, the focus, at least for the majority of the tribe, has shifted towards what Habermas calls

the Bacchanalian traits of an orgiastic will to power – the creative and exuberant activity of a mighty will manifested as much in play, dance, rapture and giddiness as in the kinds of stimulation aroused by destruction, by viewing pain that incites cruelty and pleasure, by witnessing violent death (Habermas, 1996: 100).

It is also towards the end of this chapter that Ralph, Piggy and Simon realise their previous almost total dependence on adult influence for moral structure and moral behaviour. They also realise that without the potent intervention of some authority figure, some symbol of adult power, they are essentially lost. “ ‘If only they could get a message to us,’ cried Ralph desperately. ‘If only they could send us something grown up... a sign or something’ ” (Golding, 1979: 117). It is one of the tragic ironies of the book that when the sign does arrive, it is to be the catalyst for the complete disintegration of the already weakened society which Ralph and Piggy have tried to desperately to found.

The ‘sign’ from the adult world, perhaps quite fittingly, is the arrival of the dead airman, whose corpse ends up on top of the mountain, close to where the signal fire should be (Golding, 1979: 119). It is from here on, now that the beast has assumed a physical presence, and significantly one that seems to wish to deny them the possibility of escape, that the fear and confusion of the boys finally begins to spiral out of control. Ralph and Jack go exploring, to look for it, and it is thus that they find Castle Rock, which immediately impresses Jack with its defensive possibilities – “What a place for a fort” (Golding, 1979: 131). When they eventually decide to go to the top of the mountain, Ralph gets, also, his first taste of hunting. Although the first attempt is unsuccessful, the boys descend once again into the ritualistic re-enactment of the hunt, this time with Robert taking the role of the pig. Yet it is becoming less and less innocent, more and more real. Even Ralph is consumed by the ritualised dancing: “Ralph too was fighting to get near, to get a handful of that brown, vulnerable flesh. The desire to squeeze and hurt was over-mastering” (Golding, 1979: 142). Soon they begin to discuss how the ritual should really function, and the familiar cannibal scenes from *The Coral Island* start to have serious resonance with the boys in *Lord of the Flies*: “ ‘You want a fire, I think, and a drum, and you keep time to the drum’ ”. Further, and more worryingly: “ ‘You want a real pig,’ said Robert... ‘because you got to kill him’. ‘Use a littlun,’ said Jack, and everybody laughed” (Golding, 1979: 143).

The finding of the beast on top of the mountain precipitates the final disintegration of the somewhat precarious unity of the boys. Jack attempts to get Ralph voted out as chief, but

fails. Suddenly, despite all his pretence at bravery and leadership, Jack is humiliated back into the role of a small, humiliated boy: “I’m not going to play any longer. Not with you” (Golding, 1979: 158). And with that he leads off the boys who want to follow him, the first significant schism in what has essentially become a tribe of schoolboys. It is at this stage that Simon suggests that they should climb the mountain – “ ‘What else is there to do?’ ”(Golding, 1979: 159). It seems that Simon is the only boy who truly understands the importance of knowledge, who realises that without knowledge of what the beast truly is there is really no hope of ever conquering their fear, and themselves. Yet Ralph is as loath as the others to face it, and in the end it is only Simon who has the courage, with disastrous results for him.

Jack has a different solution to the problem. He tells his group of hunters: “ ‘We’re going to forget the beast’ ” (Golding, 1979: 165). When they hunt now, all previous squeamishness about blood and killing is forgotten, and the boys revel in cruelty. This is demonstrated “in a phrase which was received uproariously. ‘Right up her ass’ ” (Golding, 1979: 168). One is reminded of Nietzsche, who wrote in *Daybreak*: “of all pleasures, which is the greatest for the men of that little, constantly imperilled community which is in a constant state of war...?...The pleasure of *cruelty*” (Nietzsche, 1982: 16). This increased fascination with pain and suffering, especially as caused towards other living creatures, will eventually force the book towards a denouement that is strikingly different from the ‘happily ever after’ conclusion of *The Coral Island*.

It is also at the conclusion of this hunt that Jack sets up the head of the pig as a sacrifice to the beast. Once again the indications of a reversal to a pre-rational, mythical sense of the world are disturbing. The focus is once again on power and control, on appeasement of the forces that threaten human existence but, significantly, there is no longer, at least on the part of the hunters, an attempt to render the world comprehensible through the exercise of mental faculties. Rather, the atavistic act of sacrifice emphasises the extent to which the boys have turned away from their earlier, civilised way of life. Simon, always the one who seems to intuitively understand what is happening on the island, is the first one to find the sacrifice, referred to here for the first time as the Lord of the Flies

(Golding, 1979: 171). The raid by Jack and the hunters to steal Piggy's glasses follows soon after, together with the invitation to join the feast that Jack and the hunters are planning. The obvious split between the boys, and the increasing willingness of the boys to perpetrate violence against one another, is a worrying premonition of what is to come.

The increasing militarism of Jack's hunters, hidden as they are behind their masks, is significant. Lorenz writes that "militant enthusiasm is a specialised form of communal aggression, clearly distinct from and yet functionally related to the more primitive forms of petty individual aggression" (Lorenz, 1967: 231). The militaristic frenzy is also one that holds much in common with the Dionysian frenzy of Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche writes that "the individual, with his limits and moderations, forgets himself in the Dionysian vortex and becomes oblivious to the laws of Apollo" (Nietzsche, 1956: 35). This is certainly the mood that seems to prevail amongst the hunters, especially towards the end of the book. Lorenz writes, further, that under the spell of military enthusiasm,



all obstacles in its path become unimportant, the instinctive inhibitions against hurting and killing one's fellows lose, unfortunately, much of their power. Rational considerations, criticism and all reasonable arguments against...militant enthusiasm are silenced by an amazing reversal of all values, making them appear not only untenable but base and dishonourable. Men may enjoy the feeling of absolute righteousness even while they commit atrocities. Conceptual thought and moral responsibility are at their lowest ebb (Lorenz, 1967: 231-232).

It is after the raid that Simon 'converses' with the Beast, and so begins to come to a sort of understanding of what the Beast really is:

'Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!' said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. 'You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?' (Golding, 1979: 177).

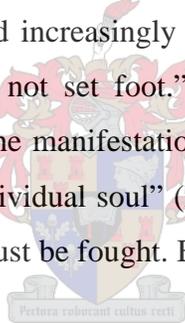
The Beast continues: “ ‘We are going to have fun on this island. Understand? We are going to have fun on this island!’ ” (Golding, 1979: 178), a disturbing repetition of Ralph’s original speech at the beginning of the book. The way the ‘fun’ will progress is indicative of the nightmare that sits at the heart of the boys’ experience of the wild.

From this point onwards the book moves swiftly towards its climax, suitably accompanied by the build-up of a massive storm. Simon, having had what appears to be some sort of epileptic fit, and with blood all over his face from a burst vessel in his nose, laboriously drags himself up the mountain, once again sure that there is nothing else to do but to try to gain some sort of understanding of what the Beast really is. He finds the dead airman, the sign from the world of adults so desperately wanted by Ralph, and realises what it is (Golding, 1979: 181) He decides to return to the others, by now deeply involved in the feast. Jack is slowly losing the last of his Englishness as he is conquered by the megalomania and madness that is the result of his monopoly of power: “Authority sat on his shoulder on his shoulder and chattered in his ear like an ape” (Golding, 1979: 185). As the feast progresses, the boys once again enact the ritualistic dance that helps to bond them into a “demented but partly secure society”, the dance helping to fuse their movements into “the throb and stamp of a single organism” (Golding, 1979: 187). It is to his great misfortune that Simon should intrude on the dance at this, its critical junction, and that he thereby becomes its first human victim. As the Judge in McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* asks, “Is not blood the tempering agent in the mortar which bonds?” (McCarthy, 1989: 329).

And indeed it is Simon’s death at the hands of his erstwhile companions that provides the catalyst for the complete disintegration of any attempts at civilised society, and bonds the boys into a savage tribe, rather than the ordered, rational society Piggy had envisioned. His death is important because, firstly, it does indeed provide the blood to bond the boys into a savage tribe, which has killed, and will kill again if they can. It is interesting to note the connection, too, with *Blood Meridian*, where the Judge states: “only that man who has offered himself up entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit

and seen horror in the round and learnt at last that it speaks to his innermost heart, only that man can dance” (McCarthy, 1989: 331). It is only Simon, Piggy, and to a lesser extent Ralph, who remain consciously aloof from the dance. For the rest of the boys, increasingly violent and savage, the descent into the Dionysian frenzy of the dance is all too easy.

Simon’s death also destroys the possibility of knowledge of what the Beast is, and consequently any hope of understanding and control is lost, especially as at the same time the violence of the storm drags the remains of the airman off the island (Golding, 1979: 189). The dance and the killing of Simon lures the remnants of the boys, all but the twins Sam and Eric, and some of the small children, to Jack’s camp. There is a reluctance to speak of Simon’s death, which reveals the last vestiges of civilisation and shame that still cling to the boys, albeit only to Ralph and Piggy. For Ralph, “the attraction of wildness had gone” (Golding, 1979: 203) and increasingly he dreams only of escape back to “a tamed town where savagery could not set foot.” (*ibid.*). Barnett writes (of *Heart of Darkness*) that “the wilderness is the manifestation of the external evil which inflames the capacity for evil within each individual soul” (Barnett, 1996: online). Yet in *Lord of the Flies* it is the internal evil that must be fought. Because the boys cannot understand it, there is little hope of victory.



Hoping for a reconciliation of sorts, Piggy and Ralph journey to Castle Rock. But a reconciliation between Piggy’s vision of a civilised society, and Jack’s maniacal obsession with power and blood proves to be impossible. At Castle Rock, after Piggy harangues them for their loss of self, he is killed, ironically by the same kind of rolling rock that earlier in the book causes Jack, Ralph and Simon such pleasure. When he dies, the conch, too is destroyed, a sign of the fragility of the order that the boys attempted to impose, and also of the unbridled chaos that now stalks the boys. With its destruction, all Ralph’s claim to authority is also lost, as is demonstrated when Jack says:

‘See? See? That’s what you’ll get! I meant that! There isn’t a tribe for you any more! The conch is gone—’

He ran forwards stooping.

‘I’m Chief!’

Viciously, with full intention, he hurled his spear at Ralph.

(Golding, 1979: 223).

And Ralph realises that the game is up. There is nothing left of Jack to appeal to, no remnant of the civilised self he had once been: “This was a savage whose image refused to blend with that ancient picture of a boy in shorts and shirt” (Golding, 1979: 225). He realises, also, that impelled by Jack’s blood lust and made anonymous by their war-paint, “these painted savages would go further and further” (Golding, 1979: 226), would stop at nothing to satisfy their various cravings, whether it be for power, blood, or a release from superstitious fear. The mask is also important, because like the dance, it provides an escape from the Apollonian burden of individuality, and consequently responsibility. In the secular world of the 20th century, “a break-up of the principle of individuation becomes the escape route from modernity” (Habermas, 1996: 94), and this is revealed as much in the figure of the masked savage of *Lord of the Flies* as it is in Kurtz forgetting himself amongst his people, wandering in the depth of the primordial jungle.

The remainder of the book depicts the hunt that the savages mount to kill Ralph. Although their intentions when they catch him are unclear, it is telling that “Roger sharpened a stick at both ends” (Golding, 1979: 234), the same thing he does when the hunters offer their first sacrifice to the Beast. The implications are horrifying. Yet Ralph manages to elude the hunters, at least for a while, by sticking to some tried and trusted imperial advice – “One must remember to wake at first light, in order to diddle the savages” (Golding, 1979: 235) – the jingoistic tone of this statement clashing ironically with the savagery that now rules the island. Yet even now it seems as if the hunt is more of a game, grown increasingly cruel, than anything else. The boys hunting Ralph seem to take the whole thing as a bit of a lark, their “silvery laughter scattered amongst the trees” (Golding, 1979: 237). And, eventually, they again resort to rolling rocks in order to flush him out. When this fails, and he manages to break through their hunting lines, they turn to fire in order to smoke him out.

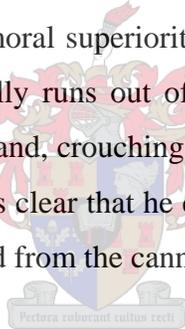
This final use of fire has attached to it a double irony. It is the massive conflagration that they start that eventually serves to do what the signal fire on top of the hill failed to – attract the attention of their rescuers. And secondly, it is through the use of fire, the maintenance of which, for much of the book, comes to stand for the preservation of order, that the boys attempt to destroy the original creator of that order. It is interesting to note Nietzsche's mention of "primitive man's belief in the supreme value of fire as the true palladium of every rising civilisation" (Nietzsche, 1956: 63). In such a view, the boys' reckless use of it has every indication of a significant regression. It is also indicative of the boys' lack of forethought and their lust for destruction that they are willing to release this untameable destructive force on the island which is, conceivably, still to be their home for the foreseeable future. Ralph finds himself, even the leader, thinking that "the fire must be almost at the fruit trees – what would they eat tomorrow?" (Golding, 1979: 243).

Yet in its Bacchanalian traits this final eruption of the will to power has nothing to do with responsibility, rational thought, or even self-preservation. It seems that in their complete surrender to the relentless dialectic of the jungle, their complete fascination with death and destruction, the boys have forgotten even the simple fact of survival. It is the same spectacle that Willard will see, on a much larger scale, in his journey up river in *Apocalypse Now*. Despite the chaos that threatens to engulf him, Ralph manages, through the exercise of his rational facilities, to survive. He chants a kind of mantra to himself – " 'Think.' What was the sensible thing to do? There was no Piggy to talk sense. There was no solemn assembly for debate nor dignity of the conch. 'Think.' " (Golding, 1979: 241).

It is no accident that at this critical juncture Ralph's attention turns to the two forces most responsible for what semblance of order there had been on the island. It is through his identification, albeit too late, with Piggy, that Ralph is able to use the rational part of his brain to outwit the savages who are now functioning on an almost entirely instinctive level. Yet for all his thinking he cannot escape the rest of the boys forever, and when they

eventually do find him Ralph, too, reverts to his savage instincts in order to survive: “Ralph screamed, a scream of fright and anger and desperation. His legs straightened, the screams became continuous and foaming. He shot forwards, burst the thicket, was in the open, screaming, snarling, bloody. He swung the stake and the savage tumbled over; but there were others coming towards him, crying out” (Golding, 1979: 245).

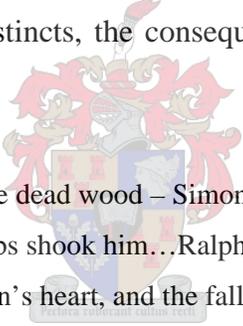
One is reminded once again of *The Coral Island* where Jack, when attacking the savages, who hold Avatea, “uttered a yell that rang like a death-shriek amongst the rocks. With one bound he leaped over a precipice full fifteen feet high, and before the savages had recovered from their surprise, was in the midst of them” (Ballantyne, 1995: 201). Dutheil remarks that “Jack’s replication of the marks of cannibal violence highlights the contradictions inherent in Ballantyne’s attempt to reconcile the heroic mode of adventure with the alleged moral superiority of the white subject” (Dutheil, 2001: 117). There is, in *Lord of the Flies*, no such alleged moral superiority. The course of the book makes this clear enough. When Ralph eventually runs out of options, and ends up on the beach, “rolling over and over in the warm sand, crouching with arm up to ward off, trying to cry for mercy” (Golding, 1979: 246) it is clear that he expects no more mercy from Jack and his hunters than Robinson Crusoe did from the cannibals on his island.



It is at this moment, of course, that their rescue, finally caused by smoke on the mountain, occurs. The naval officer, dressed all in white uniform, becomes an instant authority figure, before whom the boys, so enthusiastically savage and wild only moments before, are struck dumb. After ascertaining that there are no adults, that the boys must be responsible for the destruction, the officer says “ ‘Fun and games’ ”, once again a sort of unconscious parody of both Ralph, and of the Lord of the Flies (Golding, 1979: 246). But as yet he has no inkling of the significance of what he is seeing. When he says “ ‘We saw your smoke. What have you been doing? Having a war or something?’ ”, he is grinning cheerfully, clearly still under the impression that all is indeed fun and games. It is only when he mockingly asks “ ‘Nobody killed, I hope? Any dead bodies?’ ” and Ralph casually answers “ ‘Only two. And they’ve gone’ ” that he seems to realise the full gravity of the situation (Golding, 1979: 247). It is telling, too, that when the man asks

who is in charge, and Ralph says “ ‘I am’ ”, loudly, Jack steps forward, “then changed his mind and stood still” (Golding, 1979: 248). Even now, when things have gone so utterly out of control, it is Ralph, not Jack, the cause of the chaos, who steps forward to take responsibility.

At this stage, in contrast to the order that Piggy tried to create, the boys do not even know how many of them there are. Needless to say, the officer is not impressed: “ ‘I should have thought that a pack of British boys – you’re all British, aren’t you? – would have been able to put up a better show than that – ’ ”. And Ralph is unable to put what happened into words: “ ‘It was like that at first,’ said Ralph, ‘before things – ’ ”. When he runs out of words the officer nods helpfully. “ ‘I know. Jolly good show. Like the Coral Island’ ” (Golding, 1979: 248). And at this Ralph can hold in no longer. He thinks of “the strange glamour that had once invested the beaches”. But before his mind’s eye floats the results of the boys’ destructive instincts, the consequence of an unbridled and reckless will to power:

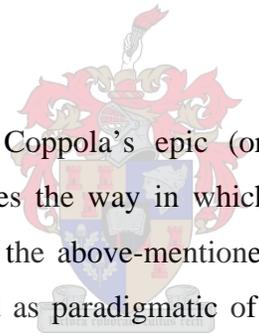


the island was scorched up like dead wood – Simon was dead – and Jack had...
the tears began to flow and sobs shook him...Ralph wept for the end of
innocence, the darkness of man’s heart, and the fall through the air of the true,
wise friend called Piggy. The officer, surrounded by these noises, was moved and
a little embarrassed. He turned away to give them time to pull themselves together;
and waited, allowing his eyes to rest on the trim cruiser in the distance (Golding,
1979: 248).

Chapter 7

Making a Friend of Horror: Madness and Morality in *Apocalypse Now*

“In this war things get... confused out there. Power, ideals, the old morality and practical military necessity. But out there with these natives it must be a temptation to be god. Because there's a conflict in every human heart between the rational and the irrational, between good and evil, and good does *not* always triumph. Sometimes the dark side overcomes what Lincoln called the 'better angels of our nature'. Every man has a breaking point. You and I have one. Walt Kurtz has reached his, and obviously he has gone insane” (Coppola, 1979).



Apocalypse Now, Francis Ford Coppola's epic (or anti-epic, as it has also been described), is a film that examines the way in which war impacts upon morality and rationality. As such, we can take the above-mentioned statement, made by the general during his interview with Willard as paradigmatic of the whole film. Contained in the statement are all of the aspects that make the film so fascinating, on a philosophical, anthropological and mythical level. Although not a colonial text in the classical sense, it has distinct affinities with the colonial genre, perhaps the most of important being its close relation to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In fact, in broad outline the story is basically the same, and Norris writes that

Coppola attends to the way Joseph Conrad took the great philosophical theme of the modern – the arbitrariness, randomness, chance and absurdity of the universe – and gave them a precise function and figuration in the critique of colonialism (Norris, 1998: 739).

Yet whereas *Heart of Darkness* is set during the colonial period, in the Congo, Coppola uses essentially the same plot for a film about the Vietnam war. In both texts a man is

sent to travel up a river, into an unexplored and/or hostile jungle, to find a man named Kurtz. The colonial setting in the Congo facilitates the hostility of the landscape, while in Vietnam it is, of course, the war. In both texts the river and the jungle come to play an important part in the psychological effects of the journey on Marlow and Willard respectively. Taylor writes of Marlow, Willard's fictional ancestor, that "unwilling to espouse the violence inherent in adventure or to fully relinquish his need to pass as an adventurer, Marlow attempts an unholy amalgamation of the two positions. In so doing, he renders himself impotent in both" (Taylor, 1998: 195). The same does not apply to Willard. Indeed, Willard proves himself to be not adverse to violent action, especially as he journeys further and further upstream. It is this that makes Willard's journey into the heart of darkness, if anything, even more compelling than Marlow's essentially distanced narration.

Of particular interest to this study is the work of Nietzsche, whose work in many respects resonates deeply with *Apocalypse Now*. As a critic of modernity, Nietzsche's work applies profoundly to *Apocalypse Now*, itself, in a sense, a critique of the hypocrisy of society. In the epigraph, the general mentions "a conflict in every human heart, between the rational and the irrational, between good and evil". One is immediately reminded of two of Nietzsche's key texts, namely *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he develops his opposition to "the old morality", and *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he develops the distinction between the Apollonian (rational) and Dionysian (irrational) parts of the psyche. It is in conjunction with this that the books *The Golden Bough*, by Sir J.G. Frazer, and *From Ritual to Romance*, by Jessie L. Weston, glimpsed on Kurtz's table at the end of the film, come also to hold significance. This is so especially for their examination of, firstly, the shift from prerational to rational societies, and secondly of the hero, the warrior, and his quest. Certain aspects of the Dionysian fable mentioned by Frazer also provide interesting links with the film.

Perhaps a good starting point to a Nietzschean critique of *Apocalypse Now* would be to elucidate the character of the Apollonian and Dionysian character respectively. As mentioned earlier, the Apollonian in Nietzsche stands for the rational, the objective, and,

consequently, for rational, objective *judgement*, which implies, of course, a rational, objective being acting in accordance with predetermined and determinable rules. In opposition, the Dionysian world-view represents the irrational, the subjective, and consequently the element of spontaneity, of action without judgement, of seeing what has to be done and doing it. Of course, the point to make is that the Apollonian is above all what structures culture and consequently morality, because morality is the set of precepts accepted and acted upon by a sane, rational mind, which is one of the pre-conditions of culture.

In distinct contrast, the Dionysian admits of no morality, and accepts only the exigencies of the moment as motivation for action. Nietzsche goes as far as to state that “understanding kills action, for in order to act we require the veil of illusion” (Nietzsche, 1956: 51). What the Dionysian, in its emphasis on the instinctive, entails, is the absence of the *need* for understanding, which in turn gives rise to the possibility of instinctive, spontaneous action. Importantly, the Dionysian revel also entails the losing of self, the negation of individuality and personality and the surrender, completely, to the world of urges and appetites, to descend, almost, to the level of the beast of prey. Nietzsche writes, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, that “all the savage urges of the mind were unleashed on those occasions until they reached that paroxysm of lust and cruelty which has always struck me as the ‘witches cauldron’ per excellence” (Nietzsche, 1956: 25-26). The Dionysian represents, in this scheme, action motivated by natural instinct rather than the dictates of culture.

It is in the context of this “witches cauldron” of insanity and cruelty that the almost hallucinatory quality of *Apocalypse Now* makes its greatest impact. The sheer size of the operation, the amount of technology, dwarfs the rather primitive conditions of *Heart of Darkness*. Tellingly, Dempsey speaks of “limitless power being wielded by cracked-open minds which have lost their compass, which have become caught up in a collective madness for its own sake” (Dempsey, 1979-80: 6-7). While the Apollonian reflects the “culture” of mankind, the Dionysian represents the aspect of “nature”, described by

Frazer as “the permanent existence of ... a solid layer of savagery beneath the surface of society” (Frazer, 1925: 56).

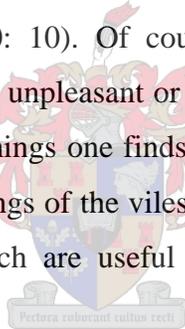
The Dionysian, once outside the structured confines of society, represents the return to the level of the beast of prey, the law of nature, where he who is the stronger triumphs. Nietzsche writes in *The Genealogy of Morals*, that “deep within all these noble races there lurks the beast of prey, bent on spoil and conquest. This hidden urge has to be satisfied from time to time, the beast let loose in the wilderness” (Nietzsche, 1956: 174). In contrast, as mentioned earlier, “as a moral deity Apollo demands self-control from his people and, in order to observe such self-control, a knowledge of self” (Nietzsche, 1956: 34). Such self-control is the basis for any attempt at the creation of society, for without it there is nothing to tame ‘the beast of prey’. Man’s natural instincts towards power and domination must be contained by the rational, Apollonian self-control in order to create society. Without such control, one is back to Hobbes’ state of nature, “a perpetual and restless desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death” (Hobbes, 1904: 49).

Yet in another book, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, he also writes that “in all the original conditions of mankind ‘evil’ signifies the same as ‘individual’, ‘free’, ‘capricious’, ‘unusual’, ‘unforeseen’, ‘incalculable’” and, one might suggest, ‘unsound’, the term used of Kurtz by the general in the film (Nietzsche 1982: 9). The problem, for this latter day Kurtz, as much as for his ancestor, is that the ‘sound’ morality of civilised society has no place where he now finds himself, physically and psychologically.

The point is that Kurtz has been forced to shrug off “the old morality”, a morality made useless and hypocritical by the war, and has attempted instead to create an ethic of strength, of terror, of the will to power. And like his ancestor in *Heart of Darkness*, who despite his excesses, still “sends in as much ivory as all the others put together” (Conrad, 1994: 27), Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* is also frighteningly efficient. Yet such efficiency in a war-zone, in the face of an implacable enemy, where it truly is a kill-or-be-killed situation, comes at a cost.

Rasmussen and Downey, in their discussion of the “warrior psychosis”, speaks of the “tension between the devastating killer and the humane individual, between the *militaristic* and the *moralistic*” (Rasmussen and Downey, 1991: 180). It is this duality that Kurtz attempts, after his “break down”, to dissolve. He is described by the general as having been “a good man, a humanitarian man” (Coppola, 1979). What all of this suggests (on a facile level) is that Kurtz, as a moral man exposed to an untenable duality, has broken, has gone mad, and surrendered entirely to the primal urges of his nature. In fact, the film is far more complex than this.

Pym describes Kurtz’s breakdown (or epiphany) as follows: “[the Americans] lacked, as he saw it, the ability to act in a completely desensitised manner, to prove that they were not afraid of the powers of darkness, in order to vanquish, by sheer force of will, such a determined enemy” (Pym, 1979-80: 10). Of course this strength of will means the strength to act ruthlessly, even to do unpleasant or repugnant things. Yet in the very fact that one is able to do such things, things one finds repulsive, a commitment can also be read. As Nietzsche puts it “to do things of the vilest odour, of which one hardly ventures to speak in polite society but which are useful and necessary – this too is heroic” (Nietzsche, 1982: 185).



It is interesting that, in an article entitled *Combat and Personality Change*, Bradshaw and Ohlde typify what they come to call ‘heart of darkness syndrome’ thus: “heart of darkness syndrome is characterised by a love of killing, a feeling of invulnerability, and an absence of empathy for any enemy killed” (Bradshaw & Ohlde, 1993: online). Eugene Dawn, in *The Vietnam Project*, after nearly killing his son, states of his examiners: “The hypothesis they test is that intimate contact with the designs of war made me callous to suffering and created in me a need for violent solution to problems of living” (Coetzee, 1998: 48). One could, perhaps, make the same argument about Kurtz, an argument which is very close to a kind of ‘survival of the fittest’ scenario. In fact, it is the only option for survival and eventually, one might argue, he too comes face to face with the same malady as Dawn. Willard states that “charging a man with murder here

was like handing out speeding tickets at the Indy 500” (Coppola, 1979), a somewhat wry take on military hypocrisy. What is important to note is that it is Kurtz’s defection from the army, which results in claims of madness and murder, rather than his methods, which has caused Willard to be sent to kill him.

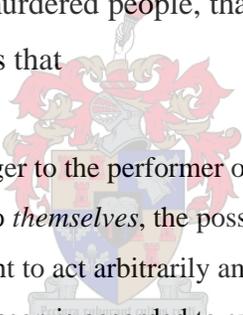
The redundancy and dishonesty of the old morality is emphasised by both Kurtz and Willard. Kurtz states that “I am above their timid, lying morality, and so I am above caring” (Coppola, 1979), while Willard states (about American dealings with the Vietnamese) “It was a way we had over here of living with ourselves. We’d cut them in half with a machine gun, then give them a Band-Aid. It was a lie, and the more I saw of it the more I began to hate lies” (Coppola, 1979). The old morality has, in Vietnam, lost its relevance and even its base in practicality – it has become merely customary, merely conventional, and as a result has lost its ability of guiding actions. Importantly, it has lost its integrity. Nietzsche states that “to admit to a belief merely because it is custom – but that means to be dishonest, cowardly, lazy! – And so could dishonesty, cowardice and laziness be the precondition of morality?” (Nietzsche, 1982: 59).

This, for Nietzsche, is the difference between morality and ethics: morality is an external set of rules, imposed from the outside, ethics a personal world-view and set of rules, created by the free individual out of the necessities of a situation. And Kurtz is very much a free man: he is “operating without any decent restraint, totally beyond the pale of any acceptable human conduct” (Coppola, 1979). Like his predecessor, he too has come to aspire, at least among his savage consorts, to be a god. His Montagnard followers “worship the man like a god, and follow every order, however ridiculous”. In his quest for personal autonomy and power, Kurtz has isolated himself from all meaning-giving structures, including Army operating procedure, and this, more than anything else, is what has decreed his death-sentence from his superiors. Willard describes him as having “split from the whole fucking program” (Coppola, 1979). Nietzsche writes, in *The Twilight of the Idols* that

war is a training in freedom. For what is freedom? That one has the will to self-responsibility... That one has become more indifferent to hardship, toil, privation, even to life. That one is ready to sacrifice men to one's cause, oneself not excepted. Freedom means that the manly instincts that delight in war and victory have gained mastery over the other instincts (Nietzsche, 1990: 103-104).

Like his predecessor, Kurtz could be described as one of Nietzsche's great men. The General says of him: "he was one of this country's most outstanding officers...brilliant in every way", while the photographer says "you don't judge the colonel like an ordinary man". As Willard puts it "he could have gone for general. Instead he went for himself" (Coppola, 1979).

The theme of madness is also essential to the film. Officially, it is Kurtz's ostensible madness, and the fact that he has murdered people, that is the cause of Willard being sent to assassinate him. Nietzsche writes that



usually it is not really the danger to the performer of the actions which the authorities have in view, but the danger to *themselves*, the possibility that their power and influence might be diminished if the right to act arbitrarily and foolishly, according to the light, bright or dim, of one's own reason is accorded to everybody (Nietzsche, 1982: 62).

This is illustrated in the film through the character of Kilgore, the maverick Air Cavalry Commander, who is just as, if not more insane than Kurtz. The difference is that Kilgore is still under control, is still part of the flock. His actions do not challenge the authorities, and until they do so there is no danger to them from him. Willard states "if that's how Kilgore fought the war, I began to wonder what they had against Kurtz. It wasn't just insanity and murder. There was enough of that for everyone" (Coppola, 1979). One cannot help but be reminded, when viewing the "you either surf, or you fight" scene with Kilgore, of the general's accusation of Kurtz, that his army "follow any orders, however ridiculous." It is only when the status quo is challenged, as Kurtz does, that he must be terminated "with extreme prejudice", the finely couched euphemism almost, but not quite concealing the savagery that underlies such an order.

The photo-journalist character at the end of the film says of Kurtz that “the man is clear in his mind but his soul has gone insane” (Coppola, 1979), again an echo of *Heart of Darkness* where Marlow says of Kurtz that “his intelligence was perfectly clear...[yet]... his soul had gone mad” (Conrad, 1994: 94). This links with the description above of the free man as being somehow defective, or other to the norm, and this also finds a number of interesting echoes in the work of Nietzsche. The first of these occurs in *Daybreak*, where Nietzsche writes that “all superior men who were irresistibly drawn to throw off the yoke of any kind of morality and to frame new laws had, *if they were not actually mad*, no alternative but to make themselves, or pretend to be, mad” (Nietzsche, 1982: 14). From the inoculation story told by Kurtz at the end of the film it seems relatively clear that it was Kurtz’s essential morality, his humanitarian values, (as mentioned by the general at the beginning) that leads to his breakdown and insanity. Here once again Nietzschean thought is applicable. In *Daybreak* he writes “men whose disposition are fundamentally warlike...are *hard to move*, and when pity does for once overbear their severity it seizes them like a frenzy and as though a ‘demonic force’ ” (Nietzsche, 1982: 104-5). And, relevant to the course of the whole film, Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* states that “he who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze too long into the abyss, the abyss will gaze also into thee” (Nietzsche, 1923: 97).

Of course this applies to Kurtz, but on a different level it applies also to Willard. There is an ambiguity to Willard’s character: while he is supposedly the upholder of morality and of human decency in his capacity as Kurtz’s assassin, the actions he has to perform are to a very large degree opposed to conventional morality. He is, already at the beginning of the film, a seasoned killer: “How many men had I already killed? There were the six I knew about for sure, close enough to blow their last breath in my face” (Coppola, 1979). The whole question of Willard “honourably” performing his duties is ruled out by their very nature. For Willard (and for Kurtz) to perform their duties under the old morality’s code of honour “is impossible because honour presupposes moral parameters, parameters exceeded and violated repeatedly” by both Kurtz and Willard” (Rasmussen & Downey,

1991: 191). As both Kurtz and Willard come to realise, the only coherent way to deal with the situation is to create, and live by, a code very different from that of traditional morality.

Of course, Willard is supposedly neutral, supposedly merely a tool in the hands of Command, an “errand boy sent by grocery clerks to collect the bill” (Coppola, 1979). As such, the issue of *judgement* once again becomes significant. Kurtz tells Willard “I’ve seen horror, the horrors that you’ve seen. You have the right to kill me, you have the right to do that, but you have no right to judge me” (Coppola, 1979). A complex kinship is established between Willard and Kurtz throughout the film, and this adds to the ambiguity of Willard’s character. Kurtz’s new ethos is based to a large extent on necessity, on seeing what has to be done and doing it, and, as the film progresses, so is Willard’s. In a letter home to his son, Kurtz writes “in a war there are many moments for compassionate, tender action. There are many moments for ruthless action. What is often called ruthless may in many circumstances only be clarity, seeing what has to be done and doing it, directly, awake, looking at it” (Coppola, 1979).

The massacre on the sampan and Willard’s subsequent execution of the wounded woman suggest the degree to which Willard is coming to accept this logical conclusion to what war demands. Studying Kurtz’s dossier while travelling upriver, Willard admits as much when he states “I felt that I knew one or two things about Kurtz that wasn’t in the dossier” (Coppola, 1979). There is also in *Apocalypse Now*, as there never is in *Heart of Darkness*, the sense that for Willard this is a one-way journey. He even goes as far as to say to the chief: “Get me close and I’ll cut you and the crew loose” (*ibid.*). There seems to be little hope of coming back. The difference between Willard and Marlow, of course, is that Marlow has never yet had to perpetrate the kind of violence that Willard has. Willard, already at the beginning of the film, has shared Kurtz’s experience in a way that Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* never will.

It is here that we return to the opposition between the Dionysian and Apollonian consciousness mentioned above. In this the difference between spontaneity and

judgement is crucial. The Dionysian state is spontaneous, instinctive action, the action of the beast of prey or the intoxicated celebrant. In opposition to this the Apollonian represents calculation, rationality, and judgement of consequences. In both the film and in the writings of Nietzsche we find references to the superiority and desirability of the former. Nietzsche, recounting an episode in which he tended spontaneously to a man who had fallen down, describes himself as feeling “nothing, neither fear nor sympathy, but I did what needed doing and went coolly on my way”. To this he contrasts the Apollonian view where “all possible drives would have *had time* to imagine the experience and to comment on it”, leading to failure, at the decisive moment, to act effectively (Nietzsche, 1982: 76).

Kurtz, also, seems to privilege this immediate, spontaneous quality of the Dionysian over the Apollonian. He states “you have to have men who are moral and who at the same time are willing to utilise their primordial instincts to kill, without feeling, without passion, without judgement, without judgement. Because it is judgement that defeats us” (Coppola, 1979). Of course the circumstances are somewhat different for Kurtz than for Nietzsche, but the conclusion remains the same – in situations where action is needed, rationality, the Apollonian, only gets in the way, while the Dionysian reflects the ability to act ruthlessly, instinctively. It is **this ability**, to act spontaneously, without moral judgement, that reflects the will to power most purely. Kurtz, relating the story of the chopped-off arms, says “and I thought, my god, the genius of that, the genius, the will to do that – perfect, genuine, complete, crystal, pure” (Coppola, 1979).

It is an interesting fact that in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* the ultimate conclusion reached by both parties is: “Exterminate all the brutes” (Conrad, 1994: 72; Coppola, 1979). An echo of this is found in J.M Coetzee’s work *The Vietnam Project*, where the protagonist, Eugene Dawn, a military analyst specialising in psychological warfare, states

When we attack the enemy via a pair of map co-ordinates we lay ourselves open to mathematical problems we cannot solve. But if we cannot solve them we can

eliminate them, by attacking the co-ordinates themselves – all the co-ordinates!
(Coetzee, 1998: 28).

As in the case of Kurtz, there is indeed a twisted logic here, which brings us easily back to the themes of megalomania so central to this discussion. For Kurtz, in *Heart of Darkness* as well as in *Apocalypse Now*, as well as for Eugene Dawn in *The Vietnam Project*, the complete destruction of what they oppose comes to seem the only tenable solution to their respective problems. It is not difficult to see how the megalomaniac urge to control and conquer, so central to the modern agenda which underlies all these texts, eventually exhausts itself in the genocidal tendencies displayed by all the above quotations.

If we have described, (an accurate, description, I believe) Kurtz's character in the film as being that of a 'great man', a man driven mad by the pressures of conventional morality, then once again Nietzsche reflects accurately upon his situation. In Nietzsche, as in the film, and in *The Golden Bough* and *From Ritual to Romance*, the theme of sacrifice is important. Nietzsche writes that "the most moral man is he who *sacrifices* the most to custom" (Nietzsche, 1982: 11). The essential reason why Kurtz must be executed is because he is willing to sacrifice himself totally to his own beliefs, rather than to the morality imposed on him by society. Yet under the stresses of war and imminent death, this break from society comes at a high price. As Willard states: "He broke from them. Then he broke from himself" (Coppola, 1979).

But, one might well ask, if Kurtz's new ethos is based upon necessity, why does he sometimes "go too far", in the words of the photojournalist? Why the evidence of gratuitous violence, why the evidence of a cruelty in which Willard can see "no method at all"? (Coppola, 1979). Is it enough merely to accept the photojournalist's explanation that "the man is clear in his mind, but his soul has gone insane"? In this respect the presence of *The Golden Bough* on Kurtz's table becomes significant. This book, dealing with the transition from the magical to the religious worldview, speaks, in its discussion of the Dionysian revel, the bacchanal, of "that proneness to savagery which seems to be

innate in most men” (Frazer, 1925: 387). One is reminded of Habermas, who wrote of “the Bacchanalian traits of an orgiastic will to power” (Habermas, 1996: 100). It is the Dionysian revel, the forgetting of self, that allows Kurtz to do and command what he does. There are elements of this, too, in other texts such as *Lord of the Flies*, and indeed in *Heart of Darkness* too. One need only think of the ritualised dancing and chanting of *Lord of the Flies*, or of “the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness” (Conrad, 1994: 94) where Kurtz would “forget himself amongst his people – forget himself–” (Conrad, 1994:81).

Nietzsche speaks of the Apollonian as the “*principium individuationis*”, (Nietzsche, 1956: 22) the principle of individuality where rationality is the privileged state. In contrast to this is the revelry of the Dionysiac, who loses all sense of self and merely acts out the sum of his drives, urges and appetites. The photojournalist says of Kurtz “He feels comfortable with his people, he forgets himself with his people. He forgets *himself*” (Coppola, 1979), a conscious echo of the description of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. (It is telling that Willard says almost exactly the same thing about Kilgore, prompting comparison once more). With his people, out in the jungle, Kurtz is free to act as he pleases, to act without restraint or fear of consequences – he can, truly, by forgetting himself, *be himself*.

Nietzsche also has something more specific to say about the nature of the phenomenon of cruelty. In *Daybreak* he writes “cruelty is one of the oldest festive joys of mankind” (Nietzsche, 1982: 16). In his reversion to a more primal, instinctive version of humanity, it is scarcely surprising that Kurtz too has discovered the deep, violent pleasure of pain and suffering. Discussing the warrior psychosis, Rasmussen and Downey speak of “individuals obviously capable of humane choice... relish[ing] useless destruction” (Rasmussen & Downey, 1991: 182). The joy of cruelty lies in the fact that it is an exhibition of power, both physical and mental, and as such, in a tense, warlike and embattled community like Kurtz’s, where power means survival, its excesses are bound to be all the greater. Nietzsche writes

Of all pleasures, which is the greatest for that little, imperilled community which is in a constant state of war...? –For souls, that is to say, which are full of strength, revengefulness, hostility..., ready for the most fearsome things and made hard by deprivation and morality? The pleasure of *cruelty* (Nietzsche, 1982: 16).

It is also important to note that in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche links (Nietzsche, 1956: *passim*.) the Dionysian state with the cathartic effect of tragedy. It is through the experience of tragedy that the Dionysian impulse takes its strongest form. And in *Daybreak* he writes that “that which constitutes the painful delight of tragedy is cruelty” (Nietzsche, 1982: 177). It is through cruelty, and actions which show “no method at all” that Kurtz can experience the Dionysian state, the state he has chosen, or been forced to choose, most fully.

Symbolism is a very important aspect of *Apocalypse Now*. Throughout the film several important symbols recur, and give emphasis to various aspects of the film. Perhaps one of the most important sets of symbolic opposites are the boat in which the crew travel upriver, and, in opposition to this, the jungle. It seems relatively clear that the boat represents society, civilisation, and order, while the jungle represents the chaotic, the primordial, the irrational. In the voice-over after the mango-and-tiger scene, Willard says “never get out of the goddamned boat ...not unless you were willing to go all the way. Kurtz got off the boat. He split from the whole fucking program” (Coppola, 1979). What ‘going all the way’ entails in *Apocalypse Now* is something that will become frighteningly clear once Willard and the remaining members of the crew reach Kurtz’s base. As they journey upriver a passing patrol boat throws a flare on board, and the canopy burns down. They are forced to replace it with leaves from the jungle, signifying both the gradual deterioration and disappearance of the veneer of civilisation, and the fact that the spirit of the jungle is increasingly present to them.

Similarly, when they arrive at Kurtz’s camp, after meeting the photojournalist and coming face to face with the magnitude of the place and Kurtz’s madness, Willard reassuringly tells Chef “Let’s go back to the boat” with the important proviso “for a while” (Coppola, 1979). The savagery of the jungle, its chaotic energy is already at play

in Willard, and he, like the others, can feel its allure. It is interesting to note that Lance, the young surfer, joins Kurtz's tribe almost effortlessly. For him, like for Colby, the previous soldier sent to kill Kurtz, there is a complete surrender to one might term the call of the wild, in Lance's case no doubt aided by the LSD he rather foolishly takes on the way upriver. Colby, too, is an interesting case, because he represents a complete and enthusiastic surrender to that which he was supposed to eradicate. A trained assassin, like Willard, he finds himself unable to resist Kurtz's way of life. He writes to his wife: "Sell the house. Sell the car. Sell the kids. Forget it. I'm never coming back..." (Coppola, 1979).

Another important symbol is the person of Kurtz himself. It is in this respect that the presence of *The Golden Bough* and *From Ritual to Romance* in Kurtz's abode is significant, as is his reading, at the end, of T.S. Eliot's poem *The Hollow Men*. This poem is a metaphor for the emptiness of modern, moralistic, rational men, who have no inner resources or strength but who are merely reflections of the dominant ideology or morality. Interestingly, another Eliot poem, *The Waste Land*, was inspired by Weston's book, which in turn owes a debt to Frazer's work. The inclusion of the Weston text in the film therefore alludes to the spiritual and moral wasteland of which Kurtz is the logical end product.

Nietzsche, writing in the 1880's, recognised the increasing uselessness and ineffectuality of conventional morality. He wrote "we present-day men live in a very immoral age; the power of custom is astonishingly enfeebled, and the moral sense so rarefied and lofty it might be described as being more or less evaporated" (Nietzsche, 1982: 9). Almost a hundred years later, the effect in war is compounded to the extent that conventional morality becomes, simply, untenable. Kurtz becomes symbolic of the "free human being [who] is determined to depend upon himself and not upon tradition" (Nietzsche, 1982: 9), in this case a tradition that has become sterile and irrelevant to the point of hypocrisy.

From Ritual to Romance and *The Golden Bough* both deal extensively with the issue of sacrifice and, importantly, the killing of the king. Frazer deals extensively with sacrifice,

both of kings and deities. Frazer also refers extensively to royalty becoming deified, and in *Apocalypse Now* the general who speaks of “the temptation to be god” echoes this. Kurtz is very much of this type of leader – the Montagnards are described as “worshipping him like a god” and as such he comes to represent the mythical character of a deified king. Importantly, Frazer also highlights the predominance, in ritualistic societies, of the culture of sacrificing the king when he becomes old or infirm. Pym argues that “he finds his strength ebbing and must be killed by someone younger and stronger so that his power, on which depends the stability of the world, will not be lost” (Pym, 1979-80: 10). Willard, in this model, is supposed to replace Kurtz, but he refuses to do so, thus signalling (perhaps) the end of his life of violence, symbolised by him throwing down the machete with which he has just hacked Kurtz to death. The Montagnards let him go, because he is, if he wants to be, their new king. Yet Willard refuses to succumb, like Kurtz, to the temptation to be a god, and returns to the boat, to his society and his nightmares.

Water, represented by the river upon which they travel, and by the rain towards the end of the film, is a powerful symbol for purification, and Frazer finds in traditional, mythical cultures around the world the repeated tendency for killers to have to purify themselves through either immersion in or close proximity to water (Frazer, 1925: 211 and *passim*). This is illustrated by Lance’s immersion of Chief’s body after he is killed, and by their entrusting his remains to it, rather than to the jungle, with its associations of chaos and savagery.

In this sense the river, too, is of symbolic significance. Willard, like Marlow, has a deep fascination with it, describing it as “a live wire that snaked through the war and plugged straight into Kurtz”, what one might describe as a modern version of Marlow’s experience of its power. The river is also significant because it represents a boundary between the boat (civilisation) and the jungle (savagery). Yet, as in *Heart of Darkness*, part of its fascination lies in the fact that it is a means of travel towards the fabled figure of Kurtz. Willard speaks of “above all, the desire to confront him” (Coppola, 1979). At the same time the river is going further and further into dangerous territories, and leading

the narrator deeper and deeper into an understanding of what he is going to face. His trip up the river is as much a journey of self-discovery as it is a journey towards Kurtz. He, too, will feel the call of the jungle, the savage urges, and to an extent this is demonstrated by his killing of Kurtz.

Willard's immersion of himself just before killing Kurtz (we are represented with a striking image of him rising from the water) serves a symbolic purpose, because water is symbolic of, especially in *The Waste Land*, the force of life. But this image is also ambiguous: by immersing himself Willard both purifies himself and joins himself with the chaotic force of the jungle and nature, becoming a worthy executioner of Kurtz. There is even a sense of divine will in the whole affair – Willard states that “even the jungle wanted him dead, and that's who he took his orders from anyway” (Coppola, 1979). When he accepts the law of the jungle Kurtz seals his own fate, for the law of the jungle dictates that when one weakens, one dies. Or, to put it another way, he who lives by the sword dies by the sword.

A final interesting symbol in the film when related to both *The Golden Bough* and the work of Nietzsche is the sacrificial killing of the bull at the end of the film. If we accept Kurtz as a man mastered by the Dionysian instinct, Frazer's treatment of the myth of Dionysos is telling, for he recounts how “finally, in the form of a bull, he was cut to death by the murderous knives of his enemies” (Frazer, 1925: 388). Thus one can read the savage sacrifice of the bull as symbolic for both the death of Kurtz and of the Dionysian spirit that inhabited him.

Weston, who deals with the Grail Legend and that of the Fisher King, states that “in no case is the Fisher King a youthful character; that distinction is reserved for his Healer, and successor” (Weston, 1957: 119). Whether one can see Willard as Kurtz's healer is debatable, but what is certain is that Willard has an important function to fulfil, both physically and psychologically. Physically his task is, in the words of the photojournalist, “to set the man right”. It would probably be fair to argue that Kurtz is beyond repair, and that the only way to “set him right” must be to kill him. This is echoed by Willard who

says “everyone wanted me to do it, him most of all”. What is undeniably true is that Willard is seen, by the Montagnards at least, as Kurtz’s successor, should he wish it. It is clear that the society which Kurtz has, to an extent, helped create, is based to a far greater extent on power than anything else.

A last interesting symbol in relation to Weston’s book is that of the temple at the end of the film, reminiscent of Angkor Wat, the great Cambodian ruins (Dempsey, 1979: 6). In Weston’s book she discusses the prevalence in the Grail Legend of “the fearsome chapel”, an obstacle encountered in almost all versions of the Grail Legend. Here the mettle and determination of the hero are tested, and he must resist the voice of his own fear if he is to overcome the temptation (Weston, 1957: 176-8). Similarly, Willard must enter the “fearsome temple” that Kurtz inhabits, must listen to his voice, and must not be swayed. The quandary for Willard is twofold: firstly he must decide whether to kill Kurtz or not, and secondly, once the deed is done, he must decide whether he will take Kurtz’s place. Traditionally, it is only through Willard taking over the king’s place that strength and vigour will be restored to the kingdom: Willard, by refusing to do so, dooms Kurtz’s whole enterprise, and calls in the air-strike that will destroy the last remnants of it.

It is difficult to know what to make of this final sequence. It is relatively clear that he is not acting because of his orders – he states “they were going to make me a major for this, and I wasn’t even in their fucking army anymore” (Coppola, 1979). Rather, Willard has come to accept Kurtz’s morality, his credo of “seeing what has to be done, and doing it”. Once again, the theme of sacrifice is central, and one could argue that Kurtz is sacrificed as expiation of the collective guilt and shame felt by society, and manifested in Willard’s mission. Nietzsche states that when a war is unsuccessful, someone is always sacrificed, not as a scapegoat, but as a new “excitation of the *feeling of power*”, which allows the weak, humiliated and depressed to demonstrate that they still have some strength left” (Nietzsche, 1982: 88). But while this may be the case for Command, for Willard the situation is different – he does what he does not for society, or the army, or his commanders, but for himself.

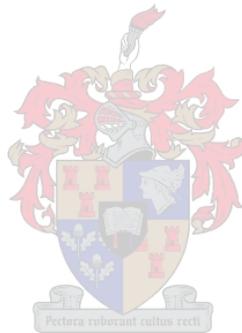
No discussion of *Apocalypse Now* would be complete without a discussion of Kurtz's final words: "The horror. The horror". As in *Heart of Darkness*, this is certainly an enigmatic ending. In fact, the theme of horror is central to the film. Kurtz tells Willard that "You must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends, if they are not they are enemies to be feared. They are truly enemies." Also, as mentioned earlier, Kurtz tells Willard that "I've seen the horrors that you've seen" (Coppola, 1979). There are interesting echoes here of the Judge in *Blood Meridian*, who states: "only that man who has offered himself up entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learnt at last that it speaks to his innermost heart, only that man can dance" (McCarthy, 1989: 331).

Horror is an inevitable result of war, of seeing the things that war forces you to see, but the horror extends also to a deeper, psychological level. The necessities of war, as described above, lead to an inevitable questioning of the morality in the name of which war is fought and such horrors sanctioned. Ultimately, it must lead to a rejection of this morality, a recognition of its hypocrisy. It is this realisation, above all, that is the horror, "the enormous *horror* which seizes people when they suddenly become confused and lose faith in the cognitive forms of the phenomenal world because the principle of sufficient reason, in one or other of its modes, appears to sustain an exception" (Nietzsche, 2000: 17). It is the existence of this exception, of the essential and irresolvable duality of war, that causes in Kurtz the horror that drives him over the edge.

Apocalypse Now is in many respects a bewilderingly complex film, and the themes and arguments expounded upon above do little but scratch the surface. As a whole the film is anti-war, but there are also echoes of the sheer exhilaration and adrenaline of modern warfare, especially during the air-cavalry attack on the village set to the thundering sound of Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*. At the same time the absurdity of the war, *any* war is emphasised. Yet one might argue that the main focus of the film is what war does to people, to their morality, and the changes it forces them to make. It comments also on the senseless orgiastic nature of war, especially wars fought with modern technology. Above

all one is presented with the spectacle that the Americans make of the war, and, more importantly, that the war makes of the Americans.

It is also a study of the return to a different mode of thought, a return reinforced by the sufferings and privations of war. It is, above all, a regression. In war, the film seems to say, the traditional, Apollonian morality is merely hypocritical, and this indicts the entire idea of a rational nation making war. It is this opposition between the Apollonian and Dionysian, tolerable perhaps in society, that becomes untenable in war, and which leads to the breakdown of the system. It is in this, in its depiction of a man driven insane when conventional morality becomes untenable, that *Apocalypse Now* delivers its strongest anti-war message.



Chapter 8

“No godserver but a god himself:” The ‘New Mythology’ of *Blood Meridian*.

...and not again in all the world’s turning will there be terrains so wild and barbarous to try whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man’s will or whether his own heart is not another kind of clay (McCarthy, 1989: 5).

On the cover of Cormac McCarthy’s epic novel *Blood Meridian* Richard Burns, a reviewer, is quoted as stating “There have been many attempts, on film as well as in books, to subvert the cosy self-satisfaction of the American “wild” west. But McCarthy’s achievement, in *Blood Meridian*, is to establish a new mythology which is as potent and vivid as that of the films, yet one which has absolutely the opposite effect...He is a great writer, and *Blood Meridian* is his masterpiece.” Perhaps the most telling part of this statement (at least for the purposes of this discussion) is that which speaks of the establishment of a “new mythology”. When trying to “read” the Wild West one invariably comes up against the stereotypes of western and frontier life as propagated by the pop-culture figures of The Lone Ranger, or the Disney versions of Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone. Relevant to this discussion are the ideas contained in Frederick Turner’s “frontier hypothesis”, which held sway over thinking about the western frontier for many years.

Similarly, important to an examination of McCarthy’s “new mythology” is an examination of the forms and functions of myth as a meaning-generating phenomenon, which reveals certain basic cultural biases and norms. It is perhaps in this regard that *Blood Meridian* is most interesting, for it reveals an underlying heart of darkness glossed over in the self-satisfied, heroic conception of the frontiersman, cowboy and Indian-killer. What ultimately makes the book so disturbing (or, to be fair, even more disturbing) is the fact that much of the book (both as regards characters and plot) is historically

based. Perhaps this is what lends the book such authority, and a feeling of authenticity that in the end makes the book a cutting indictment of the “real” American West.

Writing after the great orgy of expansion and death described in *Blood Meridian*, Turner develops his theories about the character and functions of the frontier and the frontiersmen in his famous "frontier hypothesis". Much of his thesis has to do with economic and social development and does not concern us here but, often, reading between the lines, one can come to discern in many parts of the thesis a curious kind of validation of *Blood Meridian*. Particularly interesting is Turner's argument that the development and conquering of the frontier represented, in essence, the whole development of the human race. In this view, the frontiersman is at first completely dominated by his environment. Turner writes that “at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man” (Turner, 1921: 4). This is a telling assertion, and it is reminiscent, to a large degree, of the basic principle underlying much late modern fiction, notably Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. In *Blood Meridian*, as in *Heart of Darkness* (which is set in a roughly similar period of expansion, albeit on a different continent) the underlying theme is the basic savagery of human nature, a savagery concealed but not reduced by the veneer of civilisation.



In Turner's analysis (and, for that matter, Conrad's, Golding's and McCarthy's) the return to the wild, out of the reaches of civilisation signals a return to a more primitive form of life. He even writes “before long the settler is shouting the war-whoop and taking the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion” (Turner, 1921: 4). This reference is important, for it reveals also the significance of the report from the *Yuma Daily Sun* used as prologue to the book which states “Clark, who led last year's expedition to the Afar region of Northern Ethiopia, and UC Berkeley colleague Tim. D. White, also said that a re-examination of a 300,000-year-old fossil skull found in the same region earlier shows evidence of having been scalped” (McCarthy, 1989). In the novel, scalping comes to represent, especially for the judge, an atavistic act of trophy-hunting, which is linked, through the above quotation, to a far older, more primitive attitude towards the world.

Incidentally, Yuma is the same place where the historically documented massacre that resulted in the death of John Joel Glanton took place.

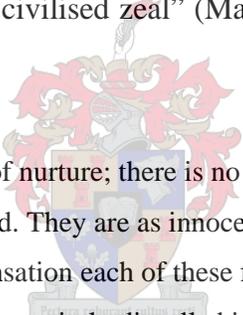
It is hard to fault the logic that every nation, on its way to whatever level of civilisation, must have passed through a stage of relatively primitive savagery. If, then, one accepts the thesis that the American genesis is one that is representative of the rise of humanity as a whole then one can hardly question the fact that Americans, too, must have passed through this initial stage of savagery, a savagery dictated to a large degree by the demands of the new and savage landscape. As the old man in the canteen says: “Blood...this country is give much blood. This Mexico. This is a thirsty country” (McCarthy, 1989: 102). *Blood Meridian* represents in all its gory details the story of this upward march, and reveals the underlying savagery of the so-called “civilised” American progress, a fact glossed over or ignored in more conventional histories.

It is in this regard that Turner’s hypothesis about the development of mankind being reflected in the development of the frontier begins to make sense. In this view there is a complete reversion to savagery, this reversion being caused by the strength and wildness of the untamed regions of the world. In *Blood Meridian*, Judge Holden states “This desert upon which so many have been broken is vast and calls for largeness of heart but it is also ultimately empty. It is hard, it is barren. Its very nature is stone” (McCarthy, 1989: 330). In the novel, this reference to stone follows on the thematic building up of the idea of the power and permanence of stone, against which is set the “clay” of the human heart, a clay moulded and shaped almost entirely by the stone which surrounds it, lending credence to the theory mentioned above, about the determining character of landscape. It is interesting to note the progression from earlier texts like *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island*, where the landscape is almost entirely passive and receptive to Western intrusion, to the later texts where landscape comes to assume a far more sinister and deadly aspect. Whereas in *Robinson Crusoe* the protagonist is able to completely enclose the land, and so subdue it, the desert, because of its emptiness and vastness, resists such domination. Rather, the savagery so inherent in the barrenness of the desert comes to inhabit also the characters that inhabit it.

A description of the riders given by McCarthy is relevant to this idea of a reversion to a savage state, and links once again with the theme of stone and landscape. They are described thus:

Above all else they appeared wholly at venture, primal, provisional, devoid of order. Like beings provoked out of the absolute rock and set nameless and at no remove from their own loomings to wander ravenous and doomed and mute as gorgons shambling the brutal wastes of Gondwanaland in a time before nomenclature was and each was all (McCarthy, 1989: 172).

One is reminded of Marzec's statement that the enclosure drive marks the difference between a "savage rambling and a civilised zeal" (Marzec, 2002: 143). Donoghue writes that



they are forces of nature, not of nurture; there is no common law of culture to be known, obeyed, respected. They are as innocent and as opaque as the rock. Under some other dispensation each of these figures might be considered as an individual, not entirely dispelled in the commonality, but here they are merely disturbances of the landscape, movements of life hardly distinguishable from the rock they may be fancied to have come from after millennia of unanswerable but pointless evolution" (Donoghue, 1997: online).

The argument suggests, further, that subsequently mankind rediscovers a more civilised form of existence and, because the finer arts and crafts are already developed elsewhere, then rises quickly to a level of sophistication comparable to the rest of the world. This, in fact, is the situation that obtains in *Robinson Crusoe*, with the crucial difference that Crusoe is at no stage portrayed as in any way mastered by the landscape. Thus the entire rise of humanity to their present state of civilisation can be seen, according to Turner, using the frontier as a microcosm. Out of this initial state of savagery, where there are

many “influences destructive to the gains of civilisation”, and where all too often the frontiersman “reverted in many ways to primitive conditions of life” (Turner, 1921: 269) it must also be noted, a new culture is seen to emerge, necessarily a culture that is more than merely the sum of all its contributing factors (Turner, 1921: 30 and *passim*). The creation of a new culture entails, of course, the manufacture of all the cultural products of a culture, and one of the most significant of these is myth.

Myth is not a static entity or phenomenon. Rather, myth is a method of continual interaction with the world, of cataloguing it, categorising it and importantly, reflecting what one might call the spirit of the age. As Max Muller, quoted in Campbell, wrote: “Depend upon it, there is mythology now as there was in the time of Homer. Only we do not perceive it, because we ourselves live in the very shadow of it, and because we all shrink from the full meridian light of the truth” (Campbell, 1997: 55). The mention of the “meridian light of truth” is significant, for it reflects back on the title of the novel, a fact we shall return to later. Myth is in a constant state of evolution, and mythical narratives continue to be added to and, importantly, re-examined. Myth fits itself to the spirit of an age, adapting and changing to form a kind of shifting continuity between the ages. It could be argued that myth is a constantly fluid and changeable phenomenon that comes to represent successive stages of religious and cultural standards. This ethical import of myth makes it, to an extent, representative also of the level of reflection that people are able, or willing, to exert on their own moral universe.

One might argue that *Blood Meridian* reveals an age, or inhabitants of an age, without any kind of reflection on the moral nature of their actions at all. Donoghue writes that

the appalling quality of each deed is its emptiness, as if it were done before anyone thought of a meaning it might have. Conduct is predicated upon some primitive energy, and when it is vicious beyond apparent cause, it is merely and outbreak of force that knows nothing else to do (Donoghue, 1997: online).

Central to the myth of the West and the frontier is the colonial ideal of freedom and space, of the unending potentiality of the unexplored world. *Blood Meridian*, in its depiction of the scalphunters, gives an impression of people living out a completely untrammelled kind of freedom, the freedom to pursue a relentless dialectic where might is right and all other concerns are subsumed under this all-encompassing rhetoric. It is in this dimension that the judge comes to assume almost Nietzschean proportions in his espousal of the legitimising and ultimately omnipotent (in the frontier context) power of violence. Donoghue writes that the “‘historicised myth’ to which *Blood Meridian* refers is one in which men acquire the aura of gods or devils by sheer force of will and are recalled with fascination for doing so” (Donoghue, 1997: online). The Nietzschean implications of this are already rather evident, and will be returned to later, and the links with the two Kurtzes of *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*, both of whom are taken as gods by the societies they encounter, are also becoming clear.

Unthinking acceptance of myth serves to gloss over what the myth conceals. It is in this regard that *Blood Meridian*, like *Lord of the Flies* and *Heart of Darkness*, is such a significant text, because to a large extent it reveals the underlying assumptions of the colonial myth and makes glaringly obvious the hierarchies and lacunae that make up the “traditional” colonial fabric. Much of the power of these texts no doubt arises from the fact that they subvert the entire course of colonial mythology, making it, in the process, far darker, bloodier and a less optimistic ground for social construction. It has been written that “the myth is a particular kind of communal experience. It is a special form of shared fantasy, and it serves to bring the individual into relationship with members of his cultural group” (Arlow, 1996: 5). *Blood Meridian* represents an inversion of the normal stereotypes and Western hierarchies, and in so doing it subverts the colonial and western myth as whole. When reading historical accounts of the old West it is noticeable how violence and death are glossed over. They are inherent in the entire architecture of the myth, and of the history, and yet, as in *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island*, the violence is curiously bloodless and sterile. In addition, a belief in the justice and the rightness of colonial violence is inherent in the myth, as typified by historical characters like Wyatt Earp, and fictional ones like The Lone Ranger.

It might be argued, then, that the frontier, in its dual representation of the history of mankind in a pre-civilised or even savage state and of the shaping of the American character, could come to stand for the mythical era that for older cultures is buried deep in the past. For a culture to develop and to be able to be self-substantiating it must have a mythological background in which cultural values and attitudes are entrenched and according to which future progressions can be evaluated. One of the primary functions of myth is to validate and justify a given way of life and a given way of interacting with the world. In so doing myth conserves the fundamental values, as well as the shared customs and beliefs on which societies are based. Myth validates actions because to a large extent they serve as models of action. The colonial myth, the myth of *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Coral Island* and a host of other texts, is just such a myth, for it is the foundation of the entire colonial enterprise, and its moral justification. When the myth is subverted, the self-assurance of colonialism comes to seem more and more like what Pippin referred to when he wrote that “much in modernity is a mere self-assertion, a kind of vain celebration of human power” (Pippin, 1991: 26).

It is for this reason, perhaps, that the idea of the frontier and specifically of the West as both a direction and a motivation has come to hold such a prominent place in American mythology. The West itself became a kind of idealised location, and, significantly, a constantly shifting one. Norris writes that “colonialism is a movable horror prone to displacement and repetition” (Norris, 1998: 734) and this is certainly true of the Western frontier. In the almost four centuries it took to conquer the New World, the constant drive was Westwards, towards new and unexplored opportunities and places. Central to this was what is known as the “myth of the garden”, namely the myth that ever to the west lay more and better lands, greater opportunities and more freedom (Turner, 1921: 12-14 and *passim*). The judge, ever aware of his own mythical function, even goes as far as to inscribe his rifle with the inscription “*Et in Arcadia ego*”, a clear indication of his perception of the ‘new’ mythical space that he and the other scalphunters inhabit.

Here, once again, *Blood Meridian* provides an inversion of traditional myth, for the landscape in which it is set is uncompromisingly bleak and dry and savage, and the people who inhabit it must adapt to the dictates of the landscape, or perish. In comparison to tropical nightmares like *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord of the Flies* or *Apocalypse Now*, the experience is one of too much space, rather than the claustrophobia of the jungle or a tropical island. One is reminded of Hirsch and O'Hanlon's argument that "the purest form of potentiality is emptiness itself" (Hirsch & O'Hanlon, 1996: 4). Even more than the unexplored jungle, the unexplored wastes of *Blood Meridian* lend themselves to the urge to lose oneself in the pure potentiality of the New World, the ultimate modern dream of freedom. The West, and the frontier receding ever onwards over thousands of miles of 'empty' lands, comes to hold a profound significance for the restless modern spirit intent on ever greater expansion and conquest.

The mythic character of the west is also closely associated with the death of the sun. Significantly, the sun is also associated with Apollo, the god of reason and order. Apart from coming to hold a kind of euphemistic connection with human death, the west, of course, is the place where the sun dies, where rationality ends and the chaotic, Dionysian forces of darkness take over. Of the Westwards drive, Campbell writes of the "temptation to know and experience that which lies beyond or "behind the sun, even at the risk of destruction, for that moment makes you almost Godlike" (once again a strikingly Nietzschean-sounding phrase) and later of "a larger mythic fear about the West as the place where the sun 'dies' " (Campbell, 1997: 57). It is significant that the full title of the McCarthy novel is *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West*, an indication of this exact mythic fear and temptation.

In the book, McCarthy portrays characters (notably Judge Holden) who have succumbed to this calling, as illustrated in a passage where he describes the scalphunters: "they had turned their tragic mounts to the west and they rode infatuate and half fond toward the red demise of the day, toward the evening lands and the distant pandemonium of the sun" (McCarthy, 1989: 185). In such a scheme the noon hour, the meridian of the sun, "is

experienced as the secular equivalent of the earlier experience of God; in the afternoon the autonomous subject experiences the world in her absoluteness, as in a completely immanent, concentrated-on-itself reality” (Lemaire, 1996: 226). The afternoon hour thus also comes to hold a significant symbolic content for the novel. Lemaire writes that

afternoon light is deadening and rapacious, because it reveals the phenomenal world – and thereby the human being, to whom consciousness belongs – absolutely identified with himself, and thereby deprives him of every margin of uncertainty, denies him the entrusting of knowledge to unknowns... The hour of truth is dead and deadly because it renders everything immobile, because it petrifies everything in its perfection. The zenith of life is close to death; at the moment that the world reaches her climax, everything that lives holds its breath and hides (Lemaire, 1996: 224).

This idea finds a curious resonance with the writings of Turner, according to whom “the frontier of agricultural settlement was universally recognised as the line separating civilisation from savagery” (Turner, 1921: 3). In this context the frontier comes to play an important role in the creation of a colonial mythology because it typifies the primordial, the primitive and the pre-rational, the place where a mythology can function authentically because it is not restrained by the limits of reason and rationality. Levi-Strauss has stated that “in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen. There is no logic, no continuity. Any characteristic can be attributed to any subject, every conceivable relation can be met. With myth, everything becomes possible” (Levi-Strauss, 1996: 119). The problem for McCarthy then lies in constructing an age of contradictions and ambivalence, and moreover an age within which anything is possible, and then establishing a credible mythology for such an age.

By placing his characters beyond the scope of human intervention, beyond the line separating civilisation from savagery, McCarthy is able to create a milieu within which his characters, like characters in the Heroic age, are dependant primarily on their own effort, and are largely cut off from any kind of supernatural or divine intervention. This

idea of the mythic hero is remarkably similar to the idea of the American frontier hero, the self-made individual who lives by his wits alone in an untamed wilderness, supported but rarely helped by his god. The quintessential American character has been held (once again, by Turner) to be typified by

that coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness, that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients, that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends, that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism, working for good and evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance that comes with freedom – these are the traits of the frontier (Turner, 1921: 30).

All of these are without doubt traits shared by Judge Holden, the Mephistophelean figure that dominates McCarthy's narrative (he is often referred to, especially by characters with religious affiliations, as the devil). The judge is the novel's answer to the traditional western hero, as typified by examples such as The Lone Ranger and the figure of the Virginian, which appears in a book of the same name written by Owen Wister and published in 1902. The Judge holds several things in common with these characters, specifically the fact of Southern descent. The Lone Ranger is a Texan, the Virginian from, well, Virginia. Holden, who is in fact based upon an actual documented figure, hails from the south. He is described thus in Samuel. E Chamberlain's contemporary account *My Confession*:

The second in command, now left in charge of camp, was a man of gigantic proportions called "Judge" Holden of Texas. Who or what he was no one knew but a cooler blooded villain never went unhung; he stood six feet six in his moccasins, had a large fleshy frame, a dull tallow coloured face destitute of hair and all expression. His desires was [sic] blood and women, and terrible stories were circulated in camp of horrid crimes committed by him when bearing another name, in the Cherokee nation and Texas; and before we left Frontereras a little girl was found in the chaparral, foully violated and murdered. The mark of a huge hand on her little throat pointed him out as the ravisher as no other man had

such a hand, but though all suspected, no one charged him with the crime (Donoghue, 1997: online).

This however is only half of the story, and does not make for a particularly engaging hero. Where the judge emerges as a mythical character worthy of note is in the second half of the description, where he is described thus:

Holden was by far the best-educated man in Northern Mexico; he conversed with all in their own language, spoke in several Indian lingo, at a fandango would take the Harp or Guitar from the hands of the musicians and charm all with his wonderful performance, and out-waltz any poblana of the ball. He was “plum centre” with rifle or revolver, a daring horseman, acquainted with the nature of all the strange plants and their botanical names, great in Geology and Mineralogy (Donoghue, 1997: online).

From such historical material McCarthy assembles his figure of the Judge, a judge of who knows what, and the central protagonist of the novel. Taking this historical account, McCarthy embellishes upon it, building out the themes of, especially, the Judge’s proficiency in languages, his knowledge of Geology and Mineralogy (as demonstrated in the story told by the ex-priest that culminates in the terrible covenant atop the extinct volcano), and his suspected paedophilia (wherever they go the riders are followed by stories of disappearing children).

Mythological figures can, in general, be divided into two categories. The first of these is the Promethean hero, an agent of good working against evil in order to ensure the betterment of mankind. This is the basic dichotomous myth where the hero works for good against evil, and does so consciously and with full intent. In contrast there is the trickster figure, an altogether more sinister figure: utterly selfish and completely irresponsible, a being who sometimes benefits mankind, but only incidentally in the pursuit of his own desires. In much of the literature on *Blood Meridian*, the judge is identified as a being of the latter sort. According to Waldington, quoted in Masters, “the Trickster tricks because everything – whether law, proposition or role – is immaterial to

him as an end and completely credible to him as means, in light of his powerful instinctual life” (Masters, 1998: online). One is reminded of Larmore, who wrote in *The Morals of Modernity*, that

the modern view is that one has a right to something simply because one wants it a lot: rights are but the expression of strong preferences. Although individuals may restrain their wants for the sake of civil peace no moral blame can attach to the ‘superman’ who casts social decency aside in order to indulge in his exorbitant desires (Larmore, 1997: 72).

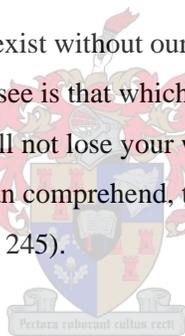
Masters writes that “as a trickster figure, the judge signifies chaos, lawlessness and transgression; however, as an ethnographer he is able to McCarthy re-assert order” (Masters, 1998: online). The judge’s role as ethnographer is one invented by McCarthy (there being no historical evidence for this particular trait), and it allows the judge to be placed in a privileged position towards the events that he both directs and describes. The judge himself states “Words are things. The words [one] is in command of he cannot be deprived of. Their authority transcends his ignorance of their meaning” (McCarthy, 1989: 85). One is reminded of another revisionist desert narrative, J. M Coetzee’s *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*, where he writes:

One cannot count the wild. The wild is one because it is boundless...Our commerce with the wild is a tireless enterprise of turning it into orchard or field. When we cannot fence it and count it we reduce it to number by other means. Every wild creature I kill crosses the boundary between wilderness and number (Coetzee, 1998: 80).

Through his meticulous cataloguing of the world, the judge asserts, or attempts to assert, control over the world, thereby placing him squarely in both the colonial and modernist mode. Masters has written that “the judge is a nightmarish embodiment of the myths of colonial expansion, myths that he extends, rewrites and reconstructs to apocalyptic ends” (Masters, 1998: online).

It is interesting in this regard to note the affiliations between the ethnographer and the Trickster figure. Like the trickster, the ethnographer “creates” a world by fixing it on paper, documenting it and thereby establishing that it is this way and not some other way. The idea of documentation comes to play a central role in the progression of *Blood Meridian*, for it implies also the idea of fate and destiny. The judge tells the scalphunters “what is to be deviates no jot from the book wherein it is writ. How could it? It would be a false book and a false book is no book at all” (McCarthy, 1989: 141). Allied with this notion is the judge’s realisation of the constructed nature of morality, and of any kind of human order. It is this realisation of the essential emptiness that underlies all of human endeavour that both empowers the judge to write history as he would have it and to transcend the bounds of traditional morality and order. This view, so close to that of Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*, is described thus by Holden:

Even in this world more things exist without our knowledge than with it and the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way. For existence has its own order and that no man’s mind can comprehend, that mind being itself but a fact among others (McCarthy, 1989: 245).



The ideas of destiny and fate run strong in the book, reflected in the night of the kid’s birth when “God how the stars did fall” (McCarthy, 1989: 3) and the night of his death when “stars were falling across the sky myriad and random, speeding along brief vectors from their origins in night to their destinies in dust and nothingness” (McCarthy, 1989: 333). Masters has argued that the falling stars of the kid’s birth reflect or symbolise a kind of presage of the battle between good and evil for the kid’s soul (a fact demonstrable by reference to the “fallen star” of Lucifer after he is cast down from heaven). In this analysis “the epic battle that the novel charts is ultimately a battle for the kid’s soul” (Masters, 1998: online). This seems to find a resonance in the final pages where the judge, upon re-encountering the kid for the first time in what must be almost thirty years, tells him “Drink up. Drink up. This night thy soul may be required of thee” (McCarthy 1989: 327). It could be argued that the kid is to an extent the antithesis of the judge, the

only one who does not subscribe or commit wholly to the demands and philosophy of the judge. In the desert, after the massacre at Yuma, the judge tells the kid: “there’s a flawed place in the fabric of your heart. Do you think I could not know? You alone were mutinous. You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen” (McCarthy, 1989: 307). The Tarot reading given by the old woman of the kid supports this. She associates him with the “cuatro de copas”, which Sepich (quoted in Masters) says “suggests a divided heart, and generally associates him with the quality of mercy” (Masters, 1998: online).

Yet “in him broods already a taste for mindless violence” (McCarthy, 1989: 3). The kid is a somewhat ambivalent figure. He participates in the violence and bloodletting, yet rarely (if ever) are his specific actions in the killings and massacres described. Rather, the violence ascribed to the kid takes place on a more personal level, such as when he is hunted, or outnumbered, or fighting for his life. His role in the violence of the book is de-emphasised, and this is what allows him to function as a representative of a different order. He is of a different order for a number of reasons. Firstly, he carries within him, perhaps, the code of morality internalised from his father who “quotes from poets whose names are now lost” (McCarthy, 1989: 3). The kid is illiterate, yet some shred of this older order of civilisation resides in him. Towards the end, he even carries a Bible, “no word of which could he read” (McCarthy, 1989: 312). Significantly, the older manifestations of civilisation are even more present in the figure of the judge, who however twists and adapts them to fit his belief in the precedence of historical law over moral law. We shall return to this point. A second possible reason why the kid is exempt from the group morality (or lack thereof) of the scalphunters is his absence from the terrible covenant on the top of the volcano. Even the volcano is laden with mythical importance, because it is a vent to the underworld, to the bedrock upon which the world is founded, which for Holden symbolises the order of which he sees himself to be the earthly representative.

A final reason why the kid is a separate entity from the rest of the group lies in the fact that his exemption from the nothingness that is at the heart of the “terrible covenant” allows him the capacity for regeneration through violence, a central aspect of the Western

myth (Masters 1998: online). In this view the western hero is able, through death and warfare, to remake himself and come out a new man, through the purifying effects of violence. It is interesting to note how different this myth is from the experiences of the boys in *Lord of the Flies* and of Kurtz, all of whom are undone, rather than purified, by their violent actions. This aspect of the myth, also, is touched upon and to an extent subverted by the judge. The western hero is the individual, the lone cowboy or gunman, who dispenses justice from his guns, and in the end rides away burned clean of all impurities in the moral crucible of the frontier. Yet the fact that the stereotypical western is a man alone is to an extent problematic. Poole writes that

once the identity of the individual is conceived in abstraction from his relations with others, the assumption of pervasive self-interest becomes almost inescapable. Other individuals occur in the reasoning of such individuals only as means or implements to ends which are independent of them (Poole, 1994: 7).

He is, in this conception of his character, alienated from society and from the community. The western hero, while claiming considerable concern for the good of the community, yet exists essentially in isolation and never practises citizenship. This renders the western hero somewhat of a loose cannon, operating without any due restraint from law or government. In the traditional western myth, the hero is sustained by “a consuming love of impartial justice”, (*ibid.*) and is thus able to maintain a kind of equilibrium of violence. In the traditional myth, also, it is the landscape, the nobility and freedom of the wide open spaces that give the hero the moral sustenance to not be corrupted by the evil he must do in the name of good. An interesting statement in this regard is that made by Turner, who states that the frontiersman prefers a state of nature to the more rigid confines of civilisation (Turner, 1921: 269).

One is reminded of the 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes’ work, in which he describes the life of man in “a state of nature” as having “no arts, no letters, no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes, 1904: 65). Hobbes also speaks of the state of nature as a state where “man is wolf to man”. And indeed the riders seem to

espouse very much the moral code of wolves. Holden goes as far as to state, in his explanation of his *Weltanschauung*:

Wolves cull themselves, man. What other creature could? And is not the race of man more predacious yet? The way of the world is to bloom and flower and die but in the affairs of men there is no waning and the noon of his expression signals the onset of the night. His spirit is exhausted at the peak of its achievement. His meridian at once his darkening and the evening of his day (McCarthy, 1989: 146-147).

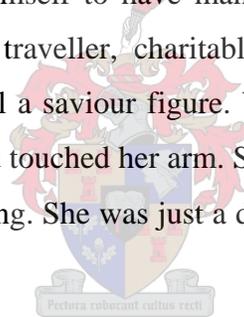
In McCarthy's view of the frontier "this desert upon which so many have been broken is vast and calls for largeness of heart but it is also ultimately empty." This view coincides with that of Masters, who claims that "traditionally, the landscape of the Frontier has been conceived as a void waiting to be filled, as a tablet awaiting inscription" (Masters, 1998: online). The problem, of course, is that the landscape is as void of traditional morality as it is of everything else, and the figures who inhabit it are as reliant on their own morality as they are upon their own strength and ingenuity. Ultimately, they inhabit a landscape completely isolated from everything else in the world, each other included: "here, beyond men's judgement all covenants were brittle" (McCarthy, 1989: 106). The judge tells the kid: "You of all men are no stranger to that feeling, the emptiness and the despair. It is that which we take arms against, is it not? Is not blood the tempering agent in the mortar which bonds?" (McCarthy, 1989: 329).

Yet despite the influence of the judge the kid is able to retain the possibility of such a regeneration, yet when it comes and the kid is "reborn" as a more traditional western hero, his redemption is empty and ultimately meaningless. In his travels after the destruction of Glanton and the disbanding of the group the kid (here referred to as such for the last time) comes upon a group of group of pilgrims slaughtered by Indians. "The company of penitents lay hacked and butchered among the stones in every attitude". The ultimate emptiness of the landscape and the lack of any kind of ultimate authority is emphasised by the fact that "they'd gathered under the cross for shelter but the hole into which it had been set and the cairn of rocks about its base showed how it had been

pushed over” (McCarthy, 1989: 315). Ultimately, the desert will sanction no higher authority than that of violence and death (the ultimate authority, also, that the judge espouses). Above the slaughtered penitents the kid finds an old woman, kneeling alone in a niche in the rocks.

He made his way among the corpses and stood before her...He spoke to her in a low voice. He told her that he was an American and that he was a long way from the country of his birth and that he had no family and had travelled much and seen many things and been at war and endured hardships. He told her that he would convey her to a safe place, some party of her countrypeople who would welcome her and that she should join them for he could not leave her in this place or she would surely die (*ibid.*).

In this passage the kid reveals himself to have many of the essential attributes of the mythical American cowboy – a traveller, charitable, tempered by the landscape, no stranger to violence, and above all a saviour figure. Yet the revelation comes too late – “he reached into the little cove and touched her arm. She moved slightly, her whole body, light and rigid. She weighed nothing. She was just a dried shell and she had been dead in that place for many years” (*ibid.*).



The ritualised nature of violence as it appears in the colonial myth leads us finally to the figure of the judge, and more importantly, his philosophical position, which comes to dominate the entire course of the book. The judge has been identified by Donoghue as a kind of Nietzschean figure, although, of course, he predated Nietzsche by a good couple of years (Donoghue, 1997: online). Throughout the judge’s philosophising the trace of the Nietzschean concept of the will to power can be discerned. We have already mentioned the fact that the judge, like the two Kurtzes and even the boys in *Lord of the Flies*, move in a sphere outside of that of traditional morality. Donoghue writes: “They meet the world without the mediation of law, morality, religion, or politics; and therefore they assume – without putting the assumption in words – that the power of the world is absolute and arbitrary” (Donoghue, 1997: online). This, of course, is the whole issue at

the heart of Nietzsche's critique of modernity. The will to power, in such a situation, is the only reliable way of dealing with the disenchanted modern view.

The judge sees the desert as a testing ground and as a crucible wherein the ultimate test of war will determine who lives and who dies, who is "pure" and who is not. One is reminded of Nietzsche, who wrote that "war is a training in freedom" (Nietzsche, 1990: 103). According to the judge, war is the ultimate game, and for man, as a creature enamoured of games, the ultimate test. He states

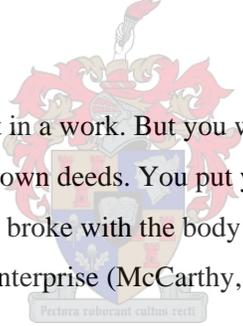
this is the nature of war, whose stake is at once the game and the authority and the justification. Seen so, war is the truest form of divination. It is the testing of one's will and the will of another within that larger will which because it binds them is therefore forced to select. War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god (McCarthy, 1989: 249).

Allied to this view is the judge's belief in the inevitability of war, the fact that it is the natural pursuit of mankind: "War endures. As well ask men what they think of stone. War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner. That is the way it was and will be. That way and not some other way" (McCarthy, 1989: 248). For Holden, war is the ultimate pursuit because it is, firstly, the ultimate test and secondly because "all other trades are contained in that of war" (McCarthy, 1989: 249). Here we come face to face with the judge's hectic dialectic, where opposites vie for power in an eternal struggle that has no foreseeable goal or end. Opposed to traditional moral law, in the judge's scheme, is historical law, or the idea, contained also within dialectics, that might is right. This lends credibility and purpose also to the judge's role as ethnographer, for he who tells the story holds the power, and is able to determine with the greatest amount of accuracy the dictates of historical law. The judge states, in a distinctly Nietzschean phrase:

moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favour of the weak. Historical law subverts it at every turn...
Decisions of life and death, of what shall be and what shall not, beggar all

questions of right. In elections of this magnitude are all lesser ones subsumed, moral, spiritual, natural (McCarthy, 1989: 250).

Central also to the judge's endeavour is the suspension of judgement in favour of a more instinctive way of relating to the world. This allies him again with the instinctive life of the mythological trickster figure, as well as to the writings of Nietzsche. Nietzsche advocates the suspension of judgement in favour of the more instinctive function of evaluation. One is reminded of Colonel Kurtz, in *Apocalypse Now*, speaking of the need to harness and utilise the primordial instinct to kill "without judgement, without judgement. For it is judgement that defeats us" (Coppola, 1979). One can draw a number of interesting parallels, incidentally, between the figure of the judge and that of Kurtz, both in *Apocalypse Now* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. We shall return to another similarity presently. Thus the judge tells the kid (when the latter is incarcerated after the Yuma massacre):



You came forward to take part in a work. But you were a witness against yourself. You sat in judgement on your own deeds. You put your own allowances before the judgements of history and you broke with the body of which you were pledged a part and poisoned it in all its enterprise (McCarthy, 1989: 307).

In his role as ethnographer and killer the judge comes to occupy an almost god-like place in the book. Like Jacobus Coetzee, who "rode like a god through a world only partly named, differentiating and bringing into existence" (Coetzee, 1998: 116), the judge is able to bring order to a landscape in which no immediate order is visible. He is seemingly omniscient, able to expound on history and anthropology and geology and a host of other themes, as well as being erudite, well-read, a musician and a dancer. Like Kurtz, he is a sort of universal genius. Yet at the heart of all this lies the realisation (a realisation similar to that of Kurtz) of the emptiness and despair that underlies all human existence, all attempts at defining morality: the *horror vacui* of modernity. In *Apocalypse Now* Kurtz (like the judge a large, threatening, hairless figure) tells his would-be assassin Willard: "You must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror must be your friends. If they are not then they are enemies to be feared" (Coppola, 1979). Compare this

to the words of Holden where he states: “only that man who has offered himself entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his inmost heart, only that man can dance” (McCarthy, 1989: 331).

The dance here signifies Holden’s conception of the course of human affairs, within which the men of will, the men of power are the dancers, those who move surely and lightly through life in a predestined, preordained manner. Glanton, certainly, is one of these men, a man who has resigned himself to war and death and horror, and come to accept his fate. He is also a man destined to push ever westward, into the unknown and towards that distant pandemonium of the sun:

He would live to look upon the western sea and he was equal to whatever might follow for he was complete at every hour. Whether his history should run concomitant with men and nations, whether it should cease. He’d long foresworn all weighing of consequences and allowing as he did that most men’s histories are given yet he usurped to contain within him all that he would ever be in the world and all that the world would ever be to him and be his charter written in the urstone itself he claimed agency and said so and he’d drive the remorseless sun on to its final endarkenment as if he’d ordered it all ages since, before there were paths anywhere, before there were men or suns to go upon them (McCarthy, 1989: 243).

One might argue that Glanton, in this passage, is represented as the ultimate modern wanderer, alone and self-sufficient, unconcerned with the absurdity of the world, drawn only to ever greater power. One cannot help but be reminded of Kant’s dictum that “the modern subject will determine for itself, completely and unconditionally, what to accept as evidence of the nature of things and, ultimately, what to regard as an appropriate evaluation for action” (Pippin, 1991: 47).

Interesting here are both the references to fate and destiny and to the paths and charter of men being “written in the urstone itself”. As already mentioned, the book abounds with

references to fate, destiny, a larger order than man can comprehend. Throughout the book, rock and stone come to stand as a kind of symbol of this permanent, unchanging and unchangeable route. The riders, in their function as bearers of the inhuman agency of death of are described a “beings provoked out of the absolute rock” (McCarthy, 1989: 172). This description is echoed in the already oft-quoted statement of the judge about the desert “It is hard, it is barren. Its very nature is stone” (McCarthy, 1989:330). The desert comes, in the book, to function almost as another character in the events that unfold, as indicated by the description of Sloat (a new recruit) after he joins the company: “if he gave thanks to any god at all it was ill-timed for the country was not yet done with him” (McCarthy, 1989: 204) One is reminded of Levi-Strauss’ statement that in myth any agency can be ascribed to any object. And if the desert comes to hold a kind of agency, there is also a larger force at work, that force which leads Holden to say “War is god”. There are already intimations of this early in the book when an old Mexican tells the riders “You are fine caballeros. You kill the barbarians. They cannot hide from you. But there is another caballero and I think that no-one hides from him” (McCarthy, 1989: 103). When Holden speaks of the larger will that encompasses other wills he cannot be speaking (in Nietzschean terminology) of anything other than the will to death, the will to nothingness, “that border of pornographic thrill at the body’s vulnerability”. In this context the epigraph by Paul Valery used as prologue comes also to make sense: “Your ideas are terrifying and your hearts are faint. Your acts of pity and cruelty are absurd, committed with no calm, as if they were irresistible. Finally, you fear blood more and more. Blood and time” (McCarthy, 1989). Later, in the final pages of the book, Holden asks the kid (now no longer a kid):

What do you think death is, man? Of whom do we speak when we speak of a man who was and is not? Are these blind riddles, or are they not part of every man’s jurisdiction? What is death if not an agency? And who does he intend towards? (McCarthy, 1989: 329).

Ascribing agency to death brings us back once again to the significance of the west as both a direction and motivation. Fiedler wrote that the voyage west is

left-handed, ill-omened, sinister...A turning away from the direction out of which the sun rises, signifying salvation, to the direction into which it sets, signifying death; a flight compared by implication to the fatal course of Phaeton... it is mad, since to enter the west is to live in a dream i.e. to go insane (Campbell, 1997: 57).

The judge, who has been described as “a nightmarish embodiment of the dream of colonial expansion” (Masters, 1998: online), certainly moves in this sphere. The effects of this dream can be read most clearly in the state of the landscape that the kid (and later the man) rides through after the scalphunters are destroyed. It is a landscape ravaged and ravished. There is the showdown amongst the bones around the spring, the skeletal remains of the animals being all that is left of the great bison herds of the prairies. One is reminded, also, in the description of the bonepickers, of vultures picking over the remains of some vast and gory orgy. In fact, all that is left are the bones, the ghosts – the real animals have disappeared. As the old hunter says of the buffalo “They’re gone. Ever one of them that God ever made is gone as if they’d never been at all” (McCarthy, 1989: 317).

The true nature of the colonial dream, that of expansion and conquering and exploitation, is made manifest in this passage, and the buffalo come to stand as symbol for a whole landscape, a whole era. One gets a feeling of a vast stillness that has settled over the land, a stillness that is the aftermath of the final thrust towards the conquering of the land. Even the old buffalo-hunter seems to understand that something irreversible has happened, that the west as he and the kid (now described as the man) knew it is gone forever. “I wonder if there’s other worlds like this, he said. Or if this is the only one” (*ibid.*).

The era of the final pages of the book (i.e. 1878) is, in McCarthy’s view, the final days of the “true” West. Things have started to change, civilisation is spreading, and the old order to which Glanton and the judge and the rest subscribed is no longer practical. When meeting the man again, the judge says “The last of the true. The last of the true. I’d say they’re all gone under now saving me and thee” (McCarthy, 1989: 327). Yet the man is

not “the last of the true”, for he has rejected the judge’s program. Although he still wears the scapular of dried ears, he is no longer a part of the dance that the judge describes, the dance of death. Even the judge realises that his time is coming to an end: “I tell you this. As war becomes dishonoured and its nobility called into question those honourable men who recognise the sanctity of blood will become excluded from the dance, which is the warrior’s right, and thereby will the dance become a false dance and the dancers false dancers” (McCarthy, 1989: 331). The era in which the judge’s dialectic could function is coming to an end, and with it the era of the judge’s dominion. Yet he still arrogates to himself a future in the world, because he alone is the one who has seen the emptiness of the world, of human endeavour, and who is therefore able to take arms against it. His final words to the man are telling: “There is room on the stage for one beast and one alone. All others are destined for a night that is eternal and without name. One by one they will step down into the darkness before the footlamps. Bears that dance, bears that don’t” (McCarthy, 1989: 331).

The point is that the judge reserves for himself the right to survive, the right to live on, because he is working for a larger cause than himself. He has become the agent of the agency of death, he has learnt the darkness that lurks at the “outermost edge of the world” and he will endure. Although it is never explicitly stated, one is led to believe that the judge kills the kid, thereby restating and revalidating the force of his dialectic, and claiming for himself sole agency. By killing “the last of the true” Holden is able to reserve for himself alone a place in the future and to thereby reach an almost god-like status. This supernatural element is made clear in the final passage of the book

And they are dancing, the board floor slamming under the jackboots and the fiddlers grinning hideously over their canted pieces. Towering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing, his small feet lively and quick and now in doubletime and bowing to the ladies, huge and pale and hairless, like an enormous infant. He never sleeps, he says. He says he’ll never die...His feet are light and nimble. He never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He dances in the light and in shadow and he is a great favourite. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die (McCarthy, 1989: 335).

The epilogue to the book sums up this relentless dance of history, describing the ordering of the west out of the chaos that was before. The figure progressing over the plain does so with a sense of purpose, a sense of order. He has been described as a Promethean figure, a fire-bringer (Donoghue, 1997: online), due perhaps to the reference to him “striking the fire out of the rock which God has put there”. Yet such a reading ignores the symbolic value of rock in the book, ignores the theme of the fate of man and the destiny of the world being written in the bedrock of the world. By striking the fire out of the rock man is at last imposing his own singular will on the world, creating order out of chaos, laying a piece of string in a maze so that we may not get lost. The man described is making holes for fences, so that the wilderness may be contained, ordered and ultimately tamed. Gone now are the vast open lands that characterise the first three hundred pages of the book, gone the wilderness, and with it the savagery that lies at the heart is once again buried, for fences betoken agriculture and agriculture is the line separating civilisation from savagery.

The man’s action “seems less the pursuit of some continuance than the verification of a principle, a validation of sequence and causality” (McCarthy, 1989: 337). The principle at stake is the colonial principle of order, the urge towards enclosure, of cause and effect, of rationality, of control. What the epilogue reflects, in opposition to the rest of the book, is man at last overcoming the dictates of the terrain, taming it and bending it to his will so that rather than being mastered by the landscape he becomes the master. In the final analysis, out of chaos is created order, and so the colonial myth is complete.

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“What is to be deviates no jot from the book wherein it is written. How could it?
It would be a false book and a false book is no book at all.” (McCarthy, 1989: 141)

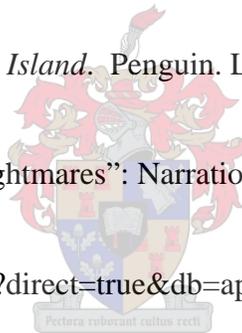
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