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Industrializing Crusoe: Adventure, Modernity and Anglo-American Expansionism

Abstract.

This essay focuses on two updated, Americanized versions of the Robinson Crusoe story published in the final quarter of the nineteenth-century: Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* and Douglas Frazar's *Perseverance Island: or the Nineteenth-Century Robinson Crusoe*. The first half of the essay considers how these Robinsonades reworked Defoe's novel as a fantasy of applied technology in an industrialized agrarian context. The second half of the essay engages with recent historical work on nineteenth-century British expansion in order to consider how Verne's and Frazar's adventures might be understood in relation to the flow of migrants and money from Britain to America around the period the novels were written. As a result, the essay proposes *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island* as literary vehicles that inspired visions of agro-industrialization at a time when Victorian subjects were increasingly drawn to the American West as a site in which to sink their labour and finance. Thus linking the circulation of the adventure form with overseas capitalist enterprise, the essay concludes by reflecting upon how such expansionism might be understood with regard to the discriminatory processes of primitive accumulation and uneven development that have characterized the growth of the modern capitalist world system.

Keywords: Robinson Crusoe; Anglo-American expansionism; industrialization; adventure; modernity; global periphery.

i. Introduction.

On the occasion of its first edition, in February 1870, an editorial in the American journal *The Technologist: An Illustrated Journal of Engineering, Manufacturing and Building* underscored to its readership the importance of a rapidly expanding transcontinental railway system to the state of the newly formed Union:

It is not many years since two-thirds of the territory of the United States, though nominally under the control of our Government, were actually in possession of the bison and the Indian. But to-day this savage dominion is passing away. From the outposts of civilization on both sides of the continent, a slender line has been projected, and on either side of this line the forces of civilization are producing a rapid crystallization that must soon fill the whole continent.¹

The socio-economics behind this empowered expansionist programme were explained with relation to the growing refinements in exchange and production processes opened up by railways. 'A marked feature of the present age is co-operation and the division of labour', the editorial observed, invoking the image of the farmer 'raising good crops' alongside the 'works of the engineer' as the dominion of bison and Indian gave way to agriculture and technology. This collaborative, dynamic and profitable work was contrasted with the efforts of the individual pioneer, who fifty years previously 'went out into the wilderness with his axe and his rifle as his sole companions'. Pioneering activity remained possible, the *Technologist* admitted, but the progressive momentum generated by a well-connected society energized by steam power and organized according to the market-driven logic of comparative advantage and competitive

¹ My thanks to the Huntington Library, Pasadena, who generously awarded me a Fellowship in order that I could research this essay. My thanks also to the editorial staff at *JVC*, especially Ruth Livesey, who have provided such constructive feedback on my work. '... to float upon this tide' (Editorial), *Technologist*, 1.1 (1870), 1-2, in *Major Problems in the History of American Technology*, ed. by Merritt Roe Smith and Gregory Clancey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), pp. 197-98 (197-98).

exchange left 'all such Robinson Crusoe-like attempts at an overwhelming disadvantage'.²

The fact that the journal dismissed the relevance of Robinson Crusoe from its vision of American expansion is noteworthy given that Daniel Defoe's island adventurer has been understood to embody the spirit of economically motivated expansionist enterprise. Ian Watt maintains that since 'profit is Crusoe's only vocation, and the whole world is his territory', Defoe's protagonist stands as 'an inspiration to economists' as well as those 'more practical heroes, the empire builders'. For Watt, Crusoe mobilized and exploited global resources in a manner 'on which the future progress of capitalism depended', meaning that *Robinson Crusoe* furnished Western societies with 'a distinctively modern culture-hero'.³ However, Watt also writes that Defoe disregarded the social nature of economic life in order 'to give narrative expression to the ideological counterpart of the Division of Labour, the Dignity of Labour'. Hence Defoe 'sets back the economic clock', taking 'his hero to a primitive environment, where labour can be presented as varied and inspiring'.⁴ In contrast with Watt's analysis, the *Technologist* refused Crusoe such backward-facing appeal, casting his solitary struggles in terms of disadvantage not dignity. That it did so draws attention to the epoch-defining character the journal accorded the railway and, by extension, steam-powered industrialization. Crusoe's isolated, laborious form of industrial endeavour served the journal as an historical juxtaposition with which to bring into sharper relief the pace and power of a new, mechanized mode of production. Thus where Watt ascribes to Defoe's protagonist a territorially extensive and profit-oriented logic that encapsulated the imperatives of capitalist modernity, the *Technologist* presented a vision of industrialized expansion in which Crusoe appeared not as a 'modern culture-hero' but rather as an anachronistic outcast.

² *Major Problems*, p. 198.

³ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), (London: Pimlico, 2000), p. 67, p. 87.

⁴ Watt, pp. 72-3.

This essay focuses upon two revisions of *Robinson Crusoe*, or Robinsonades, that broke down the clear cut distinction drawn by the *Technologist* between the Crusoe story and the steam-driven present. The first is the English translation of Jules Verne's *L'Île Mystérieuse*, which appeared in both Britain and America in 1875 as *The Mysterious Island*, only a year after it had been published in France. The second is Douglas Frazar's *Perseverance Island: or the Nineteenth-Century Robinson Crusoe*, an American Robinsonade that was first published in 1884 but that had crossed the Atlantic to appear as a British edition by 1886. Although both of these novels framed the action they recounted with relation to Defoe's original tale, they featured American not English protagonists and they updated and intensified a story conceived of during an era of mercantile capitalism in line with the technological advances of industrial capitalism. While the *Technologist* set Crusoe in opposition to industrialized progress, therefore, Verne and Frazar reworked the Crusoe story as an industrialized fantasy. By tracing the way in which their respective fantasies took shape, the first section of this essay demonstrates how these adventure stories narrated the same kind of mechanically engineered process of territorial transformation as was anticipated by the *Technologist*. Following on from the fact that the journal celebrated technological advance in agriculturally productive terms, this line of analysis draws particular attention to the manner in which Verne and Frazar's Robinsonades plotted the industrialization of their respective islands in pastoral, vitalizing rather than urban, dehumanizing terms.

Having demonstrated the way in which the Crusoe story could accommodate industrialized modernity, my attention turns to the idea that its adventurous dynamic could promote industrialized modernity. The essay's second section suggests that *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island* reinvigorated the profit-orientated, expansionist appeal with which Watt associates *Robinson Crusoe*, allowing that the novels can be understood in the wider context of the programme of American growth with which the *Technologist* was concerned. Notably this expansionist programme was

in part sustained by a flow of British migrants and money, opening up a transnational line of analysis that links the circulation of the adventure form with overseas capitalist enterprise. Here my argument connecting Verne's and Frazer's Robinsonades with Anglo-American patterns of migratory and financial investment draws upon recent historical work on nineteenth-century British expansion. As well as emphasizing that the phenomenon of British expansion was not restricted by the formal coordinates of the British Empire, these studies have contended that the economic imperatives driving expansion were shaped and energized by the cultural contexts in which they emerged. Thus furnishing a historical framework within which to consider the heroic manner that the protagonists of *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island* engineered their environments in order to advance their interests, the studies substantiate my claim that such adventurous literature promoted the international scope of British economic activity. This claim develops but also reorients existing scholarship on the connection between culture and empire. While the Crusoe story has long been recognized as a foundational myth of British imperialism, therefore, the present study explores how these two Robinsonades might be understood as literary examples of a wider cultural matrix that encouraged Victorian migrants and financial investors to turn towards the scene of Britain's greatest imperial loss: America.

Stretching the expansionist significance of the Crusoe story beyond empire leads the essay to highlight a Victorian desire for safe and profitable investment over and above a drive for colonial conflict and rule. Although the resultant argument privileges the expansionist appeal of work over war to Victorian imaginaries, however, it does not seek to downplay the idea that Victorian expansionism could promote exploitation and violence. The essay's concluding section thus turns to consider the notion that the transformative programmes of industrialization plotted by the Robinsonades were economically attractive because they opened up the idea of peripheral modernity, a spatio-temporal realm that was profitable precisely because it remained to some extent

primitive. Working against the claim that modernity is distinguished by universal progress, this concluding focus suggests the way in which *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island*, and the adventure form more generally, might be understood with regard to the discriminatory processes of primitive accumulation and uneven development that have characterized the growth of the modern capitalist world system.

ii. Machines in the Garden.

In an analysis of the influence Daniel Defoe's novel has exercised within Western culture, Martin Green identifies Jules Verne as 'the story's most important heir and transmitter, at least in the second half of the nineteenth century'.⁵ Green points out that much of Verne's vast and internationally popular body of work borrowed from and reworked aspects of Defoe's adventure narrative. But he also notes the particular significance of *L'Ile Mystérieuse*, translated as *The Mysterious Island* for Anglophone markets by the popular adventure writer W.H.G. Kingston. For Green this novel is where Verne most fully realized his dream of producing 'a magnificent Robinson'.⁶ And he did so by incorporating the technologically-driven historical progress of his age. 'The story is unmistakably a revised and up-to-date version of *Robinson Crusoe*', Green explains, adding that the familiar tale 'is immensely expanded and its pace speeded up, so that the story passes before the reader's eye like a film running too fast'.⁷

The contemporary setting of Verne's Robinsonade is established from the outset: the action begins in March 1865, just as the American Civil War is coming to an end, with five Yankee prisoners of war (and one dog) escaping confederate confinement by means

⁵ Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Park University Press, 1990), p. 129.

⁶ Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, p. 129. It may have been Kingston's wife, Agnes Kinloch Kingston, who translated the novel. Although this translation makes numerous changes from the French version, I cite from it because it is the Anglophone circulation of the novel in which I am interested.

⁷ Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, p. 132.

of a hot air balloon. The party comprises the American railway engineer Cyrus Harding, followed faithfully by the Negro Neb, a former slave born on the engineer's estate who refuses to leave his master despite being granted his freedom. To this emancipatory twist upon the Crusoe-Friday dyad are added three more Americans: a journalist (Gideon Spillet), a sailor (Bonadventure Pencroft) and his adopted son (Herbert Brown), plus Top the dog. However, the escape goes wrong and the novel opens with the balloon sinking rapidly 'above the vast watery desert of the Pacific', propelling the group onto an unknown volcanic island in a state of 'absolute destitution'.⁸ Ian Watt comments that the shipwreck in *Robinson Crusoe* serves as the novel's *deus ex machina*, rendering Crusoe 'the lucky heir to the labours of countless other individuals'.⁹ No such luck is afforded Harding and his companions. Contrasting their predicament with that faced by the characters in Johan Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812) as well as *Robinson Crusoe*, and thus making manifest the novel's literary genealogy, Verne's narrator comments that while the 'imaginary heroes of Daniel Defoe or of Wyss' were blessed with 'abundant resources from their stranded vessels', these 'castaways from the clouds' had neither 'the first necessities of life', nor any of the instruments or utensils with which to procure them: 'From nothing they must supply themselves with everything' (p. 41). The remainder of *The Mysterious Island* takes shape around this imperative.

Notwithstanding that they begin in far less favourable circumstances than Defoe's hero, it soon becomes clear that that these updated American adventurers will easily outstrip his achievements. The companions share Crusoe's enthusiasm for hard work and ability to rise to the challenges with which they are faced, but the narrative is driven by Harding's scientific knowledge and technical proficiency, quickly allowing the group to take control of their environment. Excited by the transformative power the engineer's expertise affords them, Pencroft demands 'that we do not consider ourselves

⁸ Jules Verne, *The Mysterious Island*, trans. by W.H.G. Kingston (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low, and Searle, 1875), (New York: Heritage, 1959), p. 1, p. 41.

⁹ Watt, p. 88.

castaways, but colonists, who have come here to settle': 'We will make a little America of this island! We will build towns, we will establish railways, start telegraphs, and one fine day, when it is quite put in order and civilized, we will go and offer it to the government of the Union' (pp. 89-90). The mariner's faith in the engineer is rewarded as the latter leads the companions through a series of developmental stages which see them realize the tools, techniques and technologies to profit from the island's organic and inorganic resources. Harding and his fellow colonists fashion tools, sow crops, enclose livestock, make bricks, build ovens, mine coal, smelt iron, fabricate textiles; later they generate steam-power and electricity with which to run a series of machines; and they produce sulphuric acid and nitro-glycerine to explode those parts of the island that stand in their way, constructing roads, a telegraph system, a dockyard and factories. The fast-paced action, punctuated repeatedly by the exhortation 'Forward!', is thus mirrored by a rapid process of technological advance that sees the island forged after the image of industrialized modernity.

Arguing that this transformative process represents 'the programme of the conquering bourgeoisie', Pierre Macherey suggests that *The Mysterious Island* dramatizes an 'assault upon nature'.¹⁰ Significantly, however, the protagonists of Verne's Robinsonade conceive of their technologically enhanced endeavours in regenerative rather than destructive terms. The fact that they do so can be usefully elaborated with relation to Leo Marx's observations on the emergence 'of a new, distinctively American, post-romantic, industrial version of the pastoral design' in the mid nineteenth century.¹¹ Explicating the logic and pervasive appeal of what he terms the myth of the 'machine in the garden', Marx draws upon Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1844 lecture 'The Young American'. In the lecture Emerson laid out his exceptionalist belief that industrialized technologies, principally transportation, would 'pattern the various threads of American

¹⁰ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. by Geoffrey Wall, rev. edn. (London: Routledge Classics, 2006), p. 232.

¹¹ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963; rpr. 1972), p. 32,

life into one vast web': 'As a result, local peculiarities are overcome, the Union is held staunch, the opening of the West is accelerated and the influence of Europe is weakened.' Importantly, however, this mechanized web was to bind nature and industry together as a pastoral phenomenon, engendering bountiful and beautiful results that would stand in stark contrast with the horrific consequences of industrialization across the Atlantic: 'Like a divining rod, the machine will unearth the hidden graces of landscape. There are to be no satanic mills in America, no dark, begrimed cities, nothing like the squalid, inhuman world depicted by Blake, Dickens, and Carlyle.'¹² Where William Wordsworth placed 'the machine in opposition to the tranquility and order located in the landscape', protesting against the 'rash assault' of the railway upon 'English ground', therefore, Marx traces the development of a vision of the American industrial revolution as 'a railway journey in the direction of nature'.¹³

The Mysterious Island tapped into the machine in the garden myth, transmitting it to an international audience. And it did so by casting this fantasy in the form of an adventure narrative, lending an exciting appeal to a programme of technologically sophisticated, pastorally oriented enterprise. Thus when Pencroft is drawn again to ponder how Harding will harness the productive potential of their new island home, now named after President Lincoln and claimed for the Union, his bullish confidence rehearses precisely the kind of logic with which Marx is concerned:

His faith in the engineer was complete; nothing could disturb it. He believed him capable of undertaking anything and succeeding in everything. The question of boots and clothes - assuredly a serious question, - that of light during winter months, utilizing the fertile parts of the island, transforming the wild flora into cultivated flora, it all appeared easy to him; Cyrus Harding helping, everything would be done in time. He dreamed of canals facilitating the transport of the riches of

¹² Marx, pp. 234-5.

¹³ Marx, p. 18, p. 238.

the ground; workings of quarries and mines; machines for every industrial manufacture; railroads; yes, railroads! Of which a network would certainly one day cover Lincoln Island. (p. 160)

In fact this anticipated railroad network never materializes. It is noticeable, however, that it is a railway engineer that sets in motion and oversees the island's modernization. Moreover, railroads are invoked throughout the novel in a manner that registers fast-paced and irresistible transformation yet refuses 'that there might be anything alien or "artificial" about mechanization'.¹⁴ While Verne's Robinsonade does not literally represent industrialization as a 'railway journey in the direction of nature', then, the colonists do position matter and machine in harmonious and fruitful union. Pencroft's dream thus rapidly becomes a cultivated reality.

Crucially the engineered island order that results appears sustainable as well as productive. Harding attests with anti-Malthusian zeal to 'the arithmetical progressions of prolific nature', enthusing over the way in which corn, the poppy- and tobacco-plant would 'overrun the earth' unless properly tended (p. 171). Likewise he dismisses the idea that an end of coal would effect 'an end to machinery', and with it an end to railways, steamers and manufactories, everything that 'is indispensable to modern civilization!': 'As long as the earth is inhabited it will supply the wants of its inhabitants [...] Water will be the coal of the future' (p. 289). Marx discusses the way in which a 'program of economic development' was mythologically enshrined 'as part of a grand topographical design', generating the nineteenth-century idea of an American society 'emanating from geography' (p. 158). Verne's protagonists give shape to this idea in the middle of the Pacific. But when Harding predicts that 'the grandeur of the American Republic' will extend around the same process of 'continual advance' (p. 287) he has realized on Lincoln Island, the engineer only underlines what has already become

¹⁴ Marx, p. 160.

apparent: Verne's castaways-cum-colonists figure their transformative exploits in line with American confidence in a far wider programme of transcontinental expansion.

Significantly, however, Verne's Robinsonade problematizes such confidence. While Harding and his companions consistently foreground a productive economic correspondence between their technology and the island's topography, the industrialized order is in fact threatened. In an admission that anticipates Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's contention that 'the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant', Harding affirms Pencroft's concern that the 'charming liquid' he has manufactured at one point in the narrative could 'blow up the whole of our island,' adding 'the island, continents, and the world itself' (p. 147) are exposed to risk.¹⁵ While this revelation gives the lie to the regenerative power the engineer claims elsewhere distinguishes his operations, it transpires that the island is not in fact 'fully enlightened', and the mystery it holds in store for the colonists refuses their sovereign status. Although Harding and his companions believe themselves the masters of their own destiny, they gradually discover that it is the island's true master, Captain Nemo, whose 'invisible protection' (p. 491) has done much to sustain their existence and control their fate. When Nemo dies the island explodes as a result of a volcanic eruption, dramatically exposing the settlers' vulnerability without him. In tension with the idea that *The Mysterious Island* stages a comprehensive victory for science and technology is the fact that the novel comes to turn around the exertion of a secretive Gothic force, and culminates with the 'sad and fearful sight' (p. 561) of the hubristic colonists left clinging to a tiny, isolated outcrop of volcanic rock.

Except this is not how the novel actually ends. Verne's biographer William Butcher notes that the intrusive editorial practices of Verne's commercially-driven publisher Jules Hetzel 'twisted and corrupted' the writer's work, compromising – if not effacing – much of its complexity and pessimism. In the 'Hetzelized' ending Verne

¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), (London: Verso, 1997), p. 3.

eventually wrote for *The Mysterious Islanders* the settlers are rescued and, as Butcher remarks, 'have to laboriously start over again in Iowa'.¹⁶ Butcher's emphasis on the arduous nature of this process jars, however, with the wholly positive way in which this new industrial beginning takes shape. Since Nemo has left them a coffer of diamonds and pearls, to the value of many millions of dollars, Harding and his companions purchase 'a vast territory in the State of Iowa', whereupon they are able to recreate and expand their settlement project:

There, upon this domain, the colonists invited to labour, that is to say, to wealth and happiness, all those to whom they had hoped to offer the hospitality of Lincoln Island. There was found a vast colony to which they gave the name of the island sunk beneath the waves of the Pacific. A river there was called the Mercy, a mountain took the name of Mount Franklin, a small lake was named Lake Grant, and the forests became the forests of the Far West. It might have been an island on terra firma.

There under the intelligent hands of the engineer and his companions everything prospered. (p. 568)

Far from being cowed by their Pacific encounter, the settlers are inspired by it, and the rewards it generated are ploughed into a new industrialized, pastorally oriented venture that materializes more rapidly and successfully than the last. An ending motivated by Hetzel's commercial imperatives thus produces a socio-economic success story, the moral of which recuperates the machine in the garden myth's capacity to frame a programme of economic development 'as part of a grand topographical design'.

The fact that *The Mysterious Island* reworked the Crusoe story as a collective enterprise leads Macherey to conclude that the 'solitary outlaw of the past could not embody modernity'.¹⁷ This echo of the *Technologist's* reaction against Crusoe falls in line

¹⁶ William Butcher, *Jules Verne: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Thunder's Mouth, 2006), p. xxiii, p. 232.

¹⁷ Macherey, p. 235.

with what nineteenth-century political economy had to say about the dynamism of the division of labour. But it is noticeable that although Verne emphasized the variety of industrial tasks performed collectively by the settlers, their socio-economic advance is not dependent upon individual specialization; it is, as indicated, not divided labour but science and technology that generate historical progression on Lincoln Island. *Pace* Macherey, and *pace* political economy, the engineered drive behind such progress opened up the possibility that a solitary figure could indeed embody modernity. And less than a decade after Verne's novel appeared in English translation, Douglas Frazar wrote an American Robinsonade that turned upon just such a possibility.

Frazar's *Perseverance Island: or the Nineteenth-Century Robinson Crusoe* was first published in America in 1884 by the Boston firm Lee and Shepard. Two years later it was published in Britain by the Glasgow and London based Blackie and Son. The author of *Practical Boat Building*, published in 1879, Frazar was far from renowned. But although his Robinsonade could not compete with the success enjoyed by Verne, it appeared consistently in different editions on both sides of the Atlantic into the twentieth century. *Perseverance Island* owed a clear debt to *The Mysterious Island* and, like Verne, Frazar opened the action of his adventure in 1865. Unlike Verne, though, he began with a shipwreck; that of the 'Good Luck', a United States built schooner bound from Liverpool to the South Pacific Islands to establish a commercial pearling colony. The sole survivor is the American William Anderson, a sailor rather than an engineer by trade, who finds himself as bereft as Harding and his companions had done of the provisions bestowed upon the original Crusoe. Blessed with a practical aptitude, however, Anderson has retained in his possession a 'Compendium of Useful Arts and Sciences', an encyclopaedic volume that compensates him for the fact he has neither Harding's extensive technological knowledge nor Crusoe's hardware and foods. In a passage that sets the tone for what comes after, Anderson resolves that it would be

overly pessimistic to envy the outwardly more fortunate position of ‘the old Robinson Crusoe’, with whom he compares but also contrasts himself:

How many years must I stagnate upon this island? But I am young and determined to improve my position. Have I not got a book of all the practical sciences to aid me in forcing Nature to give up her secrets? Why should I not be able to improve my condition beyond that which my predecessor in history had been able to do? He had not the education of the nineteenth century to aid him; he knew nothing about the science of steam, railroads, steamboats, telegraphs, etc., whilst I had a book treating of these and a thousand other subjects of infinite interest. I could not help thinking that if I could find iron, I could do almost anything, and why should I not be able to find it?¹⁸

The castaway does indeed find iron ore, a discovery that leads him to echo Verne’s protagonists, who had erased the word ‘impossible’ (p. 148) from Lincoln Island’s dictionary: ‘Nothing was now impossible. I had got my genie, and I was determined to make him work’ (p. 149). What follows sees Anderson single-handedly industrialize his island.

Thus *Perseverance Island* revolves around an engineered programme of transformation and production, set in an environment devoid of human inhabitants and cast in terms of a heroic effort to not only survive but prosper. Drawing attention to his modernity by dismissing ‘the original Robinson Crusoe’ as ‘a bungler at anything and everything that he undertook’ (p. 103), Anderson utilizes steam, electricity and dynamite as he cultivates crops and animals, damns rivers, mines mineral resources, builds a smelting-house, a blast furnace and a kiln with which to forge iron and steel, and establishes a mill. With the island’s resources harnessed to his advantage, the sailor

¹⁸ Douglas Frazar, *Perseverance Island: or the Nineteenth-Century Robinson Crusoe*, 2nd edn. (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1885), pp. 82-3. Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

declares 'Nature was under my thumb; I was the master' (p. 172), before reflecting in a little more detail upon his achievements. While it echoes Defoe's protagonist's reflections upon his own attainments, the following passage is equally notable for the way in which it signals a technologically powered temporality that is entirely distinct from the agonizingly slow pace of change endured by the original Crusoe:

In this short space of time, one year, I had wrested from Nature many things, showing the supremacy of mind over matter, and knowledge, over ignorance and sloth. [...] [I now] found myself sitting at my house door surrounded with my flock of goats, my garden and farm planted, my mill and smelting house in running order, my canoe at my feet in the quiet water of the cove, and everything about me that could please or charm the eye. From absolutely nothing I had created everything. (pp. 173-4)

Like *The Mysterious Island*, *Perseverance Island* frames an 'assault upon nature' as a welcome violation, distinguished by its accelerated historical energy and its capacity to mobilize rather than diminish earthly plenitude. And although the sailor attempts to escape from his island, what takes up the vast majority of the second half of the novel are the various schemes Anderson dreams up to exploit further the island's resources and increase his wealth.

At the centre of these schemes, which run alongside his ongoing agricultural, mining and metal-working operations, is the 'submarine monster' Anderson constructs in order to explore the riches that lie beneath the ocean. Built of iron, driven by propeller, and featuring a mechanized life-support system that separates oxygen from sea-water, the submarine is paddle-powered by 'two fine young goats', which have been trained for their role upon 'a treadmill fitted to their size and strength' (p. 217). Providing a novel aquatic addition to the machine in the garden myth, the craft bears testament to the capacity of modern science to overcome natural obstacles. It enables

Anderson to farm and harvest the island's fertile oyster beds, rewarding him with 'probably the finest private collection of pearls in the world' (p. 252). It also lets him explore fully the gold filled lake he discovers, allowing the castaway to extract in the region of \$500 to \$1000 of nuggets per day before growing 'absolutely tired of gathering this golden harvest' (p. 338). To these naturally occurring riches Anderson adds the man-made wealth of his 'predecessor' on the island, a bloodthirsty English pirate captain whose skeleton he stumbles across. Having already dismissed the industrial efforts of his fictional forerunner, Crusoe, the sailor juxtaposes his own position with that of this literal 'prototype': 'you did not live when steam was the motive power, when the lightnings of the heavens were made obedient to man' (p. 270). Such historical confidence is justified, albeit via goat rather than steam power, when Anderson succeeds in raising from the ocean-floor \$12 million in silver and gold bullion deposited by the pirate.

Despite such tremendous wealth, however, neither the submarine nor the steam-powered yacht built later by the sailor is capable of effecting his escape. Like Defoe's hero, Frazar's protagonist is led to question the point of the riches he has accumulated. But, like Crusoe, Anderson overcomes this unease, predicting not only his flight but his successful return:

You will escape! You will escape! And with this [pirate's] treasure, added to your stock of pearls and ownership of the island, with its mineral wealth of coal, iron, saltpeter, and sulphur, you will be the richest man in the world. With these industries once developed, your submarine boats multiplied, and pearl oysters procured by thousands, and your island peopled with contented and happy working people, not even the Rothchilds or Barings will be able to compete with you. (pp. 295-6).

The American's assurance is not misplaced and, in a twist on Verne's novel, he is rescued from the island when an air-balloon to which he has secured details of his location and

predicament is discovered in his homeland. The narrative closes with a report from the *New York Herald*, fifteen years after the 'Good Luck's' shipwreck, informing readers that Anderson's 'wonderful story' is set to end happily, with the sailor fulfilling his prediction by returning 'to Perseverance Island, with a colony, there to end his days' (p. 373).

iii. Industrializing Investment

Verne and Frazar updated and accelerated the Crusoe story by writing island adventures that revolved around the construction and operation of industrialized infrastructures. In so doing both authors played with the notion that the pace and power of industrialized modernity would leave the original Crusoe standing. But at the same time they revived the transformative mandate of Defoe's 'modern culture-hero'. And they did so by plotting mechanized journeys that moved their protagonists in the direction of an abundant and profitable Nature, drawing upon the machine in the garden myth in order to give fresh impetus to a foundational narrative of capitalist development. Significantly, therefore, there is a pointed correspondence between the hard-working, happy and prosperous settler communities with which both *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island* conclude and the *Technologist's* contemporaneous confidence in a technologically advanced, agriculturally productive programme of transcontinental American expansion. That Verne literally shifted the action of his novel from an island to Iowa underlines this correspondence. And in so doing it lends weight to the contention that these Robinsonades might be understood to have furnished fictional foundations to the same process of industrialized growth with which the journal was concerned. Taking up such a line of argument, this essay turns to consider Verne's and Frazar's novels with regard to expansionist developments in the American West rather than the Pacific Ocean. As indicated, it does so in order to set out hitherto underexplored cultural connections between adventure narratives such as

these and the movement of migrants and money from Britain to America in the second half of the nineteenth century. While much existing scholarship has followed Watt's suggestion that the economic appeal of the Crusoe story worked to inspire empire-building, the extra-imperial scope of this argument foregrounds that when the Victorians looked to profit from the world America loomed large on their horizon.

P. J. Cain notes that by 1914 the British Empire 'had become a global phenomenon of immense cultural and economic diversity and by far the largest, most populous and most prosperous of the European Imperial domains'. Yet 'despite its impressive dimensions', he cautions, 'Imperial economic ties were never more than part of [a] broader pattern of trade and the associated movements of people and capital'. Although America had been lost to Britain as a colony, Cain points out that it remained central to this expansive network of economic opportunities, providing 'the biggest single outlet for British migrants and capital in the nineteenth century'.¹⁹ Underscoring its crucial role in Britain's global expansion, Eric Richards writes that America 'captured the great majority of British migrants and capital throughout the nineteenth century: the single most important fact about the British diaspora was its orientation to the American Republic'.²⁰

Behind the fact that America thus served to absorb a tremendous amount of British migrants and money lies the question of what drove Victorians to invest human and financial capital there. The orthodox argument among economic historians proposes that it was a rational response by informed actors to increasing opportunities for global migration and financial speculation. Richards points to 'differences in the rates of economic growth between the Old World and the New' that caused 'income differentials in favour of the latter', leaving potential investors with a relatively

¹⁹ 'Economics and Empire: The Metropolitan Context' in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 31-52 (p. 31).

²⁰ Eric Richards, *Britannia's Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland Since 1600* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 119.

straightforward although nonetheless difficult decision to make: 'British citizens certainly knew that they could better themselves by emigration and overseas investment even if they were doing relatively well at home'.²¹ Richards is also keen to foreground the 'sheer spontaneity' of the 'phenomenon of emigration', positioning it at a remove from the realms of politics or culture: 'it happened outside government control and beyond contemporary understanding. It was atomistic. Millions of people departed with astonishingly little framework or ideology'.²² This picture of a progressively interconnected world in which flows of labour and finance are understood as rational responses to reliable information is complicated, however, by the idea that cultural forces influenced economic behaviour.

In a recent study of British-led globalization in the second half of the nineteenth century, Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson note a 'discreet silence' on the subject of Anglo-American connections, and indicate a need to revisit 'Britain's involvement with America, and vice versa, from the perspective of grass-roots society, family histories and various forms of popular culture'.²³ The demand fits with their broader insistence that 'a recognition of culture as the matrix in which economic life occurs' is necessary in order to understand the global scope of Victorian expansion.²⁴ It is an insistence that is echoed by James Belich in his work on Anglophone settlerism, which also draws attention to the significant role played by British migrants and money to the history of nineteenth-century America, especially as regards to expansion in the American West. Of particular concern here is Belich's discussion of the transatlantic promotional activities that generated the international and intercontinental flows of peoples and monies necessary for America's railroad-led programme of westward expansion. These globally influential advertising campaigns figured American expansion

²¹ Richards, p. 184.

²² Richards, p. 149.

²³ Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 19.

²⁴ Magee and Thompson, p. 14.

as a rural but technologically advanced process, distinguished by 'natural abundance, ease of cultivation, and giant vegetables'.²⁵ Belich's point that such promotional activities overcame 'obstacles to settlement, real and imaginary' (p. 333) in the American West feeds into his argument concerning the way in which 'emigration' or 'booster' literature - a vast array of 'books, pamphlets, newspaper and journal articles, lectures and advertisements' - promoted 'a paradise complex' (pp. 153-4) among Anglophone peoples who sought opportunities for themselves or their monies in new lands. Denying that the economics of expansion can be fully explained with recourse to rational response theory, Belich proposes these textual materials helped inspire financial and migrational investors with 'a persistent and consistent "boom mentality", an ideology somewhere between "bounded rationality" and collective hysteria': 'Its central tenets were that history in new lands happened faster than in old, that nature was infinitely exploitable, and that risk-taking in booms was pretty much a sure thing' (p. 200).

The present study draws in general terms upon Magee and Thompson's and Belich's contention that the economics of Victorian expansion were stimulated by more than a flow of facts and figures, alongside their call for more attention to be paid to the cultural dimensions of Anglo-American connections. More particularly, it notes that *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island* rehearsed and promoted the 'new land' logic Belich associates with specialist forms of expansionist literature. If Belich is right to claim that a 'paradise complex' inspired Victorian interest in America, then Verne's and Frazer's American success stories can be positioned as fictional parts of this complex. And in order to pull together the argument that these industrialized Robinsonades thus excited Anglo-American expansion, it is important to set out how this line of analysis

²⁵ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 333. Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

builds upon but also extends and revises existing work on the Crusoe story and the growth of empire.

Typifying the way in which the story's expansionist significance has been interpreted, Edward W. Said makes clear from the outset of *Culture and Imperialism* that Robinson Crusoe's island 'fiefdom' is central to his claim that European literature and art can be read with relation to a 'general European effort to rule distant lands and peoples'.²⁶ Linda Colley adds weight to this assessment, noting that 'Empire-making in this parable – as in much history in fact – involves being a warrior and taking charge', before citing James Joyce's observation that Robinson Crusoe stands as 'the true symbol of British conquest'.²⁷ Considering the sustained literary as well as imperial influence of Defoe's novel, Martin Green writes that 'the adventure tales that formed the light reading of Englishmen' for two hundred years following the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* charged 'England's will with the energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer, and rule'.²⁸ Franco Moretti builds upon this line of analysis when he asks in a recent essay: 'What is adventure doing in the modern world?' His answer proposes that the adventure story serves within Western culture as 'a trope of expansion: capitalism on the offensive, planetary, crossing the oceans'; he elaborates the point by suggesting that 'the reason adventure works so well within this context is that it's so good at imagining war'.²⁹

Scholarship in this vein has done much to foreground a link between metropolitan culture and overseas expansion. But without denying that Britain's empire was crucial to the way in which the Victorians sought to secure economic advantage, its emphasis upon imperial rule and warfare does little to acknowledge Victorian interest in America as a site of economic opportunity; it jars with Belich's insistence that

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. xiii, p. xi.

²⁷ Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 1.

²⁸ Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 3.

²⁹ Franco Moretti, 'The Novel: History and Theory', *New Left Review* 52 (July/August 2008), pp. 111-24 (124).

settlement and 'the creation of new societies' not conquest and 'the control of old ones' (p. 23) played the more significant role in Anglophone expansion; and it seems out of line with his assertion that the Anglophone peoples who drove the 'Settler Revolution' were 'not notable for their military efficiency', and were focused on their 'core business: explosive growth' (p. 554). Significantly, therefore, in *The Robinson Crusoe Story* Green frames adventure literature in terms that accommodate a far greater range of expansionist activities:

Robinson Crusoe is one of the most important genres of that huge literary form, the adventure tale, historically speaking the most important of all our literary forms. For adventure in this sense was the literary reflection (and to some extent the inspiration, intensification, communication) of the expansive imperialist thrust of the white race, the nations of Europe, which started around 1600 and has not ended yet. That imperialism has been more than a matter of overseas colonies and conquests.³⁰

Although he does not engage with specific historical contexts, Green elaborates this final sentence by suggesting this expansive thrust included economic imperatives that stretched beyond formal empire. He goes on to propose the Crusoe story 'as the most edifying and improving kind of adventure, the one that had the most to do with work and the least to do with war'.³¹ Tying this edifying appeal with the way in which Crusoe's industrial endeavours add value to his island, and indicating that its purchase extended far beyond juvenile readerships, Green contends that the Crusoe story served to promote the various kinds of 'risk and movement and expansion' around which modern capitalist societies revolve.³²

This focus upon the edifying materialism as well as the wide-ranging social spread of the Crusoe story suggests an extensive expansionist significance that not only

³⁰ Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, pp. 1-2.

³¹ Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, p. 2.

³² Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, p. 5.

privileged industrial enterprise but also accommodated Victorian interest in America. Where scholarship concerned with the connection between culture and empire has tended to read Robinsonades with relation to colonial conflict and conquests, therefore, Green positions the adventure form in general, and *Robinson Crusoe* in particular, in terms that sit far more comfortably with the way in which Belich as well as Magee and Thompson suggest cultural forces influenced the economics of British expansion. His broad insistence that the Crusoe story energized capitalism's centrifugal momentum thus feeds into this essay's more specific contention that *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island* constitute leading examples of the kind of popular fiction that can be understood to have moved money and migrants from Britain to America in the late nineteenth century. The argument that these distinctly Americanized Robinsonades worked to promote an Anglo-American flow of human and financial capital foregrounds a form of expansionism that was drawn to new lands rather than bound by empire; it notes the transformative programmes plotted by the novels privileged the worth of work over war, and the role of the engineer over and above the warrior; and it draws attention to the fact that as they dramatized these transformations so too the novels furnished adventurous form to the tropes of historical acceleration and natural abundance around which Belich's 'boom mentality' cohered. As a result, it proposes Verne's and Frazer's novels as literary vehicles through which Marx's machine in the garden myth crossed the Atlantic, inspiring Victorian imaginations with gainful visions of agro-industrialization at precisely the time that Victorian subjects were increasingly drawn to the American West as a site in which to sink their labour and finance.

iv. Opening up the global periphery

'What is adventure doing in the modern world?' While Moretti highlighted war in order to elaborate the argument that it serves to promote capitalist expansion, this essay

foregrounds work. More specifically, it has argued that Victorian expansionism was energized by the way in which adventure could open up pre-industrial parts of the world as sites for profitable modernization. Thus the technologically enhanced, historically accelerated way in which Verne's and Frazer's American heroes worked to penetrate nature and industrialize their islands can be linked to the way in which Victorian investors sought to capitalize upon American growth. Whether these investors were seeking to gain by investing their industry or their money in American expansion, this line of argument contends that *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island* tapped into and helped sustain contemporary confidence in the explosive development that modern industrial techniques and technologies were held to engender in primitive yet resource rich environments. The pastorally productive and harmoniously progressive settlements with which both Robinsonades conclude would seem to underscore the profit-oriented appeal of such agro-industrial enterprise over and above martial endeavour. It does not necessarily follow, however, that Anglo-American patterns of migrational and financial investment were inspired by a conviction that American modernization was a universally progressive or pacific process.

While Belich is clear that the Anglophone peoples whose history he charts were not militarily driven, he is equally emphatic that an expansionist programme that witnessed the emergence of '12 million mostly poor people around 1780 to 200 million mostly rich people around 1930' (pp. 554-5) was neither a peaceful nor an inclusive phenomenon: 'Though somewhat unmilitary, [Anglophone settlers] were dangerous people, especially when in full-frothing boom frenzy. [...] They destroyed, crippled, swamped, or marginalized most of the numerous societies they encountered' (p. 558). Indigenous human inhabitants are notably absent from both *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island*. But if in this sense the novels effaced from view the kind of discrimination and violence that accompanied expansion, it is nevertheless historically important to consider how these Robinsonades might be understood to have rendered

such discrimination and violence economically attractive. Having discussed how Verne's and Frazer's novels could accommodate and promote industrialization, therefore, my attention turns now to the idea that the transformative programmes they plotted served hegemonic ends. Set against the commonplace that technologically inspired capitalist progress would grip the world in an homogenizing manner, this line of enquiry is interested rather in the notion that what adventure does in the modern world is to open up global space and time that remains at once primitively yet profitably distinct from metropolitan modernity.

In order to develop this concluding point it is instructive to engage with Timothy Brennan's suggestion that postcolonial critics should 'move beyond the ethical apprehension of othered subjectivity' in order to explore the cultural logic of capitalist expansion.³³ Brennan cites a passage from Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery* which he suggests 'opens up a vast new field of research':

Primitive accumulation ... is not an episode or a moment, not a fateful biting of the apple located in an antediluvian past, but a continuing and relentless process whereby capitalist accumulation battens on pre-capitalist modes of exploitation, greatly extending their scope, until it has exhausted or transformed them. Capital's thirst for surplus-value and the necessarily uneven advance of mechanization has, indeed, repeatedly produced regimes of *extended primitive accumulation*, in which forced or sweated labour is driven to match the pace of machine industry, and expected only to rely on 'natural economy' or communal resources for their reproduction. New World slavery was the first and least-camouflaged expression of this capitalist logic.³⁴

³³ Timothy Brennan, 'The Economic Image-Function of the Periphery', in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. by Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzi, Antoinette Burton and Jed Esty (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 101-22 (p. 113).

³⁴ Brennan, p. 113.

Such regimes of extended primitive accumulation, Brennan contends, give the lie to the pervasive and politically powerful claim that capitalist modernity always and only seeks 'a world uniformly developed or developing'. They demand instead attention is paid to the fact that parts of the world have worked and continue to work as 'metaphorical and actual' spaces that sustain 'the unequal exchanges of globalization'. With regard to this metaphorical significance, Brennan posits that 'the *idea* of the global periphery – not just the periphery's physical spaces where cheap manufacturing and resource extraction flourish – is itself an economic engine'.³⁵

Two episodes from the Robinsonades considered chime with Brennan's argument and help elaborate in more general terms the interrelations of adventure, expansionism and capitalist modernity. As Anderson becomes increasingly ingenious towards the end of *Perseverance Island*, he hits upon the plan of constructing a balloon, again driven by goats, from which to survey his island by air. Having completed 'a more successful ascension than had ever before been made in the world', however, Anderson reflects upon the unsatisfactory nature of the balloon's power source: 'if I could replace my goat-power by some other – such as a caloric engine, or some method of compressed air – I should have a vehicle worthy of the nineteenth century'. The fact that he finds himself unable to construct such 'worthy' mechanisms leads Anderson to accept his island modernity is compromised: 'At the present I felt that the goat power must do me' (p. 360). While it is goats that are here forced to match the pace of machine industry, in *The Mysterious Island* other animals are enlisted. Thus although Harding's settlers look forward to a time when 'the captain has made us a steam cart, or even an engine', they nevertheless thrive in the present by integrating 'beast[s] of burden' into their industrialized order of things (p. 254). Steam power, electricity and nitro-glycerine energize island life, but so too do onagers – a type of ass – and a trained orang-outang. This latter creature, the physiognomic profile of which is compared to 'that of

³⁵ Brennan, pp. 112-13, p. 101.

Australians and Hottentots', is entered into Harding's service on revealing terms: 'the best servants are those who talk the least. And then, no wages, do you hear, my boy? We will give you no wages at first, but we will double them afterwards if we are pleased with you.' (pp. 246-7).

Although the heroes from *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island* work to industrialize their island environments, then, these episodes indicate that this was neither a technologically smooth nor a universally advantageous programme. When Pencroft anticipates the 'fine day' that Harding's island 'is quite put in order and civilized' (p. 90), or when Anderson looks forward to the time when his island is 'peopled with contented and happy working people' (p. 296), their progressive confidence speaks to the appeal of a uniformly developed or developing world. But the productive way in which the protagonists of both novels draw upon animal as well as machine powered industry refute that such development is necessary or perhaps even conducive to their own success. It rather speaks to the fact that above all else these protagonists work to their own advantage. Where Watt suggests that the Crusoe story takes 'its hero to a primitive environment' in order to present labour as varied and inspiring, then, this essay emphasizes that such marginal environments are seen to open up varied and inspiring opportunities for wealth creation, albeit that these opportunities might require that the putative practices, outcomes and values of metropolitan modernity are strategically compromised by those in control. It is in this sense that *The Mysterious Island* and *Perseverance Island* can be understood to peripheralize as well as industrialize the terrains they transform. And it is in this sense that an argument concerning the Robinsonades' economic appeal can foreground the way in which the novels advance the possibility of 'cheap manufacturing and resource extraction', where whatever means necessary – fair or foul – are deployed in order to generate surplus value and turn a profit. Following Moretti's suggestion that adventure works in the modern world as a 'trope of expansion', placing 'capitalism on the offensive', therefore,

the present study proposes that a substantive part of the reason it works so well in this context is that it is good at opening up the idea of the global periphery, a spatio-temporal realm wherein 'regimes of extended primitive accumulation' can be productively sustained, generating tremendous wealth as a result rather than in spite of ongoing uneven development.

Returning to the editorial from the *Technologist* helps clarify the way in which profit-oriented expansionism could take shape around the idea of the global periphery. When the journal suggested the 'savage dominion' of the bison and the Indian was simply 'passing away' as a historical consequence of industrialized expansion it drew upon what Patrick Brantlinger has designated the discourse of the 'self-extinguishing' savage, thereby occluding 'genocidal aspects' of expansion.³⁶ Its pacific accent was undermined, however, as it sought to reassure its Anglophone readers that an 'influx' of foreign, low-grade labour served to enhance rather than threaten their continued prosperity:

whatever view we take of emigration in general, and Chinese labor in particular, it is very obvious that that we might as well attempt to oppose the tides of the ocean as to oppose the human tide that the superior advantages of our country will draw to our shores. Our only hope of escape from being overwhelmed lies in our ability to float upon this tide, instead of being sunk beneath it. The battle between muscle and brain will be waged as fiercely in the battle of labor, as ever was the battle of caste between the feudal aristocracy and their vassals; and it is not difficult to predict the result. He who depends upon mere muscle for success, whether in the field of agriculture or mechanic arts, will go to the wall as surely as the serfs of old went down before their steel-clad lords. (198)

³⁶ Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 2.

Collapsing any neat distinction between work and war, the *Technologist* celebrated the emergence of a racialized regime of production whereby the interests of some were compromised in favour of others. And although neither Verne nor Frazar would rehearse quite the same collapse, the way in which their heroes utilized technological expertise in order to exert control, exploit resources and generate wealth lent an adventurous appeal to the journal's hegemonic fantasy. There is an irony to the fact that in the years following the *Technologist's* dismissal of the Crusoe story from its vision of modern American expansion, two industrialized Robinsonades appeared that can be understood to have promoted Anglo-American investment in the programme of continental 'crystallization' to which the journal had looked forward. The irony is sharpened by the idea that these adventures did so in a manner capable of exciting economic interest in the *Technologist's* expectation that the pace and power of modernity would take hold of the world in an uneven, discriminatory and violent way.