Stony Brook University

Shrouded in the Womb of a Savage, Cradled in the Arms of An Ape: Gothic Scenes of Racial Recapitulation in the Making of the American Übermensch

A Thesis Presented

by

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to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

Stony Brook University

August 2016

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Slavery is often put forward as the crucial horror that haunts the nation, and is touted, as Leslie Fiedler noted, as "the proper subject for American Gothic". This thesis does not dispute a historical location for the American Gothic, but it argues for a different starting place for the self-consciously Gothic impulse in the literature of the nation. It is not the original sin of slavery that underpins the American Gothic, but the original anxiety experienced by an infant nation as it first distances itself from its ancestral country, and then asserts its independence and superiority. It is an anxiety of growing up; an anxiety by the new country seeking to match itself against the thousands of years of history of the parent that it abandons, and realizing that it not only lacks history, but inherits from its civilized parent characteristics that are insufficiently adequate for the new realities the people of the infant nation must confront. Beginning with America's first gothic novel, Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, some authors have attempted to relieve this "haunting influence of anxiety" by creating fictional scenes of racial recapitulation. The descendant of pioneers is placed in a primeval landscape, transformed into a beast, and then made to repeat the evolutionary process, as he becomes, once more, a civilized European-American gentleman who, in Nietzschean terms, supersedes his former self. This thesis begins by examining the suitability of the gothic form for creating textual sites in which templates for the remaking of man can be constructed. After introducing the historical conditions that shaped the cultural anxieties over the physical vitality of the European male, this thesis will conclude by reading *Edgar Huntly* and Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes* as gothic spaces of transformation in which the vitality and robust masculinity of the savage are recalled to the body of the Anglo-Saxon male.

Contents

Introduction

Aligning their scholarship with Teresa A. Goddu's insight that "slavery and its attendant horrors lie at the core of the American Gothic" (189), many scholars have argued for a historicized reading of the Gothic novel in terms of slavery. The institutionalized enslavement of Africans in this country is put forward as the crucial horror that haunts the nation, and touted as "the proper subject for American Gothic" (Fiedler 378). Although I do not dispute a historical location for the genre's inception, nor disagree with the suggestion that shared experiences of horror, oppression, and guilt deriving from the system of plantation slavery have contributed significantly to the genre's development in this country, I argue for a different starting place for the Gothic impulse in the literature of the nation. The American gothic is a self-conscious reaction to experiences that go back to the first encounter between people arriving from Europe and the indigenous peoples of America, the *savages*[1]. It is not the *original sin* of slavery that underpins the American Gothic, but the *original anxiety* experienced by people journeying away from their mother country, arriving at a strange land peopled with unwelcoming inhabitants, then forging an infant nation and asserting their independence and superiority.

The anxiety that sets in motion the long tradition of the American gothic arises from several related sources that precede the systematic importation of African slaves, and troubles both the individual and national psyches. As must be a source of unease with many settler communities, early Anglo-America, in distancing itself from its ancestral countries, must seek to match itself against thousands of years of European civilized history, and at the same time

[1] This thesis will continue the use of "savage" in its historical sense to refer to primitive peoples who practice barbaric customs, such as the American natives in *Edgar Huntly* and the African villagers in *Tarzan,* even though modern sensitivities have recoded the word into a pejorative pointer.

develop a relationship with inhabitants seemingly at an early stage of social, cultural, moral, and technological evolution. Additionally, the new nation is worried that the characteristics inherited from European sensibilities are not adequate for the vigor and vitality required for confronting these new realities. Beginning with America's first gothic novel, Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, some authors have attempted to relieve this haunting sense of unease by constructing fictional scenes of racial recapitulation. The author places the descendant of pioneers in a primeval landscape, transforms him into a beast or beastlike figure, and then makes him repeat the broad stages of man's evolution from beast to savage to, once more, a civilized European-American gentleman. In this respect, Edgar Huntly is very much the progenitor of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan, the descendant of European aristocracy nurtured by apes, who is, perhaps, the boldest experiment in racial recapitulation in all of American literature. Concentrated within Tarzan are many of the theories which contribute to the idea of recapitulation; he is not just a fictional restaging of man's evolutionary past, but an imagined projection of man's evolutionary future, inscribed with the potential for realizing Nietzsche's *Übermensch.*

The theory of recapitulation first arose in the late 18th and early 19th centuries through the writings of several German Romantic anthropologists, such as Henrik Steffens (1773–1845), Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869), and Gustav Klemm (1802–1867). Steffens theorized that both culture and nature conformed to identical laws of development. In nature, each racial group matches a particular stage of life, from childhood to maturity, with the Negroid race still in infancy, and the Mongoloid, a category that included Europeans, at the most developed stage (Finkelstein). Likewise, because culture also recapitulated man's evolutionary progress,

European culture was superior to all others. Steffens' ideas reappear in the works of Carus, whose system of recapitulation separated the peoples of the earth into four groups. Of these four, "the most advanced peoples of Europe recapitulated stages of development characteristic of their more primitive ancestors. Only [Europeans] possessed any real ability to conceive of the higher ideas of 'beauty, love, and truth'; and over time 'their light and power' would 'gradually spread over all inhabited parts of the Earth' (Finkelstein). Klemm reduced Steffens and Carus' theory of race to a polarity: "There are two kinds of peoples—the active, or manly, and the passive, or womanly…The strong…ultimately dominate the weak. By this token, the Europeans will necessarily enliven the entire world, having recapitulated all stages of cultural evolution, from savagery through domestication to freedom" (Finkelstein). Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), the German biologist, later popularized the theory of recapitulation in Charles Darwin's day, joining it to Darwin's own ideas on natural selection and survival of the fittest. His "euphonious phrase, 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny'" (H. M. Morris), sums up the idea of a parallel between the development of a single organism and the evolution of the entire species, such that the embryonic growth of a human fetus in the womb rapidly recapitulates the entire evolutionary history of the species (H. M. Morris). Modern embryology has discounted Haeckel's "biogenetic law" as nonsense, although the theory persists in certain conceptions of racial differentiations and hierarchies.

Gothic Literature as National Self-Reflection

Charles Brockden Brown's Edgar Huntly is certainly a corporeal embodiment of cultural beliefs and ideologies related to notions of racial recapitulation – ideas about marginality, superiority, racial identity, and human transformation[2]. Born in 1771, on the eve of the American Revolution, Brown grew up in Philadelphia, "'the cultural capital of, … and least provincial spot in America…' during the 1770's and 1780's" (Hirsch 75), where he "was exposed to all currents of thoughts, European and American, that were molding a new country and a new people" (Clark 11). Brown was a founding member of the Friendly Club of New York, which "more than any similar group in the early American republic … occupied a crossroads—geographical, professional, and otherwise—of American literary and intellectual culture" ("Republic Of Intellect"). Members of the Friendly Club met on Sunday nights at each other's homes where they conducted uninhibited conversations on subjects as varied as "religious experiences, scientific knowledge, and gender norms" (Waterman 1). David Lee Clark describes Brown as a man of ideas with varied intellectual interests, and claims that "even his novels bear witness to [his] deep concern about the issues facing the new nation" (6). Brown's preface to his romance *Skylark*, discloses his early beliefs in the possibilities of literature to interrogate contemporary concerns and engage in complex dialectics:

> To the story-telling moralist, the United States is a new and untrodden field. He who shall examine objects with his own eyes, who shall employ the European models merely for the improvement of his taste, and adapt his fiction to all that is genuine and peculiar in the scene before him, will be entitled at least to the praise of originality… A contexture of facts capable of suspending the faculties of

[2] The subtitle of Brown's first major novel, *Wieland: or, The Transformation: An American Tale,* indicates the author's attraction to ideas of human transformation.

> every soul in curiosity may be joined with depths of views into human nature and all the subtleties of reasoning. (Brown and Warfel)

Brown soon decided that the European model most suited for distributing his ideas was the Gothic romance, a genre that was then popular with reading publics on both sides of the Atlantic. The Gothic romance taps into the long tradition of using fantasy and imagination to reproduce the anxieties of the present, and to chart and negotiate sites of competing ideologies and viewpoints. At the same time, it is an expression of nostalgia for an unscientific, and often imaginary, past filed with mythic explanations and heroic possibilities. These potentialities of the gothic form will prove crucial for both Brown and Burroughs. Their heroic characters must traverse and survive barbaric circumstances, first with the opening of the American West, and later with the shifting of America's frontiers to foreign parts, either directly through imperialism, or indirectly through political influence, particularly at a time when the model of Anglo-Saxon male masculinity was becoming problematic.

When Brown published *Edgar Huntly* in 1799 he remained true to the observations he made in the preface to *Skylark*, pledging in the foreword of the new book to engage his readers by shunning the "puerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras" (Brown 3) that were prominent ingredients of the European gothic tradition. Instead, he would indigenize, and therefore vitalize the form for an American reading public by privileging the use of American frontier experiences involving Indian hostilities and perilous landscapes as his gothic subjects and settings. The author proposed to substitute the repertoire of terrifying devices characteristic of Gothic fiction – the "vast cataracts, raging storms, lofty towers, dark nights, ghosts and goblins, serpents, madmen; mountains, precipices, dazzling light; low,

tremulous, intermittent sounds, such as moans, sighs, or whispers; immense, gloomy buildings; tyranny, incarceration, torture"(D. B. Morris) - with local terrors palpably familiar to his countrymen. Not surprisingly, however, *Edgar Huntly* is not completely crafted with "means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors" (Brown 3), as the author boldly declared. The Gothic requires obedience to a number of basic tropes, and at its inception the American gothic cannot completely extricate itself from the transatlantic influences of Brown's predecessors: Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and all the others.

First, the American author's promise to shun childish fantasies does not prevent him from using the vocabulary of gothic superstition, even though the vocabulary describes real, rather than imagined figures Informed readers will readily recall the spectral manifestations of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* when Brown writes that Clithero recoils from Edgar "as from a spectre" (31), or when a pioneer woman stares at the hero "as if a spectre had started into view" (196). Edgar writes that even his good friend and teacher, Sarsefield, shrinks from him "as if I were an apparition" (232). The vocabulary of the supernatural imbues the text with a vein of "puerile supernaturalism", similar to the use of vocabulary and setting in Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which seemingly supernatural elements turn out to be either imagined or misidentified. Second, the "western wilderness" where the author stages his gothic adventures is not atypical of gothic landscapes:

> This summit was higher than any of those which were interposed between itself and the river. A large part of this chaos of rocks and precipices was subjected, at one view, to the eye. The fertile lawns and vales which lay beyond this, the winding course of the river, and the slopes which rose on its farther side, were

> parts of this extensive scene. These objects were at any time fitted to inspire rapture. Now my delight was enhanced by the contrast which this lightsome and serene element bore to the glooms from which I had lately emerged. My station, also, was higher, and the limits of my view, consequently, more ample than any which I had hitherto enjoyed. (Brown 97-98)

The landscape and mood which Edgar describes in the letter to his betrothed is uncanny in its likeness to the scene in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* when Lady Blanche "resigned herself to the sweet and gentle emotions, which the hour and the scenery awakened" as she surveys the "the gloomy woods and solitary wildness of the scene" (468). Recall also the Italian countryside that young Emily St. Aubert passes through as she is transported to the Castle Udolpho:

> Though the deep vallies between these mountains were, for the most part, clothed with pines, sometimes an abrupt opening presented a perspective of only barren rocks, with a cataract flashing from their summit among broken cliffs, till its waters, reaching the bottom, foamed along with unceasing fury; and sometimes pastoral scenes exhibited their 'green delights' in the narrow vales, smiling amid surrounding horror. (Radcliffe 268)

The author of *Edgar Huntly* shuns neither the "puerile superstitions" nor the Burkean sublime of the gothic tradition.

Furthermore, Brown's desire to reformulate the gothic recipe is not in itself exceptional: the gothic has always affiliated itself with the place and time of production. In fact, all literary works, as Federic Jameson has argued, are "socially symbolic acts," responding to "the political

unconsciousness" (Jameson). Many readers will identify Ann Radcliffe's archetypal gothic novel as transgressive literature that is rooted in the social, economic, and political realities of 18th-century England, and in which the emotional experiences of desire, terror, and pleasure become reading-experiences of female liberation for the novel's primary audience, its disenfranchised female readers. Emily's overcoming of gothic terrors, while retaining both her chastity and her property, serves as the fantasy destabilization of the 18th-century patriarchal ideology that fixed the values and limits of the female as possessor of property and as property herself. Glennis Byron and David Punter's claim that "the Gothic is frequently considered to be a genre that re-emerges with particular force during times of cultural crisis and which serves to negotiate the anxieties of the age by working through them in a displaced form" (39) not only implies the mutability and adaptability of the genre to reveal concerns that are local and contemporary, but that the genre will frequently enlist terrors relevant to the particular milieu.

It is the adaptability of Gothicism that makes it possible to isolate the American form of the genre from its European counterpart, even though they both draw from a common pool of tropes. Louis S. Gross explains: "European gothic literature has often been dismissed as escapist romantic nonsense, but the Gothic in America, however nonsensical, has never been purely escapist. It has always engaged itself in the national predilection for self-reflection" (qtd. in Edwards xxi). Any conclusion, then, that dismisses *Edgar Huntly* or *Tarzan* as representative of "an escapist form, in which the reader is encouraged to avoid rather than to confront fear and anxiety" (Punter and Byron xix), a description generally applied to the European Gothic, would be blatantly deficient. The chimeras that inhabit the margins of human normality in gothic fiction are re-cast by Brown, and later by Burroughs, not to soothe their readers' anxieties

through fantasy distractions, but to confront those anxieties, and in confronting them, to present the template of a hero who is able to overcome his savage enemies by taking on the attributes of a savage. Recognizing in their community of readers a disquietude over the health of civilized man and the state of his social institutions and codes, the two authors, more than a hundred years apart, construct heroes who, in their strenuous engagement with nature and savage enemies, are inscribed with the possibilities of recovering positions of power for a reading public enervated by the comforts and technologies of civilization. Tarzan and Edgar Huntly, revitalized reconstructions of white manhood popularly understood to lack the passion and robust masculinity of the savage, are vicarious indulgences in male virility. Both authors create heroes who purges themselves of all artificial vestiges and return to the primordial condition governed only by the laws of nature and transcendental truths.

Anxiety over the Paradox of Civilization

At the end of the age of exploration and conquest, Europeans believed that civilization had reached its highest form in their own institutions, and western man represented the

utmost perfection of humanity. Observing that the age which began during the middle of the 18th century was “pre-eminently the era of civilization,” John Stuart Mill remarked that civilized man was on “the road to perfection” (qtd. in Padgen 251). Paradoxically, however, the benefits of civilization cause the loss of individual wisdom, the deterioration of men’s bodies, and the onset of timidities born out of the reliance on reasoning and decorum. Gail Bederman explains:

> According to Victorian doctrine, only civilized white men had the manly strength to restrain their powerful masculine passions. But what if civilized, manly self-restraint was not a source of power, but merely a symptom of nerve-exhaustion and effeminacy? What if civilized advancement led merely to delicacy and weakness? Then the male body becomes not a strong storage battery, highly charged with tightly leashed masculine sexuality, but a decadent wreck, an undercharged battery with a dangerous scarcity of nerve force. The "manly civilized man" takes on the sickly complexion of a masturbatory deviant who has lost his vital nervous energy and become weak and pathetic.
>
> In short, neurasthenia posed a paradox. Only white male bodies had the capacity to be truly civilized. Yet, at the same time, civilization destroyed white male bodies. How could powerful, civilized manhood be saved? If civilized men were too delicate to tolerate civilization, who would lead the race to ever higher stages of evolution? Was civilization itself doomed to decay? Many educated men on both sides of the Atlantic feared this was the case, and intellectuals from Max Nordau to Madison Grant preached the dangers of racial degeneracy and the decline of civilization. (Bederman 88)

In contrast, savages, as Charles Darwin noted, "commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health" (Bergman 234). Civilized man becomes dependent on repositories of knowledge that he does not control, and very often, does not understand. The technological and social attainments of civilization obscure and complicate the human predicament by diverting attention away from the fundamental connections between man and nature, and by mediating the relationships between humans, and even the relationship between man and himself, through layers of socially constructed norms, taboos, expectations, and so on. In other words, to be civilized is to adopt various performative stances, participating in the symbolic gestures, rituals, tools, and structuralizations associated with civilized behavior. What is normalcy in civilization is in fact equivalent to theatrical artificiality.

In Ray Bradbury's science fiction collection, *The Illustrated Man*, Hitchcock, an astronaut who flies through space a billion miles from the Earth, illuminates the absurdist mood that has characterized the relationship between man and technological revelation when he reflects: "Those aren't real…The stars. Who's ever touched one? I can see them, sure, but what's the use of seeing a thing that's a million or a billion miles away? Anything that far off isn't worth bothering with" (Bradbury 139). Ray Bradbury, one of the grandmasters of science fiction, the genre that is most associated with scientific innovation, know that for many humans cosseted by technology the universe in no less mysterious or utilitarian than it is for those guided by divine revelation. Following the slow but inexorable desacralization of the universe, a process that began with Copernicus and climaxed with Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God, man is inundated with information that he neither needs nor values. Furthermore, the scientific theories that undergird the high point of civilization are codified and understood by small

knowledge communities formed from “the new human scientist, new enlightened man of learning [who is] the intellectual master of all he survey[s]” (Padgen 151). The uninitiated majority remain alienated from the sources of knowledge, and is dependent on others for their own survival. Both Brown and Burroughs recognize in this alienated majority who have been unsecured from their metaphysical and transcendental anchors a yearning to reestablish a supreme right of lordship and mastery of all creation, a sentiment that Voltaire humorously described as “a nostalgia for the Neolithic” (qtd. in Padgen 250). A mood of discomfort with the stultifying habits of civilization, especially civilization’s preference for reason over intuition and the way in which the written word is used to codify and perpetuate that preference, lies at the heart of both *Edgar Huntly* and *Tarzan*. Edgar describes this very concern at the beginning of the novel when he writes, “In proportion as I gain power over words, shall I lose dominion over sentiments” (Brown 6). The power over words and mastery of language represents the attainment of reason and the (re)discovery of civilization by the savage. When Edgar suspends his writing he initiates his return into the savage form of our earliest human ancestors; conversely, the rediscovery of his lost papers coincides - not surprisingly - with his return to civilized manners. Likewise, Tarzan’s discovery of writing activates his journey from ape to human. The attainment of civilization is presented as a Faustian bargain: scientific glory involves reason and documentation at the expense of sentiments, passion, and intuition.

Readers of both *Edgar Huntly* and *Tarzan* are implicitly invited to evaluate the Faustian bargain: will they sympathize with Socrates’ superman, whose “passion and will has been carefully disciplined by and subordinated to reason” (Buck 974) , or with Nietzsche’s superman, whose “will and passion [are] stirred into action by worthy ends” (975)? The animal drives of

the Nietzschean superman, which has been put to sleep by ordered society (Nietzsche *The Gay Science* 93), reawakens in Edgar when he sleepwalks. It is not reason but "involuntary impulse" (Brown 161) that stirs him into the worthy deed of rescuing a young girl from the Indians. Brown puts the Enlightenment ideals of reason, sympathy, and community on trial when he causes the young man, recently returned from his savage sojourn in the wilderness, to divulge Euphemia Lorimer's location to Clithero, an act of naïve sympathy unbecoming for a Nietzschean superhero who just recently showed no mercy to an Indian he encounters on the roadway. Clithero immediately rushes off to attack his foster mother once again, and although he is unsuccessful, the fright he causes results in the loss of her unborn child. The Nietzschean superman rescues a child, but in contrast the Socratic hero causes one to die. Burroughs also offers his readers two types of men: Tarzan, the *savage* aristocrat who instinctively sets off in pursuit of Jane and her abductor, and his cousin, the civilized aristocrat who does nothing to rescue the woman he loves. The Socratic superman allows reason to get in the way of instinctual altruism. Readers who see in the rational Edgar Huntly or the impotent Lord Greystroke mirror images of their culture's decadence will consign these figures to the frightful place set aside for the gothic villain. Read from this perspective, it is not Burroughs' black cannibals or Great Apes, or Brown's Indians, or even the "beasts" that both protagonists become, who are the monsters in these novels. The monstrous "others" that both authors construct are, in fact, the civilized European-American gentlemen, who must be displaced or, in the vocabulary of Julia Kristeva, *abjected* to make room for a superior version of mankind if the culture is to retrieve its healthy self.

It is well to note that Kristeva's conception of abjection implicates elements that are abject, that is, disgusting and horrifying, because of socio-cultural definitions:

> … abjection is coextensive with social and symbolic order, on the individual as well as on the collective level. By virtue of this, abjection, just like prohibition of incest, is a universal phenomenon; one encounters it as soon as the symbolic and/or social dimension of man is constituted, and this throughout the course of civilization. But abjection assumes specific shapes and different codings according to the various "symbolic systems." (Kristeva 68)

Kristeva integrates man's social dimension within civilization with the origin and persistence of those elements that exist at the borders that separate the human self from the outside world. Following Kristeva's lead, I reason that the source of discomfort that bothers civilized man is cohesive with the socio-cultural aspects of civilization, and like the physical abjections that she describes, such as the nausea associated with repulsion towards cream that forms on the surface of milk, the source of discomfort can never be completely expelled. Kristeva explains, "I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself…and yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master… abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture" (11-12). In abjection, then, we have a combination of forces that are in a continuous struggle, analogous to the struggle between the rational and the instinctual, each trying to relegate the other to a recessive space. With this understanding, we begin to appreciate why neither Brown nor Burroughs can create fictional heroes who disavow their racial inheritances, and that is never their intentions. Creation of a racial hero means a displacement, but not the elimination of

civilized attitudes to make room for those primal instincts that were themselves banished by the social system of identity. The possibility of accessing primal characteristics is a contingency upon which the two projects rests. Charles Darwin himself insisted that the civilizing process has not completely washed away man's primal instincts:

> We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system — with all these exalted powers — Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin. (Darwin, qtd in Roberts 258)

At the heart of America's national mythology there exists the natural man, represented at various times and in various genres as Johnny Appleseed, or Edgar Huntly, or the young Hiawatha, or Huck Finn, or Tarzan, and all the others, in whom is constituted the vigor and vitality of the savage in combination with the best virtues of his racial lineage. In the novels of Charles Brockden Brown and Edgar Rice Burroughs the gothic provides the terrain where man, both the individual and the collective, can recover his natural healthy self.

Going Primitive: Mab's Oven as a Metaphor for Racial Transformation

The health of America's national culture is most certainly of prominent importance to Brown. Inaugurating the novel by describing himself as a "moral painter," he foregrounds his intention to make his fiction a critique of the nation's post-revolutionary situation by admitting that the experiences he narrates emerges "out of the condition of our country, and connected with one of the most common and most wonderful diseases or affections of the human frame" (Brown 3). The "condition of our country," one must assume from a close textual reading, relates to the enlightenment ideals, inherited from Europe, and implanted in the Constitution of the United States, written just a decade before *Edgar Huntly*. The references to constitutions that abound in the book bid the reader to focus his or her attention towards this most crucial post-revolutionary moment. A discussion of this theme might begin by recalling the Irishman, Clithero, the newly arrived immigrant from Europe, who admits to Edgar that his "youth and intellectual constitution made me peculiarly susceptible to female charms"(47). We soon become aware that Clithero's "intellectual constitution" makes him not only vulnerable to the opposite sex, but predisposes him to excessive reasoning. Clithero starts out by aligning himself with the traditional gothic hero; his backstory closely resembles a typical European gothic tale, and he, in fact, kills the only character in Brown's novel who resembles the traditional gothic villain, Euphemia's brother, Wiatte. Wracked with anxiety about the potential consequences of his action, Clithero's "fancy began to be infected with the errors of [his] understanding", and he resolves to murder his benefactor as well. By making the "enlightened and erect" (116) Clithero reason his way from gothic hero to gothic villain, Brown presents an exemplum of the damaging influence of Enlightenment empiricism and the potential for self-destruction concealed within the rational being.

The European's vulnerable constitution eventually pushes him to the brink of destruction. When Edgar sees him in the cave his "rueful, ghastly, and immovable eyes testified not only that his mind was ravaged by despair, but that he was pinched with famine" (Brown 100). Recall the moments just after Clithero first enters the cave: "an animal leaped forth, of what kind [Edgar] was unable to discover" (20). Some critics have read this moment as "a strange change of identity between man and animal" (Slotkin 384), and such a reading is not inconsistent with the text. The cavern houses two animals and two humans. One animal departs when Clithero enters; the other animal is eaten by Huntly. Symbolically, the animal aspect of Clithero departs from him, and on the other hand, Huntly gains the spirit of the eaten animal. Interestingly, when Edgar sees the emaciated and forlorn Irishman he yells, "Man! Clithero" (Brown 100), a greeting that is remarkable in its appositive construction. It is not entirely clear why Huntly calls out to the figure using both the signifier for his species, "Man", as well as his given name. Brown bothers us with two considerations. The transformed figure is perhaps no longer a man (i.e. a *white* man; Indians, in the context of the novel, are not classified as men), and addressing him with the singular of the collective noun is Edgar's search for reassurance. Alternatively, Brown invites the reader to question Edgar's own racial or biological classification. The figure of Clithero challenges Edgar's own alignment with humanity: if Clithero is emphatically a *man*, and not a fellow man, Edgar addresses him as one species addressing another. Edgar is at this point no longer a man; he is indeed a beast.

The underground cavern where Clithero is separated from his animal spirits in the form of the departing panther becomes the womb within which Edgar begins the recapitulation from human to beast to savage to, once again, a human. In killing and eating the animal, Edgar

symbolically becomes a member of that animal's species. In fact, he admits that the same compulsion that makes "the mother…feed upon the flesh of her young" (160) urged him to gorge on the blood and flesh of the beast. His retroactive leap from man to beast now complete, he emerges from the cavern to begin the evolutionary journey from beast back to his civilized self, a journey that takes him across a primal landscape in which "No marks of habitation, or culture, no traces of the footsteps of men, were discernible" (174). His recollection, "Since the birth of this continent, I was probably the first who had deviated thus remotely from the customary paths of men" (98), is not just the reflections of a New World explorer. The protagonist enters a world before culture, at the cusp of an evolutionary journey from the primitive to the civilized, and finds himself in a region of wilderness, itinerancy, instincts, and passion, the world of Deb, the old Indian woman.

Suitably nicknamed "Queen Mab" by the protagonist, Brown recasts Shakespeare's "fairies' midwife," the bringer of dreams (Shakespeare I.IV.57-58), as the old Indian woman. Old Deb never actually appears in the novel, but it is she who initiates all the drama when she invites and counsels members of her Lenni Lenape tribe to attack the white community, an act that results in Waldegrave's murder, and triggers Edgar's walking sleep. Matthew Sivils sums up Old Deb's significance when he writes, ''Brown did not create this character to be ignored'' (Sivils 303). The protagonist's experience of racial recapitulation occurs in this dreamlike state, and we may well recall Freud's notion that dreams are the secret fulfillment of repressed desires. Evidence for Edgar's *nostalgie de la boue* precedes his noctambulism, as is evident from his frequent solitary wanderings in the wilderness and from the tomahawk he fashions, but it is in his dream-like trance that he fully achieves his perverse wishes. For Edgar to overcome Mab's

savages he must shed his rational self and re-enter the primitive stage of man's evolutionary progression; and it is in the world of dreams and imagination, our psychologists and philosophers tell us, that lawless monsters are allowed to roam abroad uninhibited:

> Beasts…bestir themselves in dreams, when the gentler part of the soul slumbers, and *the control of Reason is withdrawn*. Then the wild Beast in us…becomes rampant and shakes off sleep to go in quest of what will gratify its own instincts. (Plato 9. 571c, my italics)

Entering Queen Mab's dream domain, however, is not enough to remake Edgar into the type of superman that Nietzsche later describes as "blond beasts of prey" (Nietzsche "On the Genealogy of Morality" 58). Brown inscribes in the form of Edgar Huntly the type of Nietzschean barbaric morality that is crucial for the preservation and progress of civilization as it comes under threat of decay and decadence. Retroactively applying Frederich Nietzsche's ideas to the motives of Charles Brockden Brown is not as incongruous as it first appears. Correlative concerns about the health of civilized man links the 17th century American author with the 18th century Prussian-born (then Swiss, and later stateless) philosopher, and the latter develops his architecture of morality and heroism in response to anxieties over the enervating influence of civilized manners. Decrying the state of contemporary European man and his institutions, Nietzsche complained that the prevalence of reason and Christianity over the fate of Europe had bred a "shrunken, almost ridiculous species, a herd animal, something well-meaning, sickly and mediocre … the European of today" (Nietzsche 57). The philosopher urges men to "recreate [themselves] into fathers and forefathers of the overman" (Nietzsche, Del Caro and Pippin 67), striving against history "not to bear their race to the grave, but to found a

new generation of this race" (qtd. in Altman 131). In Edgar Huntly, Brown embodies the type of hero that Nietzsche anticipates. Having replaced God with himself, the Nietzschean superman is "the meaning of the earth," (Nietzsche, Del Caro and Pippin 6), a self-assertive hero who has no "extra-terrestrial hopes" (6), and is therefore not bound to society's ideas of good and evil. He lives according to the laws of nature. The American wilderness hero who must confront and overcome hostilities seemingly appearing out of humankind's primitive past must operate outside of conventional morality. Edgar Huntly's is a hero primarily because he becomes a murderer, albeit of marauding Indians. The process of racial recapitulation will see Edgar forsake the weak constitution of his rational self (and the nation's constitution as well) - the type of weakness Nietzsche later deprecated - and become the surrogate child of Old Deb, the possessor of a "constitution that seemed to defy the ravages of time and the influence of the elements" (Brown 200).

Old Deb is represented as the mother of man at the beginning of evolution, and although she is invisible in the novel, her oven becomes the womb in which Edgar is remade into a savage. Edgar himself confesses to a unique bond between himself and the old woman when he reveals, "she seemed to contract an affection for me, and regarded me with more complacency and condescension than any other received" (Brown 200). The Indian woman occupies a privileged place in the spatial and temporal environment through which the protagonist traverses: she makes her home at the edge of white civilization, which existed "merely by her connivance and permission" (199), but is visited annually by members of her Lenni Lenape tribe, who seemingly appear from, and disappear into nothingness. Her dogs, who also straddle two species, mirror her location between two worlds:

> Her only companions were three dogs, of the Indian or wolf species. These animals differed in nothing from their kinsmen of the forest but in their attachment and obedience to their mistress. She governed them with absolute sway. They were her servants and protectors, and attended her person or guarded her threshold, agreeably to her directions…To the rest of mankind they were aliens or enemies. (Brown 198)

The fact that Old Deb talks incessantly to these animals who are neither dogs nor wolves situates her at the liminal moment just prior to human culture, when man begins his mastery of nature, farming the land and taming animals for burden and protection. But Queen Mab symbolizes occurrences and probabilities that go even further backward in time. She is Mother Nature in the flesh, reigning over a place swarming with lush fertility where perverse taxonomic changes can occur: man eats the flesh of a panther and thinks himself an animal eating its own offspring; wolves become dogs who, like humans, have *kinsmen*; and civilized man recapitulates his primitive heritage. It is in this terrain that Edgar enters when he goes down into the cavern. The underground cavern, of course, symbolizes the womb of Mother Nature, which is a site of perverse taxonomic transformations. When Edgar emerges from this womb, he is inscribed with the spirit of the panther that he eats.

Edgar begins the second part of his evolutionary journey when he seeks refuge in Queen Mab's cottage. Hiding out in the empty house, the "desperate impulse of passion" resulting from an attack by the rescued girl's former kidnappers compels Edgar to shroud himself within the cavity of Mab's oven. The popular euphemism for pregnancy, "a bun in the oven," is not an inappropriate analogy for Edgar's situation. Hidden within the cavity of this metaphorical

womb, he broods, “How strange is the destiny that governs mankind!” (Brown 181), reflecting not only on his own transformation, but also on the fate of humankind as a whole, and the fragility and elasticity of racial and taxonomic boundaries. When the protagonist emerges from the oven, his ash-covered body and scarred face resemble the visage of his Indian enemies, and on fainting across the dead body of an Indian, he is “steeped in that gore which had overflowed” (Brown 189) from the savage, a transfusion of bodily fluids that completes his remaking. Edgar goes into Queen Mab’s oven a half-man/half-panther, and he emerges as a human primitive. After regaining consciousness, he is the inheritor of a “perverse nature” who reasons with the barbaric morality of the Nietzschean superman, whose values are informed by the contingencies of nature, and not by society’s conventions. Edgar, now a savage on the road to civilization, decides on one final barbaric act: he kills a random Indian who creeps along the roadway, simply because “fate has reserved [the Indian] for a bloody and violent death” (192). During his sojourn in the wilderness, Edgar’s will to power sees him overcome himself, the self that is inscribed with Enlightenment rationality. His rational goodness, which started him off in pursuit of Waldengrave’s alleged murderer, gives way to values sanctioned only by the laws of nature.

Finally, after Edgar is “satiated and gorged with slaughter” (Brown 190), he sets out on the journey back to his white community. He is the artistic figure for the savage on the path to civilization, but he begins to experience an uncanny familiarity with aspects of the journey, eventually recognizing markers of known and familiar homely comfort. First, he comes upon a house “painted white” which is “the model of cleanliness and comfort,” where he hopes to “claim consanguity with such beings” as live within. In the end, when he recovers his writings at

Sarsefield's home the recapitulation that takes him from man to beast to savage to the European-American gentleman is complete.

At the conclusion of Brown's American adaptation of the gothic, the protagonist rouses from his long, adventurous sleepwalk only to revert to the Enlightenment man of reason, no superior to the person who appeared at the beginning of the novel. The Nietzschean superman requires a commitment to the laws of nature; he must replace within his being the rational self who is suborned by artificial morality, but in the end, Edgar Huntly resembles Nietzsche's impotent last man, rather than the First Man of the new race that the philosopher sought. He becomes a savage in response to stressful circumstances, and then when the crisis is over he becomes a normal civilized man who is guided by Enlightenment ideals, such as rationality, fraternity, and sympathy. In Edgar's sympathetic decision to send the murderous Clithero Edny to Mrs. Sarsefield, the author again shows the deleterious rewards of excessive reasoning and sympathy. Because of Edgar's sympathy, Mr. Sarsefield loses his unborn child, and Edgar himself is deprived of community when Sarsefield rejects him. When the novel ends, Edgar, who is without the means to marry Waldengrave's sister, is neither the Nietzschean superman, nor one of the "fathers and forefathers of the overman" (Nietzsche, Del Caro and Pippin 67), an honor he also deprives Sarsefield.

The Last Man and the First Man: Tarzan's Fulfillment of the Nietzschean Overman

The racial recapitulation project that Brown experimented with will find its perfect description in Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes.* Tarzan, as we shall see, is Edgar Huntly's superior literary descendant. Burroughs writes at a time when the conquest of America by European settlers is complete, both the American wilderness and the native populations have been conquered. With the expansion of American interests overseas, however, America's frontiers have expanded beyond the continent's borders, and the elements of racial identity, racial mastery, civilization, savagery, morality, and imperial expansion that applied to the European settlers and their relationship with the native population are reoriented to new populations and new territories. The anxieties that conceived Edgar Huntly still operates on the American consciousness, and when Burroughs sends, as Aaron Bady argues, "his white-skinned Übermensch soaring above Africa" (Bady), he is responding to both "a broad fear of civilization's emasculating effect on white men, and … the fantasy of white omnipotence that industrial and technological modernity allowed white men to play out in colonial spaces like Africa" (Bady). Interestingly, when Burroughs places the Claytons on a remote African coast he reenacts not just the crucial scene of man's primitive beginning - Alice Clayton resolves to be the "brave primeval woman, a fit mate for the primeval man"(Burroughs 32) - but he also recreates one of the earliest encounters between Europeans and Native Americans.

In his *History of Plimoth Plantation*, Governor William Bradford, recalls a long night spent on a Massachusetts beach perforated by the "hideous and great cry [sounding like] a company of wolves or such like wild beasts"(Bradford 69). For protection from these unknown creatures, the party of Englishmen barricade themselves "with logs, stakes and thick pine boughs…from any sudden assaults of the savages, if they should surround them." On the

following morning they are confronted by another "great and strange cry, which they knew to be the same voices they heard in the night," and then are set upon by a troop of Indians (69). The governor names this place of initial contact the "First Encounter," and it is here, in Governor Bradford's historical account, that we find the starting place of the gothic horror in American fiction. The governor's confusion over the nature of the nighttime cries, unsure whether they are from man or beast, presages the literal superimposition and blending of identities "as beasts and men interchange shapes and qualities" (Slotkin 385) in the gothic fiction of the nation, and especially so for the Clayton's progeny, Tarzan. It is not known whether Burroughs ever read Governor Bradford's account of the First Encounter, but barricaded in their rough shelter, the Claytons spend their first night in circumstances eerily similar to America's first Europeans:

> During the long hours of darkness [the Claytons] caught but fitful snatches of sleep, for the night noises of a great jungle teeming with myriad animal life kept their overwrought nerves on edge, so that a hundred times they were startled to wakefulness by piercing screams, or the stealthy moving of great bodies beneath them. (35)

The "great man-like figures" that the marooned couple glimpses every now turn out to be apes, and their tranquil existence ends when one of the creatures attacks Alice Clayton. Although she survives, she never fully recovers from the trauma, and dies on her son's first birthday. Eventually, when an ape kills John Clayton, the female ape Kala takes the orphaned infant away with her, leaving her own dead baby in the human baby's cradle. The human child is given the name Tarzan and he is raised among apes, where, believing Kala to be his natural

mother, Tarzan bestows upon her “all the reverence and respect and love that a normal English boy feels for his own mother” (Burroughs 100). Unlike Edgar Huntly, who begins life as a civilized man and becomes, in turn, an animal, a savage, and a civilized man again, Tarzan begins life at the very beginning of man’s evolutionary journey. Although Tarzan develops exceptional physical strength, he is not as strong as his ape companions are. He compensates this shortcoming through human agility and intellect. The human propensity for inventing tools is particularly advantageous, and he uses a noose constructed from jungle vines to avenge the humiliations he suffers from his ape stepfather, capture jungle animals, avenge Kala’s death, and terrorize villagers in order to steal their weapons. In due course, he uses a hunting knife found in the Clayton’s cabin to kill Kerchak and install himself as lord of the apes. Though Tarzan does not know it, his killing of Kerchak also avenges his own father’s death.

Under circumstances similar to those that marooned Lord and Lady Greystroke on the African coast, a shipboard mutiny strands Tarzan's cousin, William Clayton, and a few companions on the same beach where the Greystroke cabin is situated. By this time, William Clayton has become the new Lord Greystroke, inheriting the manorial privileges that rightfully belong to Tarzan. An ape, Tarzan’s stepbrother Terkoz, abducts Jane Porter, one of Clayton’s American companions, but Tarzan, who has fallen in love with her, rescues her. Eventually Jane and her party return to America. Over time, Tarzan learns to speak English and French, and learns civilized manners, mostly through the efforts of the Frenchman d'Arnot, whom he rescues from the cannibal Mbongans. Tarzan journeys with d'Arnot to Paris, and then finds his way to the United States hoping to marry Jane Porter, but learns that she is engaged to his cousin, William. As the book ends, Tarzan also learns that he is the rightful heir to the

Greystone lordship, but he turns his back on the title and estate, which he could have used to secure an alliance with Jane, when he declares, “My mother was an Ape, and of course she couldn’t tell me much about it. I never knew who my father was” (280).

Tarzan’s decision to hide his human heritage and return to his jungle home has fueled much debate over its ideological implications. Jerome Griswold points out that although Tarzan tells a lie, it is a lie that is the “ur-truth-at-the-bottom that Burroughs has been seeking,” in the sense that Darwinists would agree with Tarzan’s claim that an ape was his mother; after all, evolutionary theory insists that humans are descended from apes (Griswold 139). Griswold also argues that Freud would have agreed with Tarzan, as Freudian theory suggests that the being who suckles a child is the child’s mother, regardless of their biological connections (139). Burroughs decision to avoid the traditional “happily ever after” ending of the fantasy tale might have resulted from quotidian considerations. A conclusion where Tarzan marries Jane and becomes a country squire in England would have made the other twenty-three Tarzan sequels extremely difficult, if not impossible. Such an interpretation is merely speculative, as we do not know whether Burroughs intended to write additional Tarzan novels when he concluded the first one. Some critics have viewed Tarzan’s insistence on his ape ancestry as a rejection of the findings of the fingerprint analysis, and, therefore, a rejection of science and technology. (Nichols) This interpretation becomes problematic when we look towards the amount of “new” science, particularly Darwinism and Eugenics, on which many of the novel’s situations are grounded. What the text clearly supports is a portmanteau of ideologies, which includes ideas about racial recapitulation. Two of these ideologies, Jeffersonian aristocracy and Darwinism, both share a common emphasis on natural rather than artificial motivators as the basis for

success, whether personal, social, or evolutionary. In fact, Robert Faggen argues that the Jeffersonian ideal of virtue was “appropriated … by Darwin, [when] in *On the Origin of Species* [he] proclaim[ed] the power of natural versus artificial selection to choose the Fittest”(Faggen 143). Burroughs makes Tarzan an English lord only so he can reject the artificiality of wealth, privileges, and hereditary rank that such a title confers for one based solely on natural talent and virtues.

Thomas Jefferson laid out what he referred to as natural and artificial aristocracy when he wrote to James Madison, "There is also an artificial aristocracy, founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents. . . . The natural aristocracy I consider the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society" (Mosier 146). Jefferson’s idea of the natural aristocrat pervaded early social and political philosophy about the formation of the American nation. The evidence is everywhere in *Tarzan of the Apes* that Burroughs subscribed to these Jeffersonian ideals. Burroughs had been exposed to these concepts from an early age: two of his favorite childhood books, *The Prince and the Pauper* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, share with *Tarzan of the Apes* “a concern with the perennial American theme of natural nobility” (Griswold 142). In each of these three books, a child of aristocrats is separated from his hereditary privileges, but is able to stay alive and thrive, among the apes in Tarzan’s case, and among the *sans-culottes* for the prince and Fauntleroy, eventually gaining a high social rank through “natural nobility” (142). In Burroughs’s adaptation of Jefferson’s natural aristocracy the hero’s “aristocratic birth, the natural outcropping of many generations of fine breeding, an hereditary instinct of graciousness which a lifetime of uncouth and savage training and environment could not eradicate”(Burroughs 229) is able to overcome the loss of wealth,

rank, and privilege. In other words, there is a natural aristocracy among men, but the talent and virtues, which form the basis of that aristocracy, can be inherited through biological and evolutionary processes.

Tarzan's inherited virtues begin to communicate with him immediately after he kills Kulonga, the Mbongan who killed Kala, Tarzan's ape mother. His pursuit of Kulonga is provoked by primal drives, love of the mother, and the desire for revenge. After he kills the black villager, another basic instinct, hunger, overcomes the ape-man, and he briefly contemplates eating his victim. The savage in him considers that the man is simply "another of the countless wild things of the jungle who preyed upon one another to satisfy the cravings of hunger" (106). However, "a qualm of nausea overwhelmed him. All he knew was that he could not eat the flesh of this black man, and thus hereditary instinct, ages old, usurped the functions of his untaught mind and saved him from transgressing a worldwide law of whose very existence he was ignorant" (106). Up to the point that Tarzan rescues Jane from Terkoz he is motivated purely by the primal instincts of lust. Like his ape stepfather, he also plans to rape the young woman, and when he motions her into the bower, she instinctively understands his intentions and shrinks from him in fear. At this point, however, the chivalry and nobility that are embedded in his DNA begin to dominate his savage upbringing:

> Now, in every fiber of his being, heredity spoke louder than training. He had not in one swift transition become a polished gentleman from a savage ape-man, but at last the instincts of the former predominated, and over all was the desire to please the woman he loved, and to appear well in her eyes.

> So Tarzan of the Apes did the only thing he knew to assure Jane of her safety. He removed his hunting knife from its sheath and handed it to her hilt first, again motioning her into the bower. (230)

Claiming that Freudian theory teaches that "the cornerstone of civilization is the repression of aggressive instincts," Griswold reads Tarzan's gesture in giving the knife that he used to slay Terkoz to Jane as "the beginning of his own process of becoming civilized" (Griswold 140). In giving Jane the knife, Tarzan gestures his desire to participate within the constraints of civilized morality, curbing the egotistical desire for instant gratification in exchange for long-term fulfilment. The knife that killed the young woman's abductor and potential rapist is given to her as reassurance of her own safety – she could kill the ape-man if he tries to rape her during the night, but it is also symbolic of the male phallus. Tarzan, in effect, unsheathes his phallus and hands it over to Jane, removing any potential for rape.

The process of becoming civilized does not only revolve around inherited talent and virtues, however; it also involves hard work by its subjects. Implicit in Jefferson's rejection of the artificial aristocracy that rewards its members according to inherited rank is the belief that one should be compensated for one's efforts. Closely related to Jefferson's natural aristocracy is the ideology of a meritocracy, one of the most deeply embedded elements of American culture. Tarzan's rise from human orphan to Lord of the Apes coincides with the belief that one's success should connect directly to one's individual merit, commonly regarded as the amalgamation one's innate abilities, hard work, positive attitude, and personal integrity. Notwithstanding his English ancestry and the relocation of the frontier to Africa, Tarzan is in essence an American pioneer hero who passes across various racial, linguistic, cultural, and

geographic boundaries to achieve a version of the American dream, rising from low-level ape to lord of the jungle and from savage beast to a civilized European gentleman through individual merit. Burroughs' endorsement of one's own efforts as the basis for success begins from the inception of the novel when Lord Greystroke and his pregnant wife, Alice, are stranded on the shores of a remote African island. Stripped of their hereditary privileges, they must rely on their own efforts if they are to survive:

> "Oh, John," [Alice] cried at last, "the horror of it. What are we to do? What are we to do?"
>
> "There is but one thing to do, Alice," and he spoke as quietly as though they were sitting in their snug living room at home, "and that is work. Work must be our salvation. We must not give ourselves time to think, for in that direction lies madness. We must work and wait." (Burroughs 18)

Tarzan himself achieves success as an ape by "painstaking and continued practice," as when he learns the art of roping, and uses it in combination with his "intelligence and cunning" to torment Tublat, his stepfather, endearing himself to other apes in the process (45). The apeman's ultimate success as an ape comes when, "with only his hunting knife and his superior intellect to offset the ferocious strength of his enemy," he kills Kerchak and assumes kingship of the Apes (125).

Tarzan's character and his propensity to engage in decisive action to achieve his goals also suggests Burroughs's endorsement of the "strenuous life" philosophy which President Theodore Roosevelt expounded in his speech before the Hamilton Club in Chicago on April 10, 1899. At the turn of the century, the bourgeois culture that dominated America and Western

Europe led to a period characterized by Nietzsche as “weightless” (qtd. in Lears 32). Cultural historian T.J. Jackson Lears explains:

> For many, individual identities began to seem fragmented, diffuse, perhaps even unreal. A weightless culture of material comfort and spiritual blandness was breeding weightless persons who longed for intense experience to give some definition, some distinct outline and substance to their vaporous lives.
>
> This sense of unreality has become part of the hidden agenda of modernization. Throughout the twentieth century, a recoil from the artificial, overcivilized qualities of modern existence has sparked a wide variety of quests for more intense experience…Antimodern impulses, too, were rooted in longings to recapture an elusive "real life" in a culture evaporating into unreality. (Lears 32)

President Roosevelt responded to this “weightlessness” by preaching “the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife” (Theodore Roosevelt, qtd in Halstead 160). The man or woman who embraced the strenuous life, the president assured, will “attain [the] highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph” (160). Works such as *Tarzan* provided readers with an imagined alternative to their “vaporous lives.” Burroughs constructs an allegorical figure at the most embryonic moment and location of human origins and permits him to realize the highest level of achievement through passion and strenuous action. John Taliaferro argues that in his embodiment of Roosevelt’s philosophy Tarzan represents “a latter day Leatherstocking whose exuberant physicality and solid pedigree provided a welcome

antidote to the mongrel modern age" (Taliaferro 15). The mongrelization that Taliaferro is talking about is the influx of Mediterranean and Eastern European immigrants into the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. These newcomers were "deemed too uncouth, too thick-wristed to enrich the commonweal" (15). Burroughs himself took immense pride in his solid Anglo-Saxon pedigree, and he believed that good "stock" was a necessary prerequisite for a respectable character; he himself could trace his ancestry to the early Massachusetts pilgrims (19, 26). Recall Charles Brockden Brown's character portrait of the weak and homicidal Clithero: Taliaferro describes the same undesirable hereditary profile in his assessment of newcomers from western and southern Europe.

The creator of Tarzan possessed a copy of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, and he harbored a "life-long fascination with evolution, an interest he shared with millions of his contemporaries" (Taliaferro 14, 92). Burroughs himself confesses that when he wrote *Tarzan of the Apes* he

> was mainly interested in playing with the idea of a contest between heredity and environment. For this purpose I selected an infant child of a race strongly marked by hereditary characteristics of the finer and nobler sort; and at an age at which he could not have been influenced by association with creatures of his own kind. I threw him into an environment as diametrically opposite that to which he had been born as I might well conceive. (14)

In his literary construction of Africa, Gail Bederman points out, Burroughs creates "a place of origins, frozen at the moment the earliest human beings appeared on earth…The apes signify the primal origins of the civilizing process, the original archetypal savages" (Bederman 220*).*

Tarzan's ape family is repeatedly described as the "progenitors of man" (Burroughs 47) or "our fierce, hairy forebears" (79). The most reverberating dialogue between Burroughs and evolutionary Darwinism occurs in the Dum-Dum ceremony, described as the primeval precursor to all of humankind's cultural rituals:

> From this primitive function has arisen, unquestionably, all the forms and ceremonials of modem church and state, for through all the countless ages, back beyond the uttermost ramparts of a dawning humanity our fierce, hairy forebears danced out the rites of the Dum-Dum. ((Burroughs 79))

Burroughs's description of the Dum-Dum ritual is loaded with the vocabulary of human ceremonial rituals:

> The rites of the Dum-Dum marked important events in the life of the tribe - a victory, the capture of a prisoner, the killing of some large fierce denizen of the jungle, the death or accession of a king, and were conducted with set ceremonialism ... for half an hour the weird dance went on, until, at a sign from Kerchak, the noise of the drums ceased ... then, as one man, the males rushed headlong upon the thing which their terrific blows had reduced to a mass of hairy pulp. (58, 60)

Not only does their dancing and drumming mimic a human ritual, but also the apes move "as one man." The taxonomic boundary between ape and man recalls the fluidity between Old Deb's dogs and their "kinsmen." By placing Tarzan at the elemental moment of human origins with these "early" men, Burroughs suggests that the black Africans whom Tarzan encounters belong to a separate species. He describes the apes as men, but the black villagers are referred

to with vocabulary that suggests their closeness to animals. For example, when a black woman comes close to Tarzan as he hides in her home ''the ape-man felt the animal warmth of her naked body“ (93). Tarzan, in fact, holds the Africans “in low esteem,” and decides that “these people were more wicked than his own apes, and as savage and cruel as Sabor [the tiger]” (118). By making the apes and black men two distinct species Burroughs allays “the white man’s fear that he might be descended, in evolutionary terms, from [black African] ‘savages’” (Lundblad 148). By locating Tarzan at the earliest stage of evolution, Burroughs is mindful of Darwin’s suggestion “that it might be easier to think about a ‘heroic little monkey’ or an ‘old baboon’ as one’s ancestor than a ‘savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practices infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions’“(148). Burroughs distinguishes between animality and savagery, and in elevating the former he suggests that acts of violence from one group, Tarzan and his *tribe*, can be natural, but from others, such as the black villagers, it is cruel savagery. The practices of the black villagers leads Tarzan to wonder “at the cruel brutality of his own kind,” (18) and he observes the difference between animals and the black men in the way their victims were treated: “The ethics of all the others [the animals] meted a quick and merciful death to their victims” (118). On the other hand, the victim of the Mbogans is tortured while the villagers dance “in wild and savage abandon to the maddening music of the drums” and the “women and children shrieked their delight. The warriors licked their hideous lips in anticipation of the feast to come, and vied with one another in the savagery and loathesomeness of the cruel indignities with which they tortured the still conscious prisoner” (118). Unlike the black villagers, Nietzschean superman’s cruel practices are natural and

desirable, because it coincides with the laws of nature. He kills to satisfy natural wants, such as food, or to enforce order, as Tarzan does, in a perverse way, when he terrorizes the Mbogans. The parallel between Tarzan and southern lynch mobs operating to enforce a certain order is an obvious one, but it is outside the scope of this thesis.

Burroughs' biographer, John Taliaferro, suggests that if "creationism was the antithesis of Darwinism, then Eugenics was Darwinism taken to extremes," and over time Burroughs's "fervid appreciation of genetic predetermination led him to the radical fringe" (Taliaferro 226, 19). Burroughs even went as far as writing a column for the *Los Angeles Examiner* in which he advocated the annihilation of all "moral imbeciles" and their relatives (19). The Nazis would later endorse and adopt this same position when they attempt to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe. It is not insignificant that the name "Tarzan" means "white skin" in Burroughs' ape language. We are constantly reminded of Tarzan's race throughout the book, both in the references to his whiteness and in opposition to the "black men" whom he kills. Tarzan is not just any white man, however; he represents the very best in Anglo-Saxon racial development. As the son of Lord and Lady Greystoke, he is the inheritor of superior bloodlines. He is the "aristocratic scion of an old English house…the offspring of highly bred and intelligent parents" (Burroughs 57). As such, he is the epitome of

> the cutting edge of civilized racial evolution and possesses the inborn intelligence and manly character of the most highly bred Anglo-Saxons. On this level, then, Tarzan constructs superior manhood as a racial attribute, inherited by men of civilized races even if they never meet their parents and are reared by savages. (Bederman 221)

The product of superior bloodlines is transplanted into the most brutal and primitive of environments and still turns out to be "an embodiment of physical perfection and giant strength," a stalwart forest god," "a perfect type of the strongly masculine" who is easily recognized by D'Arnot as "the offspring of highly bred and intelligent parents"(Burroughs 157, 320, 221, 82). In Tarzan, Burroughs creates a fictional poster boy for the Eugenics movement.

Eight years before *Tarzan of the Apes* was published, G. Stanley Hall, a noted early psychologist, discussed racial recapitulation in his book *Adolescence*:

> Indeed, the boy of ten or eleven is tolerably well adjusted to the environment of savage life in a warm country where he could readily live independently of his parents, discharging all the functions necessary to his personal life, but lacking only the reproductive function. (cited in Bederman 226)

Hall believed that modern children corresponded to an earlier primitive stage of their ancestors' evolutionary history, arguing that their "instincts and feelings . . . are reverberations from the remote ancestral past" (cited in Bederman 95). The psychologist proposed that by taking advantage of this recapitulation educators can, in Gail Bederman's terms "inoculate" them against the weakness of excessive civilization" (Bederman 94). Superior bloodlines must be augmented with the proper training, otherwise civilization would degenerate. In *Tarzan of the Apes*, Burroughs suggests the efficacy of savage education in arresting the neurasthenic paradox brought on by civilization. Although Tarzan was "only a little English boy. . . . In his veins, though, flowed the blood of the best of a race of mighty fighters, and back of this was the training of his short lifetime among the fierce brutes of the jungle" (Burroughs 47). He combines "the best characteristics of the human family from which he was descended, and the

best of those which mark the wild beasts" (Taliaferro 93), thus providing a fictional solution to the paradox of civilization that had troubled psychologists such as Hall and philosophers such as Nietzsche, the Faustian bargain described earlier. Tarzan, the inheritor of Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage, must pass through a period of "savage education" – the education of the civilized man in the ways of his savage ancestors. The civilized male, tentatively explored in *Edgar Huntly*, but fully represented by Tarzan, must live as a savage in order to become the perfect Anglo-Saxon civilized male.

Tarzan's unique hybridity as both civilized and savage gives Burroughs the opportunity to explore dual curricula: Tarzan must eventually complement his savage training with 'civilized education, a task he accomplishes through the two most enabling tools of civilization. The pen and the sword are represented in the novel by the pencil and the hunting knife. Tarzan's acquisition of literacy represents his ultimate personal development, the ability that allows him to progress from savage to civilized gentleman. In mimicry of 19th-century progressive ideas of self-education, Tarzan devotes five years studying the picture book he finds in his father's cabin, and he uses the hunting knife to scratch out imitations of the characters on pieces of bark. His fortuitous discovery of the children's picture book inaugurates the civilized phase of his training. This event also begins the eventual distancing of himself from his ape companions. The discovery of the book is one of the significant tropes in the literature of what is generally referred to as "savage education" – and what I am calling, more accurately, I think, "civilized education" (necessitated by Tarzan's participation in two curricula). Generally, the savage figure's discovery of an English book initiates the progression of that individual from a pre-literate being to someone who recognizes and participates in the power that literary expression

confers. The power over words is central to the process of racial recapitulation. Man must ignore written language, immerse himself in a period of savage education, and then rediscover written language as the means of returning to or communicating with his civilized past. Edgar Huntly gives up his writing, becomes a savage, rediscovers his missing papers, and rejoins civilization. The pattern is made brilliantly clear in Burroughs' novel: the Clayton's cabin, a repository of written learning, is sealed up when the baby Tarzan is abducted. After a sufficient period of savage internship with man's evolutionary ancestors, the child returns and unlocks the cabin, teaches himself to read and write, and is able to communicate with Jane and her companions in what turns out to be his first contact with civilization.

Tarzan's introduction to the English book begins when he is drawn to the pictures rather than the text, and sees for the first time that there exists other "apes" who look like him. Intuitively, he locates the connection between literacy and whiteness; literacy is a way for whites to communicate with each other (Berglund 84). He immediately detects a cultural kinship with the first white people he encounters and writes to them, but never attempts to communicate with the Mbongan villagers in the same manner. In terms of cultural evolution he represents a "little primitive man ... an allegorical figure of the primordial groping through the black night of ignorance toward the light of learning" (Burroughs 74). Tarzan's untutored acquisition of literacy from studying a picture book is, of course, far-fetched, but "his development represents a speeded-up version of that of all mankind, from the earliest 'primitive' ideas to 'civilized' religion" (Street 170). It initiates the return of his European identity, reflecting Homi Bhabha's claim that "the discovery of the book is, at once, a moment of originality and authority" and "a process of displacement" (cited in Berglund 77). The book

bestows upon him the authority of the white colonizer, and he begins to distance himself from the apes because of the new knowledge he gains through literacy. He also begins to dominate them through superior technology, the hunting knife, and the arrows he steals from the Mbongans (Burroughs 103). Furthermore, Tarzan and his fellow apemen begin a quasi-colonial relationship with the Mbongans: the apes (Tarzan included) begin stealing crops from the villagers, leaving them just enough for their own survival, and as incentive for them to continue the production cycle. Tarzan, in fact, has recapitulated the entire evolutionary progress of the European; he starts out as an ape and eventually becomes a colonizer in Africa.

Conclusion

In the end, Tarzan is the ultimate example of racial recapitulation. He is the epitome of Gustav Klemm's strong and vigorous European who, having recapitulated the evolutionary stages, dominates the weaker races. Landa points out that

> the orphan scion of English Lords who grew up among the beasts, is the epitome of the natural master. He is destined to become the sovereign of the jungle and assert his inborn supremacy over all lesser species, beasts and black natives alike, due to the whiteness of his skin…and the pureness of his blood. (Landa 162)

And yet the Lord of the Apes represents not just the entire evolutionary history of his kind, but in fact, man's future superior self, Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. He exceeds, by a wide margin, Charles Brockden Brown's tentative experiment with Edgar Huntly. As a primitive being, he undertakes a period of study in a 'civilized' curriculum, the acquisition of literacy, so as to become a member of civilized society. At the same time, he is a civilized being, the inheritor of Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage, who passes through a period of 'savage' education, living as a beast, in order to become the ultimate Anglo-Saxon male, a superman. The popularity of the Tarzan series of adventures in American culture, and the contemporary manifestations in other genres of the ideas he represents, points to the role of the literary in allaying the anxieties of the Anglo-Saxon male when confronted by the challenges of conquest, empire, and civilization. The superhero fiction transforms frontier experiences

originating in landscapes, both real and imaginary, as diverse as the American West, Africa, Mars, and so on, into artistic symbols and metaphors that combine into an energizing myth that supports (?) cultural dominance.

Both Edgar Huntly and Tarzan embody the intersection of a complex mix of ideologies. Each of the two exemplifies Jefferson's natural aristocrat who gets ahead through virtues and talent; at the same time they are Nietzsche's noblemen, who "return to the innocent conscience of the wild beast, as exultant monsters" (Nietzsche, cited in Landa 162). There is little distinction among the ape-man who kills "with a joyous laugh upon his handsome lips" (Burroughs 108), the young man who recovers humankind's perverse disposition when he is deprived of human society, and the overjoyed monster that Nietzsche imagines. The affinity between Jefferson's rejection of "artificial aristocracy" and Nietzsche's primordial man is emphasized repeatedly by Burroughs: Tarzan is nurtured by the "first lords of the jungle", man's "shaggy ancestor", and he possesses a "nobility of character" (Burroughs 79, 260). The ape-man epitomizes, Landa explains, what "true nobility is …the one of the mythical 'first noble ancestor', the aristocratic self-made man, who has earned his privilege overcoming adversity" (Landa 163). The intersection of these ideologies is made clear at the conclusion of the book when Tarzan leaves his hereditary title to his cousin, and returns to the tropics. The tropics is popularly regarded as the primal scene of humankind's beginning, the "geological site of vitality, the alleged youth of mankind and the abode of instinct" (Landa 160). In a later novel, Burroughs would restate in terms that are pithy, but loaded with meaning, his belief that Tarzan represented the ultimate result of racial recapitulation: "sloughed from [Tarzan] was the

last vestige of artificial caste—once again he was the primeval hunter—*the first man*—the highest caste type of the human race" (Burroughs, "Tarzan and the Jewel of Opar", cited in Landa 163, my italics). Tarzan is both the last man, symbolic of civilization's final degenerate, and the first man, man's shaggy progenitor, and yet he is the First Man, the Übermensch that Zarathustra predicted, who reaches past the last man by recovering the nature of the first man.

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