Among Head-Hunters and Cannibals: Spenser St. John in Borneo and Haiti

Abstract
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Among Head-Hunters and Cannibals: Spenser St. John in Borneo and Haiti

In his preface to *The Hero as Murderer*, Australian critic Geoffrey Dutton noted that his interest in writing about Edward John Eyre, colonial governor and Austro-colonial hero-explorer, was awakened by an interchange with the Jamaican anthropologist Fernando Henriques. To Henriques, Eyre was that ‘monster’ (Dutton 9) who, in 1865, in the aftermath of the Morant Bay Uprising had, in what Bernard Semmel describes as ‘a month-long reign of terror’, burnt over one thousand homes, executed over five hundred negroes and flogged and tortured as many (15). The ‘rebel’ leader, Rev. Paul Bogle, had used Christian theology as justification for the uprising and had relied on the sympathy of the English Crown in a situation where many of the local peasantry were starving (Semmel). To Dutton, however, Eyre was the ‘brave explorer’ of the interior of an ‘unknown’ continent, and Dutton, only vaguely aware of some scandal in relation to Eyre’s governorship of Jamaica (9), was intrigued by the discrepancy between his and Henriques’ views and by the very different places Eyre now occupied in two post-colonial national histories.

Throughout the history of the British Empire, but particularly during the nineteenth-century, British administrators and adventurers (like Eyre) played significant roles in more than one colony or territory. Such men were often representatives of the Crown, but sometimes they worked for themselves or for interests independent of the administration in one colony, while serving as diplomats or officials in another; and like Eyre they worked not only for the British government, but with those of power and influence in the colony or territory itself. In Eyre’s Jamaica of 1865 a nervous white plantocracy of ex-slavers feared the growing ‘mulatto’ influence and the degeneration of the colony into what they believed to be the current conditions in the Republic of Haiti. Although Eyre was tried in England for his actions in Jamaica, he had had much local white support and encouragement for his harsh measures and this goes some way towards explaining that ‘paradox’ of Eyre’s character which Dutton sought to unlock.

From a twentieth-century point of view, the life and works of Sir Spenser Buckingham St. John offer a not dissimilar instance of apparent contradiction. Spenser St. John is remembered in the Caribbean as a particularly influential nineteenth-century racist, a writer whose *Hayti or the Black Republic* (1884) both supported those Haitian stereotypes already in circulation, (for instance, at the time of the Morant Bay Uprising), and vastly extended their influence. St. John’s
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work on Haiti remains notorious for its uncompromising dismissal (one which echoes that of J.A. Froude) of the very possibility of blacks being able to govern themselves, and for its sensationalist treatment of cannibalism (particularly child-eating) in nineteenth-century Haiti. By contrast, St. John’s two-volume *Life in the Forests of the Far East* of 1862 is noteworthy for its racial toleration, its open admiration of different cultural attitudes and practices, its sponsorship of Bornean Dyak welfare, and its approval of race mixing and ‘miscegenation’. Where Caribbean critics, historians and anthropologists have quite rightly called into question St. John’s lurid accounts of Haitian horrors, present-day local and international anthropologists and historians still draw on *Life in the Forests of the Far East* as a reliable and authoritative ethnographic source book. Both of St. John’s major works, then, had, and continue to have, significant influence in two post-colonised areas and beyond.

In his foreword to *Voodoo in Haiti* (1959) anthropologist Alfred Métraux credits (or discredits) St. John with prime responsibility for the ‘evocative power’ of the term ‘voodoo’ itself. ‘Voodoo’, argues Métraux, is ‘nothing more than a conglomeration of beliefs and rites of African origin ... closely mixed with Catholic practice’. But

the few allusions to Voodoo which may be found in documents and books little known to the general public could not have raised this rural paganism into the legendary terror it became, had not a British Consul, Spenser St. John written a book (*Haiti or the Black Republic*) in which he described the most blood-curdling crimes committed by the Voodoo sect. (Métraux 16)

This work, attests Métraux, ‘was widely read and for long has been regarded as the main authority’. Métraux lists prominent historians, anthropologists, critics and writers who either cite or draw on St. John’s work, and his estimation of its influence is impressive. Writing in 1981 on ‘global’ stereotypes of Haiti, Michael Dash noted that one of the most influential ‘and grotesque’ accounts of ‘black magic’ is that of St. John. Such ‘sensational and gory episodes’, Dash argues, particularly appealed ‘to the repressed fantasies of the Victorian imagination’ (15). But the recounting of these tales, was not. Dash concludes, gratuitous sensationalism on St. John’s part. Rather, the passages were calculated to demonstrate to a white reading public that ‘according popular government to these colonies’ was out of the question. ‘I know what the black man is,’ St. John famously stated, ‘and have no hesitation in declaring that he is incapable of the art of government’ (xi).

Spenser St. John was born in 1825, and went to Borneo at the age of twenty-three as Private Secretary to Sir James Brooke, the ‘White Rajah’ of Sarawak, owner and ruler of that ‘eastern state’. St. John served as Brooke’s secretary between 1848 and 1850, and acted as temporary commissioner for Brooke between 1851 and 1855. In 1856, still in Borneo, he was appointed British Consul General in Brunei, becoming Chargè d’Affaires in Haiti in 1863. He remained in the
Caribbean for twelve years, later as Chargé d’Affaires in the Dominican Republic and Resident Minister in Haiti. The apparent discrepancy between St. John’s attitudes to other races as they appear in *Life in the Forests of the Far East* and his attitude to late nineteenth-century Haitians — a difference exaggerated in the minds of modern readers who tend to expect that what we regard as ‘racism’ in one area will be evident in a writer’s approach to all non-white or non-European groups — could be partially explained by age and role differences. The St. John of Borneo is a young adventurer working for a radical and racially tolerant regime. During his years with the Brookes (and in Brunei) St. John became the first white man to explore the larger rivers in the western interior. Harriette McDougall, the first white woman in Sarawak, was also attached to the Brooke regime through her missionary husband and although she and Spenser St. John were strong supporters of the Brookes, and admired both Dyak and Malay cultures, McDougall particularly disliked St. John. He was, she charged, agnostic and irreverent; he had a Dyak mistress with whom he lived openly, even (and this seems to be his greatest sin) calling on the McDougalls with her; and he led talented young men astray, luring them from McDougall’s mission into the Brooke administration.

These seem very much the attitudes and actions of a young, even idealistic colonial adventurer, a far cry from the sober Haitian Chargé d’Affaires of fifty, and it would certainly be possible to argue that with age and the changing nature of his official posts, St. John may simply have become more conservative. But neither age, office, nor even racial and geographical loci seem in either Eyre’s or St. John’s cases to offer sufficient explanation for their apparent attitudinal changes. I want, therefore, in the remainder of this essay, to consider the kinds of broader discursive contexts out of which *Life in the Forests of the Far East* and *Hayti or the Black Republic* were written, and those into which they were received and thus interpreted. While I have already raised one important contextual difference — the issue of slavery and post-slavery black poverty in the Caribbean together with white fear of black rule — I want to concentrate, in terms of St. John’s work, on a different but related discursive context: the Victorian progressivist narrative and its darker side, degeneration. These two counter narratives jostle each other in his writing, and it is the uncomfortable relation between these strains which may partially account for the discrepancy.

As Daniel Pick notes, it is possible to argue that degeneration must primarily be understood as ‘one intellectual current within a far wider language of nineteenth-century racist imperialism’, the ‘hegemonic task’ as Pick expresses it, ‘lying in the ideological construction of inferiority of savagery, atavism and moral pathology in the far flung countries which came increasingly under Western political control’ (37). Pick’s interest is primarily in *European* discourse, but he recognises that currents in European thought, particularly during the period of his study (the mid to late nineteenth-century) are inextricably interwoven with the overseas empires. While fears of degeneration were rife in late nineteenth-century Europe, they
existed within a counter-context of European optimism. As many historians have argued, the years from 1870 to 1900 were dominated by the idea of mankind's unstoppable progress. Evolutionary anthropology had reinforced progressivist ideologies, and the white man's burden was still envisaged as one of catalysing or fostering 'civilisation' amongst the 'backward' races. But not all commentators were equally optimistic. Bagehot warned in 1872 that 'only a few nations, and these of European origin, advance; and yet these think — seem irresistibly compelled to think — such advances to be inevitable, natural and eternal' (qtd in Pick 13). The theory of 'dégénérescence', so Pick argues, is the ideological product of the 'complex process of conceptualising a felt crisis of history' since 'after 1848 there was a deep sense of confusion about the patterns of historical change and repetition' (37).

The relationships between these two counter-narratives of progress and degeneration were further complicated by differential European racisms. While the 'savage' or 'barbarous' could be broadly defined against a concept of 'civilisation' (inevitably European), the Rousseau-esque current in European thinking had increasingly divided 'native' cultures from the (diasporic) 'coolie' castes — that is, former African slaves and Indian and Chinese overseas communities from the indigenous, 'uncontaminated' cultures, whose ways of life seemed, by the end of the nineteenth-century, threatened with extinction due to the spread of Western 'civilisation'. Darwinian evolutionary theory had also apparently given credence to a racial hierarchy wherein Africans and Australian Aboriginal peoples were ranked lowest. The role of European commerce in this complex was also an ambivalent one. 'Slaves' and 'coolies' had frequently been the agents of acquisition of the 'civilised' wealth of Europe; a necessary 'evil' in the progress of the West as a whole, while the sophistication of a relatively wealthy industrialised Europe had come to seem to some both cause and symptom of Western attenuation and potential degeneration. (Decline into barbarism could still be Europe's fate, a fear expressed through the recurrent fin de siècle tropologies of the 'sick heart' and the 'heart of darkness'.) Some commentators thus felt that South Pacific island cultures (and even some European-descent settler colonies) had preserved an energy and a simple integrity increasingly absent from the (over)sophistications of European 'civilisation'. All these currents, then, are important in St. John's conceptualisation of the peoples and societies among whom he lived and worked, and necessarily play a part in determining the reception of his writings, both locally and in Europe and the United States.

In his introduction to Life in the Forests of the Far East, St. John writes that he has 'treated of the tribes in groups' and 'endeavoured to give an individual interest to each'. Part of that interest for the reader lies not only in the 'exotic' subject matter, but in the immediacy of encounter St. John wishes to convey: 'To preserve the freshness of my first impressions, I have copied my journal written at the time, only correcting such errors as are inseparable from first observations'
Although St. John's tone is not Rousseau-esque, it is progressivist and nativist, a not uncommon perspective whereby the potential contradiction between a desire to retain Dyak difference, yet 'improve' on the good qualities already possessed had to be negotiated. St. John effects this by, on the one hand, drawing attention to the similarities between Dyak and English 'civilisations', while on the other noting that 'steady government' or 'the benefits of civilisation' can improve on their 'natural' (English) attributes. The 'energy displayed by the Sea Dyaks ... gives much hope of their advancement in civilisation at a future time'. A 'few years of quiet and steady government' (1862 1:2) was all that was required. Moreover, the Dyaks already demonstrate their potential in terms of another essential marker of 'civilisation': they value surplus. The Seribas Dyaks, for instance, 'recover immediately from the effects of the destruction of their villages and property and set to work to create more wealth'. Comparison between English and Dyak customs are frequent, and the men in particular are 'clean built and upright in their gait, and of a very independent bearing ... Gentle in their manners', yet nevertheless 'warlike', they are 'partial to bright red cloth jackets when in the field', making them look 'so like a party of English soldiers' (1862 2:29). Indeed their sense of duty and even upbringing have English public School analogies:

Their strength and activity are remarkable. I have seen a Dyak carry a heavy Englishman down the steepest hills; and when one of their companions is severely wounded they bear him home, no matter what the distance. They exercise a great deal from boyhood in wrestling, swimming, running and sham fighting ... When a little more civilised they would make good soldiers, being brave by nature. (1862 2:29–30).

While the classic colonialist sketch of the 'heavy Englishman' being carried is a reminder of the inescapable hierarchies of the relation, the Dyaks share the 'boy's own' adventuring ideals of love of sport, bravery in war and loyalty to comrades, prizing strength, activity and good manners. And given these attributes, even the familiar colonialist trope, the Englishman carried by native bearers, assumes — at least for those fearing European degeneration — something of a warning.

Even though St. John was the first Englishman to explore the Western interior of Borneo, the Dyaks (particularly the Iban) had already been stereotyped in European discourse (through Dutch and other sources) as the world's fiercest head-hunters, famous for head-hunting practices and rituals. (The Norwegian explorer Carl Bock, who published his popular *The Head-Hunters of Borneo* in 1881 deliberately drew on [and played to] this reputation, searching for instances of cannibalism to, as it were, provide the icing on the head-hunting cake). By contrast, St. John, throughout his two-volume work, plays down the alleged 'evils' of head-hunting, carefully distinguishing the practice from cannibalism and drawing attention to measures by the Brookes to curb it.
In *Life in the Forests of the Far East* St. John writes less as an administrator than as an explorer and ethnographer, providing an exciting tale of his expedition along the rivers, an adventure shared with his Dyak and Malay companions. Head-hunting is not described as a marker of (savage) difference, even if from time to time the whole party fears pursuit by other groups with a ‘reputation’. But St. John never sensationalises the possibility (or the practice) and though he does comment, when recounting one Chief’s tale of a raid that ‘its cool atrocity always makes my heart sick’ (1862 2:61) some of his references to head-hunting seem almost casual, and talk about it is frequently the basis of cross-cultural male camaraderie. Sent inland to inquire into ‘the alleged bad conduct of an English trader and a Sarawak Malay’ (1862 2:104), St. John spent two hours on the investigation and, when this was concluded, discussed head-hunting with the local Dyak men over drinks of native arrack and his own French brandy:

> A little spirit getting into them, they became more cheerful and amusing, and we talked about their head-hunting propensities. The wholesome advice I felt compelled to give them on this subject made them feel thirsty, and Tamawan seizing a bottle, filled the tumblers two-thirds full of raw spirit and handed it to me and asked me to drink with him to the friendship of the two nations. Could I refuse? No. I raised the tumbler to my lips, and amid very excited chorus allowed the liquor to flow down.  
> (1862 2:104)

While Rajah James Brooke and after him Charles (and the British Government) officially outlawed head-hunting in Sarawak, both James, and particularly Charles, encouraged group raids to maintain and extend their territory. Charles not only accompanied Dyak war parties but was widely rumoured to have taken heads himself; an assumption generally supported by the esteem in which he was held by Dyak Chiefs. St. John was close to both James and Charles and he had certainly accompanied war parties. But even more remarkably, long after he had left Borneo and Haiti and retired to England, he re-imagined himself back into the days of *Life in the Forests of the Far East* in a strange narrative allegedly penned by one Capt. Charles Hunter, R.N., entitled *The Adventures of a Naval Officer* (1905). St. John drew extensively on his 1862 accounts for this fiction, and his first person narrator, Ali, is fully disguised as a Malay, having permanently dyed his skin to undertake pirate raids (internecine and on Dutch shipping) with his mixed Dyak-Malay comrades.

Cannibalism is only briefly mentioned in *Life in the Forests of the Far East*, but its practice is dismissed perfunctorily as unlikely. St John notes that there have been one or two reports of it (possibly Carl Bock’s) but says that he has never either seen any evidence himself, nor credited reports he has heard. What is a more troublesome conundrum for St. John is that which had worried Alfred Russell Wallace before him and William Hornaday after: the potential disbenefits for native races of the goals of ‘civilisation’ itself. Too often, as Wallace opined, ‘civilisation’ led inevitably to extermination (99); and for Hornaday, Dyak
‘civilisation’ was both happier and morally superior to that of his native United States. Spenser St. John had fewer qualms about the benefits of Western civilisation, but just as the McDougalls regarded him as a pernicious influence on young Englishmen in Sarawak, so St. John did not approve of missionising Borneans whose general condition he regarded as already felicitous.

Twenty years after Life in the Forests of the Far East, Spenser St. John published his (in)famous Hayti or the Black Republic. His account was widely circulated and much discussed, not only in the Caribbean, but in Britain, Europe and the United States. The subject of Haiti had always been of great interest in the metropoles ever since Toussaint L’Ouverture’s slave revolt of 1791 (the only successful large-scale one in New World history). With the establishment of the black state of Haiti, all eyes, particularly in France, Britain and the United States, had been focussed on her. Not only did Haiti represent, before the abolition of slavery in Britain and her colonies — and later in the Southern United States — a major threat to white plantocracy, it also stood, in the post-slavery era, as an actual (or potential) example of the progress or decline of self-governing colonies and/or black states in the New World. St. John’s apparently authoritative report on the status of Haiti after Toussaint was thus read with great interest and generally regarded as fact. Its form is much less personal than that of Life in the Forests of the Far East, and though the author recounts first-hand experiences, many of the book’s observations depend on, (as well as present) statistics; accounts of trials; three chapters on history for which St. John draws on English and European written sources; an account of the origins and present state of the population; the structure and operations of the Government; the Army and the Police; Religion, Education and Justice; Language and Literature, and Agriculture, Commerce and Finance. Fluent in French and Spanish as well as in English, St. John included impressions received from fellow diplomats and continental travellers. But the book’s most notorious chapter was (and is) ‘Vaudoux Worship and Cannibalism’.

Where Life in the Forests of the Far East was progressive and optimistic, Hayti, or the Black Republic is an account of degeneration in almost every aspect of Haitian life, and it was certainly received as incontrovertible evidence of the impossibility of the negro’s ever being able to manage his own affairs. In his Introduction St. John defends himself against charges of racism by appealing to his experience across a number of cultures and by emphasising his unqualified approval of Toussaint and his early successors:

In treating of the Black and the Mulatto as they appeared to me during my residence among them, I fear that I shall be considered by some to judge too harshly. Such, however, is not my intention. Brought up under Sir James Brooke, whose enlarged sympathies could endure no prejudice of race or colour, I do not remember ever to have felt any repugnance to my fellow creatures on account of a difference of complexion.
I have dwelt above thirty-five years among coloured people of various races, and am sensible of no prejudice against them. (viii)

More specifically, 'for twelve years I lived in familiar and kindly intercourse with Haytians of all ranks and shades of colour' and 'all who knew me in Hayti know that I had no prejudice of colour' (viii).

Where, from the beginning, Life in the Forests of the Far East promises a journey, a forward movement into an exciting and (to Europeans) unknown interior. Hayti or the Black Republic looks backwards from its very inception, moving forwards only to look backwards, confirming a decline up to the present, and assuring readers that the decline will continue: ‘Whilst in Port-au-Prince a Spanish colleague once remarked to me, “Mon ami, if we could return to Hayti fifty years hence, we should find the negresses cooking their bananas on the site of these warehouses’’ (v).

This ‘prophecy’ St. John says, will certainly be fulfilled ‘unless [they are] in the meantime influenced by some higher civilisation’. In fact, ‘the negresses are … already cooking their bananas amid the ruins of the best houses of the capital’ (v). His own impression, ‘after personally knowing the country above twenty years, is, that it is in a state of rapid decadence’, and since 1843, ‘the country has … been steadily falling to the rear in the race of civilisation’ (v). Architecture, society, agriculture, all are ‘deteriorating’ or have already deteriorated beyond redemption, and ‘in spite of all the civilising elements around them, there is a distinct tendency to sink into the state of an African tribe’ (vii). The trajectory of Hayti or the Black Republic then, is backwards to a ‘tribal’ past, well beyond the point of ‘origin’ for the black nation, in the ‘new’ world, that is, their freedom from slavery. Strangely, in the trajectory of decline catalogued by St. John, slavery appears to play no part, since it is necessarily past by the time of origin of the Haitian state. It is, of course, discussed in the chapters concerned with history; but both the formal design of St. John’s account, and his trajectory of ‘decline and fall’ give slavery — the very basis of black Haitian history — only a ‘bit’ part.

Significantly, Hayti or the Black Republic, does not begin with the kidnap and transport of Africans to Santo Domingo, but from Toussaint’s revolution and his leadership. His constitution, St. John notes, ‘was a model of liberality’ (63), and Toussaint ‘governed admirably’ (64) so that by 1800 ‘all was now progressing on the island; the government was regularly administered, the finances were getting into order and agriculture was beginning to raise its head’ (65). The initial cause of decline for Toussaint’s Hayti is external, not racially or culturally inherent: ‘Bonaparte, having secured peace in Europe, determined to recover the Queen of the Antilles and restore slavery’ (65). Nevertheless, this narrative of Haitian ‘decline’ elides slavery, while at the same time marking the decline with moments
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inextricably interwoven with it. Toussaint's revolution initiates a potential upward moral trend with the liberation of the slaves but an inevitable economic decline. It is Bonaparte's determination to re-institute slavery (and the debilitating wars which follow) which, precipitating the decline, is then assisted by incompetence and corrupt leadership till the bottom limit is reached: 'the state of an African tribe'. Since he was against slavery, St. John can hardly situate it at the beginning of New World potential; yet his apparent sharing of the commonly-held view that Africans were to be placed on the next to lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder returns a 'decayed' Haitian society to its African rather than Afro-European origin in the iniquitous slave trade. The comparisons by which present-day Haitian society is measured are drawn from the era of Toussaint. Haitian officers had been brave and energetic under this leader, but are now so lazy the Guard sit on chairs. Most governments since Toussaint (and those of his immediate successors) have been corrupt; production of goods and trade have declined. (Where his statistics don't accord with this, St. John argues that 'nature' rather than effort is responsible). But the ultimate sign and symbol of Haiti's overall decline is cannibalism as a ritual voodoo practice.

Where, in relation to the Dyaks, St. John dismissed both written and oral reports of cannibalism, appealing to his own observations (he had never seen any evidence of it), in Haiti he is prepared to credit and to draw on written accounts (particularly that of Moreau de St Méry) and hearsay (French and Spanish diplomats and travellers; white and mulatto Haitians) even quoting a sailor's report from Vanity Fair. He also reports at 'first hand' on a trial he attended which took place during President Geffrard's rule. This was a notorious case (the Bizoton or Congo Pelle trial [1864]) and one which had been widely reported in the American, French and English language presses. The case involved the alleged murder and eating of a child as part of a Voodoo ritual, and a conspiracy 'to do away with' another. It was openly acknowledged in Court (and in the reports) that the 'confessions' had been beaten out of the accused, and it was even suggested that, believing there was no escape from the charges, the prisoners had gone on to sensationalise their stories. St. John reports that the confessions were obtained under duress, but has no hesitation in ascribing guilt, concurring with the Court's verdict. In contrast to his dismissal of cannibal charges against Borneans as unsubstantiated rumour, St. John readily believes the evidence, and the even more nebulous hearsay about the widespread nature of the practice and the high level of 'corruption' protecting the 'Vaudoux' sects. But the accused in the Congo Pelle case were tried and punished, suggesting that in one of the few instances for which St. John has some 'evidence' of it, cannibalism as a Voodoo practice was not sanctioned by the State. Nevertheless, cannibalism is both structurally (and figuratively) at the centre of his narrative of Haitian decadence and decline.

In keeping with his demonisation of the syncretic Voodoo, the St. John of Hayti or the Black Republic (agnostic and actively anti-clerical in Sarawak) praises
Toussaint for having been ‘a fervent Roman Catholic ... greatly attached to the priesthood’, and for repressing Voodoo and forbidding all fetish rites (71–72). ‘Vaudoux’ for St. John is the overt cause and symptom of Haitian decline, of degeneration ‘to the level of an African tribe’, a measure identical with that of Conrad’s 1901 *Heart of Darkness*. African tribalism is indicated by both cannibal practice and disdain for the symbols of European culture in mercantile capitalism and European architecture. (Negresses are already cooking bananas ‘amid the ruins of the best houses of the capital’; they will soon be ‘cooking their bananas on the site of these warehouses’ [v]). What is striking about both of St. John’s images of Haitian decline are the obdurately separate ‘poles’ from which they proceed: ‘Europe’ (Christianity, Architecture) is the sign of civilisation; ‘Africa’ is savagery. But Voodoo is a Christian-West African syncretism (not an African religion) while the State of Haiti (and the stately buildings of its capital) are a product of the relationship between Europe and Africa through the slave trade.

Evolutionary anthropology, as Daniel Pick and others have noted, functioned not only to differentiate the colonised from the imperial race, but to scrutinise populations ‘at home’. The other was both outside, at the peripheries of Empire, and also ‘inside’, as evidenced by Europe’s criminal ‘classes’, the decadence and filth of its slums and tenements, and by its physical and mental ‘degenerates’. Joseph Conrad had read St. John’s *Life in the Forests of the Far East* and had probably read *Hayti or the Black Republic*. In *Heart of Darkness* he brought head-taking, fetish rites and cannibalism together in what would become the classic *fin de siecle* /Modernist image of European degeneration, exposing the potential for savagery at the very heart of civilisation; the white man abandoning his ‘burden’ of civilising ‘others’ to become the abandoned fetish priest; the genius of Europe gone tragically native, ‘sunk to the level of an African tribe’.

It is possible to read Conrad’s complex work as a telling allegory of European degeneration occurring precisely because of its imperial ambitions and greed masked by noble, civilising motives. Kurtz’s atavistic reversion is linked to both his greed for ivory and his civilising mission, just as the dying worker-slaves in the ‘grove of death’ are both product of Europe’s rapacious capitalist expansionism and refractions of a European ‘whited sepulchre’, a sick heart and a heart of darkness at the very centre of European imperialism.

St. John’s writing is much less complex than Conrad’s and it does not have Conrad’s figurative density or ironic vision, but like his near contemporary, St. John was necessarily influenced by many of the same discursive strains in Victorian thinking. Where Conrad set the ‘boy’s own’ Empire adventure narrative against the realities of ruthless imperialist exploitation to indict the very (colonialist) decadence constitutive of Europe’s optimistic, progressivist mood, St. John dealt with this fundamental contradiction by compartmentalisation. In Borneo and thus in *Life in the Forests of the Far East* and *The Adventures of a Naval Officer* empire adventuring, the bringing into contact of Europe and the exotic ‘other’
could be construed as mutually energising and generally benign. The European traveller could delight in observing different practices (while discovering 'universal' moral and social similarities) without there being any disturbing prior imbrication with the European past. But Haiti was a different matter.

Paraphrasing Werner Arens, Maggie Kilgour argues that

the anthropophage provides an image for the forces hostile to the civilising process, a wild, untamed nature that threatens advances made by culture. That force can be projected also onto the culture's own past, as a state of savagery out of which it has just emerged and back into which it fears it may fall. (242)

But the cannibal image had been further complicated by European recognition of its own 'cannibal' practices in relation to other peoples. At least as far back as Montaigne, writers had condemned the hypocrisy which projected savagery onto the other as justification for the (cannibalistic) savageries of genocide and slavery; the consuming of entire cultures in a drive for wealth and power.

St. John was the first white man to explore Borneo's western river systems, and his encounter with Borneo and her peoples was a pristine one. But Haitian society was a product of Afro-European history; and thus always already contaminated by some of the worst examples of European cannibalism — the slaughter of Amerindian peoples and the obscenities of the slave trade and the plantation. Genocide and enslavement (cannibalisms) were the very foundations of the Spanish and French creation of Santo Domingo and thus the 'origins' of nineteenth-century Haiti. St. John always retained his faith in the benefits of European civilisation. 'One thing I wish distinctly to state', he wrote in a footnote to the chapter on Voodoo, is 'that I never heard of any Mulatto, except Generals Salnave and Therlonge, who was mixed up with the cannibalism of the Vaudoux, nor of any black educated in Europe' (182).

Yet St. John's differing attitudes to the evidence (or lack thereof) of cannibalism in two different, apparently 'savage' populations is significant. Already demonstrating traits of 'civilisation' within their own cultures, Dyak peoples would go on to greater things. By contrast, Africans had already been brought into contact with 'civilisation' (through their enslavement by Europeans) and had now, after Toussaint, failed the test of 'progress'. Their trajectory as a people was thus downwards — degenerative. But degeneration and cannibalism, represented, respectively, a potential future and a repressed history: they could uncomfortably mirror Europe's destiny or her past 'savage' dealings with 'others'. And because Haitian society was so uncomfortably imbricated with that past and could even prefigure a devastating future to Europeans, it had to be firmly and unequivocally differentiated from it. Consequently, where St. John was eager to expel the possibility of cannibalism from the progressivist narrative of Borneo, he was equally determined to invoke it in Haiti as a barrier between 'civilisation' and
'savagery'; to re-erect the classic 'poles' in assessing a society where Europe and an 'African tribe' had been perforce brought together.

Some of St. John's expressed sentiments about Haitians are what we would now regard as unequivocally 'racist', while his reassessment of Dyaks is positive, but patronising and condescending. Such categorisations are however, too facile. In the context of fears of European degeneration and against the guilty repression of the past, the 'decadent' Haitians, as racially and religiously 'syncretic' products of that past, had to be 'returned' to Africa.

It is perhaps not surprising that St. John returned to the simplicities of Empire adventuring in his later work, casting his protagonist as an Englishman dyed 'native', enjoying serious play along the tropical coastline and up the rivers of St. John's memory, with companion Dyaks whose exciting differences yet pleasing similarities both offered and promised such civil possibilities. In that almost Adamic encounter, the 'other' neither offered a (cannibalistic) reflection of Europe's genocidal activities, nor prefigured its exposure or decline 'to the level of an African tribe'.

NOTES
1 Governor Grey, and the Roth brothers offer other instances of this 'cross colony' phenomenon.
2 I have followed Métraux in using the modern spellings 'Haiti' and 'Voodoo' except where they appear in quotes in their nineteenth-century forms as 'Hayti' and 'Vaudoux'.
3 For example Gustave Aymard's Les Vaudoux where 'the sect is described as a lot of fanatics thirsting for blood and power' (Métraux 16).
4 Spenser St. John, Hayti or the Black Republic, Frank Cass, 1971. Introduction p. xi. This later introduction to Hayti or the Black Republic was written after Froude's The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses, 1877. All further quotations in this paper are from the original edition of 1884, published by Smith, Elder and Co., London.
5 Both James and Charles Brooke had excellent relations with both Dyaks and Malays; and Sarawak's legal system operated through three codes: English, Muslim and Dyak.
6 See Harriette McDougall, Sketches of Our Life at Sarawak.
7 Susan Morgan wonderfully characterises the Sarawak of the Brookes as a 'real-life "boys' own" adventure' (215).
8 See William T. Hornaday, The Experiences of a Hunter and Naturalist in the Malay Peninsula and Borneo.
9 For an account of Toussaint L'Ouverture see C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins.

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