“Consider the Island,” Deryck Scarr invites us in his history of the Pacific: “the idea of the island.”¹ That idea, which Westerners brought to and imposed upon the insular Pacific, is of serious antiquity, in existence well before Magellan’s entry to it in 1521. “Those of us involved in Pacific studies,” Kerry Howe writes,² “have been too impressed with the apparent novelty of the eighteenth-century Pacific dream island. But that Tahitian mirage was at the end of a very long imaginative tradition, one that long predated the Enlightenment, and even the Renaissance. Indeed it goes back to the very beginnings of Western civilization”—in Greek myth, Plato’s Atlantis, the Bible, and stories like the supremely imaginative “The Shipwrecked Sailor” from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom.

The Rousseauesque dream and mirage faded rapidly enough in Western thought after first contact with Tahiti in the 1760s, as stories of Polynesian infanticide and homosexuality were eagerly circulated by the fourth estate in an atmosphere of religious revival in late eighteenth-century England. (John Hawkesworth’s editorial compendium of 1773, An Account of the Voyages undertaken by the order of his present Majesty for making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere, was an important early revelation in that process.) But a myth inverted need lose little of its power and influence. That which was once utopian became dystopian, and the noble savage became ignoble, but the precedent myth of island isolation, augmented as it had been by accounts of Magellan’s travels by Antonio Pigafetta and others, accompanied and intensified almost every aspect of the West’s imaginative involvement with the “South Sea.” It does so still, though indigenous writers and historians have long since cast doubt upon it. The most important revisionary intervention in that respect is probably Epeli Hau’ofa’s essay, “Our Sea of Islands,”

which does a good deal of myth-inversion of its own as regards Western views (political, economic, and cultural) of the islands of the Pacific as “tiny, confined spaces” at immense distances from both each other and the cosmopolitan epicentres of the First World. The peoples of Oceania, Hau’ofa argued, “did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions”:

Their universe comprised not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named stars and constellations that people could count on to guide their ways across the seas. Their world was anything but tiny.

So it is that “There is a gulf of difference between viewing the Pacific as ‘islands in a far sea’”—as the West has consistently done—“and as ‘a sea of islands.’” Yet the notion of insular isolation, of Islands of the Blessed, “Happy Isles,” antipodes, and Hesperides, is remarkably persistent:

Again and again the island has figured in the European mind as a place where human potential would emerge unhampered by the conventional life, where a passage across the sea would involve leaving behind items of cultural, moral, social, psychological, or historical baggage and allow a new experiment in living. On islands, too, the strange and unfamiliar—be it within the voyager’s mind or outside it, animate or inanimate, human or natural—would and could be confronted.

A utopian/dystopian logic has also often competed with and operated over such fantasies, and often enough the place of retreat has itself been invaded and itself been proved vulnerable to the very outside forces the traveler thinks he has left behind. If the island-dweller is in some sense an intellectual there arises a special and additional metaphorical significance, given that the Western tradition has commonly worked on the assumption that the intellectual existence is itself inherently an isolated one, like that lived by Carlyle’s Diogenes Teufelsdröckh up his ivory tower in Weissenichtwo in Sartor Resartus, “above it all,” and “alone with the stars.” There is a trio of strangely interconnected English novels from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that pursue that theme with a particular and peculiar concentration on the idea of intellectual insularity and isolation: Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Ebb-Tide (1894), H. G. Wells’ The Island of Doctor Moreau (1896), and Joseph Conrad’s Victory (1915).

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Yet even that particular variant of the idea of the island has a history, stretching back as far as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, written at a time when Austronesian settlement of the Pacific was in its infancy. In the year 891, the Chronicle recorded only two events, in apparently disproportionate terms. One entry “hurries through an important military

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campaign on the Continent in just two sentences,” Sebastian Sobecki notes, “whereas the second... receives somewhat more attention”:

And three Irishmen came to King Alfred in a rudderless boat from Ireland, whence they had stolen away because they wished for the love of God to be on a pilgrimage, they cared not where. The boat in which they set out was made of two and a half hides, and they had taken with them food for seven nights. And after one week they came to land in Cornwall, and they immediately made for King Alfred.5

Three men in a rudderless coracle, bound “they cared not where,” but obedient to an insuperable authority, are destined to find the king of England. These three God-fearing Irishmen knew nothing of the Pacific, but all unknowingly the chronicle in which they figure inaugurates a literary theme, of fateful, Providential, island landfalls by trios of strangers at sea in literally or metaphorically rudderless vessels.

Appropriately enough, Sebastian Sobecki’s book on the sea in Medieval English literature has an epilogue, “The Tempest’s Many Beginnings,” which points to the next major instance of an island-bound wizard, magus, or king descended upon by visitors destined to confront him. Like Alfred’s England, Prospero’s island draws three men in particular to it for godly purposes, though they are far from being pilgrims. “You are three men of sin,” Ariel tells Alonso (King of Naples), Sebastian (his brother), and Antonio (Prospero’s brother and usurper of his dukedom at Milan, abetted by the Neapolitans),

three men of sin whom Destiny,—
That hath to instrument this lower world
And what is in’t,—the never-surfeited sea
Hath caused to belch up you; and on this island,
Where man doth not inhabit,—you ‘mongst men
Being most unfit to live.6

The three conspirators—beneficiaries of ‘the miracle’ they understand as their “preservation” (II. i. 6–7)—are brought to acknowledge their ancient act of treason and receive Prospero’s half-hearted pardon before the entire party leaves the island and returns to civilization, accompanied by Alonso’s son, Ferdinand, who has fallen in love with Prospero’s daughter, Miranda. “Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th’ quick,” Prospero says, “Yet with my nobler reason ‘gainst my fury/Do I take part: the rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance” (V. i. 24–28).

In its contrast of reason and fury, virtue and vengeance, The Tempest is one of the most luminous moral fables in world literature—which is not inconsistent with its containing the eternal symbol of the downtrodden indigene among its cast of characters: the “abhorred slave” (I. ii. 353) and “servant monster” (II. ii. 3), Caliban, whose

stubbornly unregenerate form stalks English literature from that day to this. The three novels from the colonial era that inherit these island elements and scenarios present a good deal more moral ambiguity than *The Tempest* when it comes to strangers washing up on someone else’s shore. But they have an unexpected amount in common, both with each other and with Shakespeare’s play. First and foremost, each shows us a hermit of the Prospero kind confronted by unexpected guests: confined to an otherwise uninhabited island but “lord on’t,” as Prospero says he is (I. ii. 459), misanthropic to the point of being embittered, “philosophical” in the loose sense of the word, and possessing a personal history that suggests their unwelcome visitors’ landfall was fated, perhaps even ordained, by forces larger than the *dramatis personae* as such—just as those three Irishmen were bound to wash up in Alfred’s England, rudderless as they were but steered by the divine. In *The Ebb-Tide*, we have our first sole white male, named Attwater, graduate of Cambridge University, erstwhile pearl farmer, and some sort of Christian revivalist; in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* a second, the eponymous vivisectionist driven out of England by medical scandal; and in *Victory* a third, named Heyst, the gentle but misanthropic son of a deceased Schopenhauerean philosopher whose last words of advice to him as regards life in this world are “Look on, make no sound.”

All three novels foreground the magus-type, therefore. But the further intertextual relations between them are almost uncanny. Each story, for example, involves three men in a boat—having nothing in common with Jerome K. Jerome’s comic Thames-side novel of 1889—breaking in on a latter-day Prospero. In *The Ebb-Tide*, we have “the three most miserable English-speaking creatures in Tahiti” (or “Three types of the bad man, the weak man, and the strong man with a weakness,” as Stevenson defined them elsewhere): a vicious Cockney clerk named Huish, an Oxford graduate on his uppers named Herrick, and a disgraced and alcoholic American sea-captain named Davis, together saved from vagrancy on the beach at Papeete by the opportunity to take charge of a disease-ridden trading vessel, the *Farallone*, ostensibly carrying American champagne from San Francisco to Sydney. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, we have the sole survivor of three in a dinghy from the shipwreck of the *Lady Vain*, Edward Prendick—also educated (in biology, at what is now Imperial College London)—who is eventually brought to the island of the novel’s title. In Conrad, we have the most tightly

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9 The idea was that Stevenson would co-write *The Ebb-Tide* with his stepson Lloyd Osbourne, and first mention is made of it in October 1890, referred to as *The Pearl Fisher* (Stevenson *Letters* vii. 16). By May it had found its final title, and it was clear that Stevenson was “grinding singly” at it (Stevenson *Letters* viii. 67); by 5 June he could announce, “It’s done” (Stevenson *Letters* viii. 91); and in August, he told Sidney Colvin “to delete Lloyd’s name. He has nothing to do with the last half. The first we wrote together. . . . The second is entirely mine” (Stevenson *Letters* viii. 156). So I shall treat the novella as Stevenson’s work for present purposes.
orchestrated “gang of three ruffians” of the group: the sub-aristocratic “Mr Jones,” his so-called secretary Martin Ricardo, and their Neanderthal servant Pedro, picked up on the South American coast: “a spectre, a cat, an ape,” as Conrad calls them, representing “evil intelligence,” “instinctive savagery,” and “brute force,” respectively (Victory 131, 283). (“Mr Jones” is palpably an alias, and each of Stevenson’s “three adventurers” (Ebb-Tide 191) disguises himself in similar fashion.) Attwater’s uninhabited New Island is in the middle of nowhere, hundreds of miles south-east of the Marquesas; its thirty-three imported pearl divers have been reduced to four by smallpox. Moreau’s Noble Island, also originally uninhabited, is close to Galapagos, appropriately enough given what its owner-occupier is up to, scientifically speaking. Neither is on any map. Heyst’s Samburan, a few days’ sail from Surabaya—and therefore not in the Pacific, as such, but still in the Austronesian zone of settlement (“it has a tropical Malay setting”; Conrad Letters v. 113)—does possess a small indigenous population, which barely figures in the narrative, and is recorded as the location of a failed coal mine with an active volcano in the vicinity, though accessible only if the neighbourhood steamer parts from its normal route. Still, charted as Samburan may be, “A desert island was nothing to it,” as one of Conrad’s narrators points out (Victory 48).

All these locations are at the world’s end, “separated from the known lands and the traffic of men.” The existence of Attwater’s island “is very doubtful,” according to Findlay’s Pacific Directory, “and totally disbelieved in by South Sea traders” (Ebb-Tide 185); Noble Island had been visited by HMS Scorpion after the events described, according to Prendick’s nephew, who edits the tale: “A party of sailors then landed, but found nothing living thereon except certain curious white moths, some hogs and rabbits, and some rather peculiar rats.” It is visible only as “a low-lying patch of dim blue in the uncertain blue-grey sea” (Moreau 17), just as Attwater’s New Island manifests itself as just a reflection in the clouds: “a greenish, filmy iridescence...floating like smoke on the pale heavens” (Ebb-Tide 184), and breathing from itself “a sense of desertion that was almost poignant” (Ebb-Tide 190). “We’re off the track to anywhere,” Moreau tells Prendick (Moreau 27): “We see a ship once in a twelvemonth or so.” Heyst on Samburan, Conrad says, “was out of everybody’s way as though he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas,” at the centre of “a ring of magic stillness” (Victory 19, 68).

10 Frederick Karl, Laurence Davies, et al. (eds), The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, 9 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983–2007), v. 113. Like The Ebb-Tide, Conrad’s novel got its title belatedly: in 1913, he referred to it as “the D[ollars] novel” to distinguish it from the humdrum short story, “Because of the Dollars” (which happens to involve the Captain Davidson who resurfaces in Victory). By October it had become, tellingly, “The Island Story” (Conrad Letters v. 288, 294). It seems it was first referred to by its final title on 1 July 1914 (Conrad Letters v. 396).


In cast and location, therefore, the stories share striking similarities. But there is more to their relation than that. Heyst is a Swedish baron; Mr Jones is constantly referred to as “a gentleman” by his secretary; and Davis describes Attwater as a “real, first-rate, copper-bottomed aristocrat” (Ebb-Tide 197), dressed, Stevenson tells us, “in white drill, exquisitely made; his scarf and tie were of tender-coloured silks” (Ebb-Tide 192)—much as Jones finally confronts Heyst dressed in ‘an old but gorgeous blue silk dressing gown’ that only exaggerates his cadaverous appearance (Victory 323). “Silken brutality” is the expression Stevenson uses of Attwater (Ebb-Tide 193). It would suit Jones equally well. Moreau, too, is almost parodically urbane; his first remark to Prendick on his arrival at his god-forsaken island after days at sea in an open boat is to tell him that “You look [...] as though you had scarcely breakfasted” (Moreau 26). Moreau’s assistant Montgomery says that he himself is an “outcast from civilization” (Moreau 18). Jones, Conrad tells us, was “A wanderer clearly,” even as Heyst has been, but “of quite another kind” (Victory 93): “an outcast—almost an outlaw,” as he himself puts it (Victory 325). Attwater, too, has led a “missionary life” before settling where he has (Ebb-Tide 211). But the most physically brutal members of this *dramatis personae* are in fact both uneducated cockneys. Conrad’s Ricardo (“What was all that coal bizness? Tame citizen dodge, you scrocy—nothing else”; Victory 230) wants to “rip Heyst up” momentously with the dagger he always keeps strapped to his ankle, and Stevenson’s Huish (“You have everything about you in no end style, and no mistake, but I tell you it wouldn’t do for me [...] too retired, by ‘alf. Give me the sound of Bow Bells!”; Ebb-Tide 215) decides that the best way of dealing with Attwater—who goes constantly armed with a Winchester rifle and is a crack shot—is to throw acid in his face. “I’ll bring the ‘ulkin’ bully to grass. He’s ‘ad his larks out of me; I’m goin’ to ‘ave my lark out of ‘im, and a good lark too. [...] This ’ere’s vitriol, this is” (Ebb-Tide 237). Huish is brave, then, but “brave as a weasel,” as Stevenson says (Ebb-Tide 242), like Ricardo. So these tales involve varying forms of viciousness, patrician, and plebeian—as *The Tempest* does, where the drunken servants Stephano and Trinculo employ Caliban in an attempt to repeat the crime of dispossession committed against Prospero in days gone by.

Indigenous islanders play almost no role in these dramas, but that does not mean that Caliban is forgotten. Shakespeare’s “servant monster” returns as Montgomery’s bizarrely named manservant M’Ling in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, who could almost be the result of one of the vivisector’s earlier experiments: “a mis-shapen man, short, broad, and clumsy, with a crooked back, a hairy neck, and a head sunk between his shoulders,”

13 The similarities between Stevenson and Conrad have been discussed by Cedric Watts, in “The Ebb-Tide and Victory,” *Conradiana* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 133–37. “The case for influence” rests on four particular features, he feels: “The unexpected arrival at a tropical island of three straitened outlaws who plan to rob and kill the island’s white resident; an element of kinship between a ‘gentleman’ among the outlaws and that gentlemanly resident; the fact that the island holds relics of a defunct industry; and the portrayal of a sadistic cockney who has killed before, plans to kill again, and is eventually shot before he can fulfill his intention” (135). That is a striking and detailed list, but Watts concludes only that Conrad “might have incurred a small literary debt to The Ebb-Tide” (136). For *Doctor Moreau* and *Victory*, see Peter Krahé, “Conrad and Wells: A Source for Victory?,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 86, no. 4 (1985): 534–38.
possessed of “thick coarse black hair” and an “animal swiftness” (Moreau 13). “He’s an ugly brute,” Montgomery admits; “Half-witted, you know. Can’t remember where he came from. But I’m used to him [...]” (Moreau 33). Huish’s hands, too, we are told, “were disproportionately long and broad, and the palms in particular enormous” (Ebb-Tide 245). Jones and Ricardo’s minion-cum-drudge, Pedro—whom they have trained to prepare food just as Montgomery has trained M’Ling (Moreau 74)—is also recently up from the primal soup. “The lower part of his physiognomy,” Conrad tells us, “was overdeveloped, his narrow and low forehead unintelligently furrowed by horizontal wrinkles surmounted wildly hirsute cheeks and a flat nose with wide baboon-like nostrils,” though “His broad squat frame denoted great strength” and “he displayed a pair of remarkably long arms terminating in thick brown hairy paws of a simian aspect.” “That’s a servant of yours?” the evil Surabaya hotelier Schomberg asks Mr Jones. “Well, he hangs on to me,” Jones replies: “He is a crocodile hunter. I picked him up in Colombia—you know. Ever been to Colombia?” (Victory 94). In The Tempest, Stephano and Trinculo encourage Caliban to steal everything from Prospero’s cell, and though he declares himself “For aye thy foot-licker” (IV. i. 219), he refuses:

I will have none on’t: we shall lose our time,
And all be turn’d to barnacles, or to apes
With foreheads villainous low. (IV. i. 247–9)

Clearly all three novels are playing on late nineteenth-century themes and theories of physical and developmental primitivism having their origin in the Renaissance.

At the other end of the evolutionary spectrum are the insular magicians themselves: reclusive, refined, misanthropic, and apparently omnipotent on their island domains. “Don’t think me a philanthropist,” Attwater tells Herrick: “I dislike men, and hate women” (Ebb-Tide 205). Jones and Ricardo’s downfall is brought about in Victory by their discovery of Heyst’s heroic lover, Lena, whom he has rescued from a hideous ladies’ orchestra touring the Malay Archipelago. Jones is a rabid misogynist, who calls Heyst a “women-ridden hermit” (Victory 331), but Ricardo finds himself totally infatuated. “O you wonder!” Shakespeare’s Ferdinand gasps when he first sees Miranda (I. ii. 428), and Ricardo is a travesty of him. “Jee-miny! You are a wonder,” he tells Lena (Victory 253, 338). (Jones’ disgust at Ricardo’s erotic enslavement has him shoot his secretary rather than the man they assume, on the basis of Schomberg’s jealous and self-interested report, must have a heap of plunder hidden on Samburan: “the Victory of the title,” Conrad wrote in December 1916 (Conrad Letters v. 691), “is related directly to Lena’s feeling of Victory—the triumphant state of mind in which she dies—see the last 4 pages of the story.”) Moreau has devoted his life, he tells Prendick, “to the study of the plasticity of living forms” (Moreau 63), and has developed the thickest of scientific skins in the process. In the face of Prendick’s horror at his experiments, the doctor reminds him that his is “a mind truly opened to what science has to teach”: “We are on different platforms,” he says: “You are a materialist” (Moreau 65). The doctor had been “simply howled out of the country” (Moreau 31) after the scandal of his researches broke, and
Heyst’s father, “the silenced destructor of systems, of hopes, of beliefs” (*Victory* 152), had been just as successfully ostracized. “You believe in flesh and blood, perhaps?,” he asks his son: “A full and equable contempt would soon do away with that too. But since you have not attained to it I advise you to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity” (*Victory* 152). Heyst’s idea of himself, accordingly—before Lena and his pity for her predicament shatters his “wrecked philosophy” of being an “unconcerned spectator” (*Victory* 161)—was to become an avatar of his philosophical progenitor: “a spirit which had renounced all outside nourishment and was sustaining itself proudly on its own contempt of the usual coarse aliments which life offers to the common appetites of men” (*Victory* 154). (“Common appetite,” of course, is exactly how philosophers of Attwater’s, Moreau’s, and Heyst senior’s type would regard the love Ferdinand has for Marina, and Heyst has for Lena.) As it happens, Heyst and Moreau have something else in common: a head of blindingly white hair—“white and terrible” as Prendick calls it (*Moreau* 45) and referred to on numerous occasions in *Victory* as Heyst has a portrait of his father at his island retreat—an objective correlative, not of senescence as decrepitude or imbecility, but of to the extent to which their philosophical attitudes have prematurely exhausted their ability to respond to life.

One more of these intertextual coincidences—if that is what they are—and I am done. One of Stevenson’s “three men of sin” belched up from Shakespeare’s “never-surfetted sea” was the American, John Davis, a disgraced alcoholic sea captain—commander, he tells Herrick, of “the finest barque that ever sailed from Portland,” and drunk in his berth when it sank with the loss of six lives. “I never dared go home again,” he confesses (*Ebb-Tide* 139). It was Stephen Derry who first noticed in print that *The Island of Doctor Moreau* contains just such a captain, with “the dull and solemn eyes of a drunken man” (*Moreau* 15), who has ‘lost his certificate or something’ according to Montgomery (*Moreau* 10), and whose name is also Davis. In fact, in his original article Derry noted that the first name of Wells’ captain “is never given,” before writing a letter in the next issue of *Notes and Queries* to correct the record: in his introduction to the novel Prendick’s nephew identifies the drunken captain as *John* Davis, the exact same as Stevenson’s original.14 As I have mentioned, it was a naval vessel named the *Scorpion* that visited Moreau’s island after the events described in the story. A naval vessel of the very same name provided some of the information as regards New Island in *The Ebb-Tide* (*Ebb-Tide* 185). Little more proof is needed that Wells was familiar with Stevenson’s Pacific novella, and had it in mind when he wrote *The Island of Doctor Moreau.*15 It only


15 I can find no similar proof that Conrad knew *The Ebb-Tide*, for all its dramatic similarity to *Victory*. It seems he held Stevenson in low regard. Writing to Sidney Colvin in 1919, it is true, he described the earlier novelist as Colvin’s “brilliant and loveable friend,” capable of “loving touches of character and a marvelous insight”—albeit in a work of non-fiction, *In the South Seas* (Conrad Letters vi. 447). But in 1902 he said Stevenson “considered his art a prostitute and the artist as no better than one” (Conrad Letters ii. 371); five years later he regretted not possessing “that careless, sunny nature people talk of in
remains to add that the imperturbable and incorruptible captain who witnesses Heyst and Lena’s conflagration and *liebestod* in *Victory* is called, as chance would have it, Davidson.  

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“If island fiction is fundamentally an intellectual form,” an editor of *Doctor Moreau* suggests, “then the message of *Moreau* is a very unsettling one” (Moreau xiii). In his 1844 “Essay on Species” Charles Darwin demonstrated the importance of islands (like the Galapagos) for evolutionary theory in terms of isolation. Much the same case could be made for them in literary and philosophical terms: island fiction is intellectual fiction, from *Robinson Crusoe* to Aldous Huxley, and the “South Seas” are the preferred location. A “dialectic of boundedness and connection,” it has been proposed, “allows islands to be related more readily to the human psyche other than geographical configurations.”

Prospero said that in Milan his “library/Was dukedom large enough” (I. ii. 109–10); the library is itself insular. In his cell on his island, furnished with “volumes that/I prize above my dukedom” (I. ii. 167–8), he lays down a fundamentally intellectual template for the island mage that Attwater, Moreau, and Heyst between them continue to act out. Attwater talks to Herrick about the set of pearl-diving suits still stored on his island, which remind him that “we all wanted a dress to go down into the world in, and come up scatheless” (Ebb-Tide 202). Prendick, too, confesses that “I lost faith in the sanity of the world when I saw it suffering the painful disorder of this island” (Moreau 85). With Lena’s arrival on Samburan, Conrad’s narrator notes, “All his defences were broken now. Life had him fairly by the throat” (Victory 190). In each case, as in Prospero’s, the island is a peculiar platform for moral and intellectual revelation about our desire and inability to escape from “the world.” A ring of magic stillness has surrounded Prospero for twelve years (I. ii. 54) and Moreau for eleven—“The place seemed waiting for me,” the latter tells Prendick (Moreau 66). “Except that he stood drinks to people on suitable occasions like any other man,” Conrad’s narrator says of Heyst, “this observer of facts seemed to

connection with Stevenson” (Conrad Letters iii. 428); in 1908 he referred to him—with intentional ambiguity or not it is hard to say—as “that Virtuoso Cymballist” (Conrad Letters iv. 47); and in February 1924, within six months of his death, he continued to insist that “Stevenson is a virtuoso of style in picturesque presentation, whereas Joseph Conrad is much less of a literary man…” (Conrad Letters viii. 308). His friendship with and admiration of Wells, in contrast, was of long standing: “a very original writer,” he suggested in 1898, “romancier du fantastique, with a very individualistic judgment in all things and an astonishing imagination” (Conrad Letters ii. 138). “What do you think of Conrad?” Wells asked a friend in 1904; “I began the chorus of praise ten years ago, but I’m cooling off considerable” (David C. Smith (ed.), *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, 4 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), ii. 58); I can find no evidence that he read *Victory*.

There is a possible source for Davis and Davidson in the seventeenth-century English buccaneer Edward Davis, who may have discovered Easter Island in 1687, before the official discovery by Jacob Roggeveen in 1721.

Wells was certainly familiar with this principle: his Darwinian review-article, “The Influence of Islands on Variation,” was published in the *Saturday Review* in August 1895.

Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (eds), *Islands in History and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2003), 4.
have no connection with earthly affairs and passions” (Victory 61). “No one can hurt me,” Heyst insists (Victory 56), and he tells Lena that “Nothing can break in on us here,” even as his Chinese servant enters the room to say “Boat out there” (Victory 193, 194)—the virtually rudderless dinghy that brings Jones and his collaborators to his island.\(^1\) The message is clear: the ring of stillness is one that absolutely must be ruptured, intellectually, philosophically, and above all dramatically. “I am the world itself,” Jones tells Heyst (Victory 325), “come to pay you a visit.” “To what am I indebted for this pleasure?,” Attwater asks his three visitors, and Davis answers “I suppose you may call it an accident,” before Huish adds “Ope we don’t intrude!” (Ebb-Tide 192).

But the intrusion is not a one-way street. “This island is full of...inimical phenomena,” Moreau tells Prendick (Moreau 60), and much the same could be said of them all, from Shakespeare to Conrad. “How came we ashore?,” Miranda asks her father after his rapid résumé of his dispossession and their adventure. “By Providence divine” is the answer (I. ii. 158–9): the same Providence that brought three Irishmen to Alfred’s shore and brought forces of intellectual conflict and resolution to these four later landfalls. The “sinister but charismatic\(^2\) Attwater is above all a religious man. “Religion is a savage thing,” he says, “like the universe it illuminates; savage, cold, and bare, but infinitely strong,” and he himself is “the bearer of the sword and scourge” (Ebb-Tide 204), not just to the islander laborers he brought to New Island but above all to the pitiful desperados who believe they can overcome him: one of whom dies, one of whom remains, and one of whom (Herrick, of course) is allowed to leave. Doctor Moreau looks like a latter-day Frankenstein; but that is to miss the novel’s point about his ghastly attempt to build the humane out of the brutal, an attempt which is theological in nature. “I am a religious man,” he tells Prendick, and accordingly scientific ethics trouble him not at all. “The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature” (Moreau 66), and it is that irresponsibility, to use Prendick’s word (Moreau 85), that must in the end be punished by death at the hands, claws, and teeth of his crowning creation, a conjoint Puma-woman.

At one stage in Victory Lena asks Heyst if the arrival of Jones and Company is not some sort of punishment—perhaps for their living over the broomstick, or for their determination to step out of the world “where men and women go by thick as dust,

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\(^{1}\) Conrad’s fiction, like Balzac’s, is an intertextual universe of its own. The hero’s nemesis in Lord Jim (published fifteen years before Victory) is called “Gentleman” Brown, and confesses all in a “wretched hovel” in Bangkok, Marlow having been sent in his direction by none other than the hotelier Mr Schomberg, earlier in his career. Pseudonym aside, Brown is nothing like as aristocratic as Mr Jones, but he is the possessor of “a long ravaged brown face” (Ch. 37), invades Jim’s Patusan much as Jones invades Samburan, is encouraged by the vile and jealous Mr Cornelius as Jones is encouraged by the vile and jealous Mr Schomberg, regards himself as a “Scourge of God” (Ch. 40), tells Jim that all he wants from him is “to come on the devil’s name and have it out” (Ch. 41), and suffers from an “almost posthumous illusion of having trampled all the earth under his feet” (ibid). If that was not enough, Marlow reports that “a story is told of a white long-boat picked up a month later in the Indian Ocean by a cargo steamer. Two parched, yellow, glassy-eyed whispering skeletons in her recognized the authority of a third, who declared his name was Brown” (Ch. 44). “Nothing can touch me,” Jim says, hours before his death, in what Marlow calls “a last flicker of superb egoism” (Ch. 45).

\(^{2}\) Derry, “The Island of Doctor Moreau and Stevenson’s The Ebb-Tide,” 437.
revolving and jostling each other like figures cut out of cork and weighted with lead just sufficiently to keep them in their proudly upright posture,” as Heyst’s father would see the matter (Victory 152). “A sort of retribution from an angry Heaven,” Heyst replies: “On us! What on earth for?” (Victory 304). For not putting his trust in life earlier, perhaps; for being too good to live amidst the dust of humanity; who can say? The judgment on him is far more elusive than that which Attwater renders on his three invaders, or Prendick ultimately renders on Moreau and his crimes. “This is as strange a maze as e’er men trod,” as Alonso says (V. i. 242–5); “And there is in this business more than nature/Was ever conduct of: some oracle/Must rectify our knowledge.” A sea of islands is an ocean of coracles and oracles, isolation and contact; it must be so, these writers between them suggest.21

21 Interestingly, Stevenson, Wells, and Conrad were all ambivalent about their island stories. The first spoke of “the ever-to-be execrated Ebb-Tide, or Stevenson’s Blooming Error” (Stevenson Letters viii. 94). Wells wrote to an unknown correspondent in 1896 that he was “very glad to find anyone who thinks well of my Moreau. The book was unlucky in the outset, but I think it has the vitality to live through its troubles” (Wells Correspondence i. 279–80). Finally, Conrad, though he said of Victory in 1924 that “It is a book in which I have tried to grasp at more ‘life-stuff’ than perhaps in any other of my works” (Conrad Letters viii. 339), had earlier suggested that “it is obvious that I have done much better things” (Conrad Letters vii. 218), going so far as to say that the novel “may make a libretto for a Puccini opera anyhow” (Conrad Letters v. 452). (Operatic or not, Victory is surely one of the most cinematic of novels, and has been adapted for the screen on twelve occasions since 1919 (Victory liv.).)