

Camp performance is narcissistically self-referential, a kind of indulgent self-mockery, wavering between parody and self-parody (Sontag, 1964/Cleto, 1999: p. 58), or a making fun of (or rather: out of) those things that in fact one feels are important (Isherwood, 1954/Cleto 1999: p. 51), hence its adoption as a defensive strategy by homosexuals and others with a double life or a life involving changes of acted-out roles.

The relationship created between the camp performer and the audience is one of ironic complicity, 'a coded ironic "wink", a knowing glance shared between a cognizant perceiver... and a performative agent' (Piggford, 1997/Cleto, 1999: p. 298). It therefore involves 'the ellipse that is dear to all preciousity' and one can call camp 'an aesthetic of presupposition' (Mauriès, 1979: p. 78). The unexpressed secret is clear to all but is rendered unimportant by a mocking discourse which almost – but never quite – reveals all. As Mauriès says (1979: pp. 96-7) camp can also be defined as 'an aesthetic of bluff'.

Camp allusiveness and parody creates an in-group feeling that can give power to the marginalized, and the same end is pursued by the 'camp obsession with images of power' (like modern camp's apotheosis of cinema divas and all those involved in exaggerated role-playing) which create a parodic mythology 'producing a structure of negative and deviant knowledge' with new standards of beauty, importance and meaning that excludes the otherwise dominant (Cleto, 1999: pp. 31-2).

Camp and dandyism are similar in the emphasis on performance and style and the constructed non-essential personality and because both question orthodox ideology (including gender distinctions) from within.⁹ They differ, however, in the association of camp with exaggeration (including a more explicit questioning of gender distinctions); in camp's 'necessary inconclusiveness and mobility' (Cleto, 1999: p. 3); and in its adoption and parody of popular exaggerated artistic styles.

The first reference to camp is in a 1909 dictionary of slang, whose title *Passing English of the Victorian Era*, shows that it was not seen as a 'new word' but one that had been more widespread

previously (Ware, 1909: p. 61).¹⁰ It is defined in terms of theatrical gestural excess: 'actions and gestures of an exaggerated emphasis' (which already identifies two related elements in 'camp': theatricality and excess). Ware adds perhaps a reference to homosexual associations: 'Used chiefly of persons of exceptional want of character'.

An earlier example of the derived form *campish* is found as early as 1869 in a letter from Frederick Park to his fellow transvestite Lord Arthur Clinton: 'My campish undertakings are at not present meeting with the success they deserve. Whatever I do seems to get me in hot water somewhere. But n'importe. What's the odds as long as you're happy?' (Bartlett, 1988: p. 169/Cleto, 1999: p. 182). From the context, we can interpret part of the meaning of 'campish' here as 'entertainingly transgressive', but since the writer's 'campish undertakings' involved transvestite appearances in public the word could also mean 'involving off-stage theatricality'.¹¹

Although an origin in the French *se camper* 'strike an attitude' has been proposed (Booth, 1983/Cleto, 1999: p. 75), the word could also derive from Northern dialect *camp* meaning 'to chatter' or could be connected with a camp of soldiers, miners, navvies, actors, gypsies: a temporary base where the structure of meaning and control given by permanent institutions is partly absent. Military display and swagger could be described as 'campish' and clearly has connections with the theatricalisation of the self.¹²

Sontag sees camp originating in 'the eighteenth century relish for artifice' and 'the aristocratic pleasure of over-refinement' re-emerging in the aesthetic movement (Cleto, 1999: p. 46) and others have seen connections with Mannerism, the insubstantial pageant of seventeenth century court-life, with *préciosité* and *coquetterie*. As for the word, the evidence suggests it was in use on the margins of conventional society in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³

The settings in NAN can be considered as temporary spaces for acting. Cleto's metaphor of camp as a temporary theatrical space (Cleto, 1999: p. 9, pp. 33-6) reminds us immediately of

the 'The Adventure of the Hansom Cabs' in which Lieutenant Brackenbury accepts an anonymous invitation to 'gentleman's party' with the air of 'a private gambling saloon' in an elegantly decorated house, complete with floral decorations and busy with servants offering refreshments. After an hour or so he walks into the hall to find that:

The flowering shrubs had disappeared from the staircase; three large furniture waggons stood before the garden gate; the servants were busy dismantling the house upon all sides; and some of them had already donned their great-coats and were preparing to depart. [...] First, the guests, who were no real guests after all, had been dismissed; and now the servants, who could hardly be genuine servants, were actively dispersing.

'Was the whole establishment a sham?' he asked himself.

(NAN: p. 65)

The provisionality of the space extends to those within it (guests and servants are not 'real' or 'genuine') and undermines the whole solid appearance of the social structures it should reinforce, so that 'Was the whole establishment a sham?' could easily be applied to a whole social or semantic system. The performances that take place within such a space take on a campish air, especially in view of their excessive mode of expression.

'The Suicide Club' too has a temporary space for its members and its smoking room 'papered from top to bottom with an imitation of oak wainscot' (NAN: p. 16) is an indication of its distance from the solid permanence of middle-class furnishing, and its similarity to a stage-set.¹⁴ The opening of the story in the oyster bar 'in the immediate neighbourhood of Leicester Square' also involves a theatricalized space as the Young Man enters as onto a stage to perform his ritualized part.

Even the sentence can become a space in which a word can temporarily put on 'old fashioned clothes' of meaning, as when Brackenbury finds that the house of the party is now empty

and 'he remembered with astonishment its specious, settled and hospitable air on his arrival' (NAN: p. 65). Here we have a typically Stevensonian trope exploiting two different meanings of the same word: *specious* can have the old meaning 'pleasing to the eye, beautiful' or almost the opposite 'having a fair or attractive appearance...but in reality devoid of the qualities apparently possessed'. The context that Stevenson provides forces us to accept the possibly obsolete¹⁵ and less familiar meaning, yet the reader is aware of the second meaning which undermines the assurance of Brackenbury and the narrator. The word *specious* with its old-fashioned meaning related to that of the Latin *speciosus* and used for elegant praise, is shown to be a 'specious' word itself, and the elegant user is shown as working in mere appearances. This might remind us of Jekyll's 'I stood committed to a profound duplicity of life' in the early part of his 'statement' where he is trying to present his conduct as morally-neutral: he wants the reader to accept the Latinate meaning of *duplicity* as 'divided nature', so he is attempting to deceive the reader by manipulating a word that normally means 'deception'.¹

Stevenson himself often struck those he met as continually changing roles and poses in his brilliant conversation: Lang, for example, says 'He was like nobody else whom I ever met. There was a sort of uncommon celerity in changing expression in thought and speech' (Adventures Among Books, 1905, qu. Stott, 1994: p. 35). Balfour (1901, II: p. 174) says his talk was characterized by rapid and striking alterations 'wit, humour, and pathos; the romantic, the tragic, the picturesque; stern judgment, wise counsel, wild fooling, all... followed each other in rapid and easy succession' and elsewhere (in Masson, 1929: p. 283) he talks of 'his list of natural roles' that he enjoyed playing. Colvin (qu. Terry, 1996: p. 202, n2) says that 'he seemed to contain within himself a whole troop of singularly assorted characters'. Moors (1910/n.d.: pp. 81-2) refers to his theatrical conversational style in Samoa, and a conventional Englishman reports an after-dinner conversation in Davos in which one man was maintaining that German women (in contrast to English women) were less prone to fall in love

with a man instantly: “‘What?’”, cried Stevenson, with a theatrical outfling of both hands. “Do you talk of German women? I tell you, this neck is wet with the tears of German women!”” (Hammon, 1910: p. 63). Play-acting is a common metaphor of action especially in the three ‘Suicide Club’ tales. The Young Man has ‘played many farces’ that day and declares ‘life is only a stage to play the fool upon’ (NAN: p. 6, p. 9). Geraldine has ‘hit exactly on the manners and intonations that became the part he was playing’ and, masquerading as Mr Morris, is ‘playing the householder for a single night’ (NAN: p. 9, p. 65). Florizel, ‘accustomed to play the host in the highest circles’, wonders whether Geraldine’s brother imagines that ‘we are all playing comedy?’, yet for him the duel with the President of the Suicide Club ‘is but a farce...and... will not be long a-playing’. In the final paragraph it is revealed that he ‘has played the part of Providence’ in many strange events (NAN: p. 16, p. 36, p. 75, p. 77).

Indeed, the most obviously self-constructed personality in the tales is Prince Florizel. He habitually dresses up in disguise for his equivocal ‘adventures’ (‘The Prince had, as usual, travestied his appearance by the addition of false whiskers and a pair of large adhesive eyebrows’; NAN: p. 2), assumes a different name and allows himself a different type of behaviour. His mutability undermines the basis of his power since it shows that even his ‘sincere’ pronouncements are an act, helped by a change of clothes (‘An hour after, Florizel in his official robes, and covered with all the orders of Bohemia...’) (NAN: p. 30), and by the conventional overemphatic and melodramatic form and moralistic content of speeches full of appeals to gentlemanly and honourable codes of conduct. His personality is constructed by his gestures and his words (i.e. not the product of an interiority).

Being a symbolic central character, a symbol of authority, with an alias (Theophilus Godall) that twice recalls a divine originator, his mutable and constructed character can be seen as a general comment on the non-essentiality of conventional social and ideological systems. Camp acting does not attempt to seem natural, hence Geraldine is delighted that, disguised as ‘a person

connected with the Press in reduced circumstances', he is taken for 'a nobleman in masquerade'. Though a person in disguise normally wants that to be taken for his real identity, Geraldine smiles to see that the disguise is detected but no real identity is detected among his multiple and unconvincing masks.

Above the characters is the puppet-master of the narrator and above him the author, both of which are clearly acting a part in an exaggerated way. 'The Arabian author', frame narrator and author double the thoughts and words of characters in indirect speech, as in 'Geraldine could scarcely repress a movement of repulsion for this deplorable wretch' (NAN: p. 20), but then assume an ironic distance (Mallardi, 1989: p. 276), without however assuming a consistent moral position. The narrator does not guarantee his own sincerity: he refers to 'the Arabian author' in the codas of the various stories and then denies his existence in the last coda section (Menikoff, 1990: p. 343). The text of NAN is 'constantly...posing, impersonating, playing stylish tricks', on almost every page there is 'extravagant posing' (Sandison, 1996: p. 100, p. 101). The text itself, and not just the fictional world it represents, constitutes a series of spaces for self-conscious play-acting.

The NAN mocks conventional and self-deceptive 'chivalric' ideals of the Victorian age. Florizel (the name of a medieval chivalric hero) and Geraldine (not the name of a medieval chivalric hero) as knightly, brave, generous, and loyal to each other – and yet all their knightly virtues are incongruously applied to ambiguous rambles in the city at night:

Now and then... he would summon his confidant and Master of the Horse, Colonel Geraldine, and bid him prepare himself against an evening ramble. The Master of the Horse was a young officer of a brave and even temerarious disposition. He greeted the news with delight, and hastened to make ready (NAN: p. 1)

The reader has difficulty in seeing the connection between 'a brave and even temerarious disposition' and 'an evening ramble'.

Then reading on, we learn that this evening out requiring bravery (according to the narrator) is not faced with noble resolve and dignity, but is 'greeted... with delight'. This then leads on to the move to 'make ready' for the adventure, which could mean 'make military preparations', but we find from the next sentence that Geraldine just runs to get dressed up. This incongruous mixing deprives the dominant code of high ideals of any validity.

One overarching incongruity is the use of highly artistic style for stories of a sensational nature, a mixing of high and low styles, which calls into question the institutions and structures of literary discourse, also directly confronted in the contrast made between 'Thackeray's novels' and 'life': 'By life... I do not mean Thackeray's novels' (NAN: p. 107).

A central area of dominant ideology parodied by camp is that of fixed and clear gender distinctions. Sandison (1996: pp. 98-101) refers to 'the remarkable incidence of gender-reversal' in NAN. The implied male reader of Victorian fiction is made to feel uncomfortable, when he finds male rather than female characters described in terms of physical attractiveness and then given feminine characteristics of charm and grace:

Silas identified a very handsome young fellow of small stature... He observed a person of rather a full build, strikingly handsome...seated at table with another handsome young man, several years his junior, who addressed him with conspicuous deference. (NAN: p. 35)

A young man, slender and singularly handsome, came forward and greeted him with an air at once courtly and affectionate... Brackenbury... was unable to resist a sort of friendly attraction

for Mr. Morris's person and character... he was not so much like a host as like a hostess, and there was a feminine coquetry and condescension in his manner which charmed the hearts of all (NAN: p. 61, p. 62, p. 65)

The most obvious gender-indeterminacy is found in Harry Hartley, who has feminine looks and manners 'Blond and pink, with dove's eyes and a gentle smile, he had an air of agreeable tenderness and melancholy, and the most submissive and caressing manners'. He also has feminine interests and tastes: he pursues 'petty and purely elegant accomplishments', has 'the prettiest ways among women, could talk fashions with enjoyment, and was never more happy than when criticising a shade of ribbon, or running on an errand to the milliner's'. His theatricalized effeminacy is made clear by the fact that he was 'pleased to exhibit himself before other men, who derided and despised him, in his character of male lady's-maid and man milliner' (NAN: p. 78, p. 79, p. 80).

We even get an indirect hint of exaggerated camp linguistic emphasis when we learn that 'Harry was transferred to the feminine department, where his life was little short of heavenly' (NAN: p. 80), though we do not know if this 'Heavenly!' comes from Harry (in indirect free speech) or from a slightly camp narrator.

The camp performance does not attempt to be taken for natural and its exaggeration can be seen as forwarding that aim. Typical camp excess can be seen in the device for choosing two volunteers as seconds for a duel by first persuading single gentlemen to be taken by cab to a house temporarily set up as a private gambling club: a preposterous situation which undermines Geraldine's speech to the chosen few in terms of trust, honour, gentlemanliness and devotion.

Excess can also be seen in the parody of melodramatic modes: the gestures:

The next instant he was on his knees... 'Father!' he cried.
(NAN: p. 137)

and the heightened language expressing a world of clear moral oppositions:

‘Merciful heavens!.. Can such things be possible among men born of women? Oh! infamy of infamies!’ (NAN: p. 21)

We can also see exaggeration in the relation between cause and effect when the agitated Silas exclaims:

‘Tell me speedily, Doctor; for I have scarce enough courage to continue to exist’ (NAN: p. 45)

And in the insouciance of Lady Vandeleur when she orders Harry to take a cab because ‘I cannot have my secretary freckled’ (NAN: p. 82).

Camp exaggeration also helps us to understand a detail of the very first incident, when the Young Man enters the oyster bar, accompanied by two commissionaires with trays, and politely and ceremoniously offers a cream tart to each of the customers. He does this ‘with an exaggerated courtesy’¹⁷ and ‘with a profound obeisance’, but strangely ‘proffering the tart at the same time between his thumb and forefinger’ (NAN: p. 2). Such an indelicate way of offering among so much courtesy could be seen as an indication of badly-hidden hysteria, but could also be seen as camp incongruous excess, a means to indicate clearly that this is all a representation.

In Stevenson, the style is always foregrounded, and the NAN stories are no exception. For the Lathbury’s ‘Mr. Stevenson tells a story in a style so finished and so admirable, that it constitutes a distinct enjoyment in itself (1882/Maixner, 1980: p. 113) and Purcell a few years later says ‘in “New Arabian Nights” ...the art is phenomenal... art so carelessly, roguishly exposed, that it charms by its very audacity’ (1886/Maixner, 1980: p. 196).

An elegant and aristocratic style in manners is also typical of camp or dandy individuals, including several of the characters in NAN, including the mannered politeness of Florizel and the rather feminine attentiveness to guests of Mr Morris/Geraldine.

Both camp and dandyism are narcissistic, but camp is more clearly self-mocking.¹⁸ The incident of the cream tarts could be seen as mockery of the writer himself:¹⁹ a 'young man' offers his goods to 'the lees of London' but is unconcerned if they accept or not. The self-mockery continues if – remembering Stevenson's fondness for literally-translated Gallicisms²⁰ – we see what he offers, 'a cream tart',²¹ as an allusion to the French idiom 'une tarte à la crème', defined as 'formule banale, répétée à tout propos; lieu commun', or 'formule vide, argument rebattu par lequel on prétend avoir réponse à tout'.²² He offers only moment of pleasure (and in his letter to Gosse of January 1886 (Booth & Mehew, 1994/5: p. 170), he says of writers 'we are all whores'), a pleasure with no meaning ('une tarte à la crème'), a mere object of consumption (and in the same letters he refers to the reading public as 'the beast whom we feed').

In NAN, as in *Jekyll and Hyde*, Stevenson often uses words with transgressive colloquial meanings, 'with the context suggesting (but never authorizing) that the reader should take this 'non-official' meaning as the right one' (Dury, 1993: p. 39). We also find ambiguous syntax, unusual names, and hints at sexual behaviour ('anonymous desires and pleasures', Stevenson 1882b: p. 121) used in a similar creation of complicity with the reader. This suggestive allusion that attracts attention to itself is also found in Meredith, who refers in *Richard Feverel* (1859) to 'jokes delicately not decent, but so delicately so, that it was not decent to perceive it' (qu. L. Stevenson 1976: p. 188).

Florizel's Master of the Horse is referred to thirty times as 'Colonel Geraldine', and forty-five times (by both the Prince and the narrator) as 'Geraldine'. The use of a common female name for a 'brave and even temerarious' officer is already strange, and it becomes even stranger as we learn of Geraldine's taste for ambiguous night-time adventures and his hostess-like gracefulness. However, both Florizel and the narrator pretend that they do not see the incongruity. All irony creates a relationship of complicity; irony either involving sexual identity or naughty-but-nice sexual allusions can be seen as creating a camp complicity.²³

A nudging sexual reference found in the word 'back door', *Back-door work* being slang term for 'an unmentionable vice', according to slang dictionaries of the period.²⁴ This makes the following dialogue between the pert Prudence and the effeminate Harry (BB: pp. 90-1) rather troubling:

'Do you think I would keep you here if I were not sure to save you? Oh, no, I am a good friend to those that please me! and we have a back door upon another lane. But,' she added, checking him, for he had got upon his feet immediately on this welcome news, 'but I will not show where it is unless you kiss me. Will you, Harry?'

'That I will,' he cried, remembering his gallantry, 'not for your back door, but because you are good and pretty'.

And he administered two or three cordial salutes, which were returned to him in kind.

Then Prudence led him to the back gate, and put her hand upon the key.

'Will you come and see me?' she asked.

We are reminded of similar hints in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*: 'the back passage' (Stevenson, 1886: p. 65) to the door which is 'a back way to Dr Jekyll's' (ib. p. 34).²⁵

Another shared allusion to sexual matters concerns Florizel's cultivation of sensation and 'adventures': his 'rambles', 'adventures' and unusual and 'agreeable modes of passing an evening' are similar to sexual adventuring in their activities involving lack of control in areas below the regulated surface of life. A key word near the beginning of the text that sets off thoughts in this direction is 'ramble': 'Now and then... he would summon his confidant... Colonel Geraldine, and bid him prepare him against and evening ramble' (NAN: p. 1). Johnson's Dictionary (1755) derives *ramble* from a Dutch verb meaning as 'To wander loosely in lust' and we may remember Rochester's licentious 'A Ramble in St. James's Park' (cf. Patterson, 1981; Road, 1986) and John Dunton's *Voyage Round the World* (1691) where the word becomes a 'running

joke', appearing repeatedly in a wide variety of grammatical and typographic forms. Utterson and Enfield in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* also go together on 'rambles' through the city (Dury, 1993: p. 64). It is clear that the word led a double life with an official and a transgressive meaning for several centuries.

Another collusive reference near the beginning of the text involves the oyster bar:

The bar was full of guests, male and female; but though more than one of these offered to fall into talk with our adventurers, none of them promised to grow interesting upon a nearer acquaintance (NAN, CT: p. 2)

It is clear that the female 'guests' who approach and talk to the strangers are prostitutes, a piece of collusive knowledge shared with the reader.²⁶ In addition, 'more than one of these' would normally refer to both male and female guests – an alarming prospect of propositions from male guests, until one realizes that this must be a Latinism or Gallicism for 'more than one of the latter'.²⁷

The fictional world of the NAN contains a number of characters who give camp performances or are interpretable in a camp way. The Young Man with the cream tarts has a certain camp traits: he takes the oyster bar as a temporary stage, displays perfect manners and exaggerated courtesy even when addressing low-life characters in the bar, and he makes fun of what is important to him. Florizel shares some of the qualities that Wilde fashioned into his public persona: a 'vaguely disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisured idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism' (Sinfield, 1994: p. 118). Florizel is effeminate in the softness of his manners and apparent detachment from sex (though he has a taste for dangerous adventures), he indulges in leisured idleness, takes no notice of morality as far as his own actions are concerned, is rich and can afford the luxury of the expense of playing a godlike role, is above all wonderfully insouciant, and shares in decadence and aestheticism to the extent

that he values experience and actively seeks new kinds of stimulus. He has a taste for 'adventures' that have affinities with sexual adventures, on 'rambles' through the city with his male friend who he usually calls 'Geraldine'.

We also have a series of strong women who recall camp divas such as Mae West and Marlene Dietrich: Madame Zéphyrine, the vamp who inveigles Silas, and Lady Vandeleur.

What distances NAN from camp is that fact that the farce is tragedy in disguise, in a Meredithian comic mixture. The rather campish incident of the Young Man leads up to his declarations, which have a certain seriousness about them:

From the whole tone of the young man's statement it was plain that he harboured very bitter and contemptuous thoughts about himself. His auditors were led to imagine that his love affair was nearer his heart than he admitted, and that he had a design on his own life. The farce of the cream tarts began to have very much the air of a tragedy in disguise. (NAN: pp. 6-7)

If camp is a kind of theatrical foolery, then the Young Man says he is beyond it: 'life is only a stage to play the fool upon as long as the part amuses us' (NAN: p. 9).

The 'Saratoga Trunk' story starts with a mocking of sexual desire (exposing the fluidity and doubleness of moral behaviour) involving a campish Mae West-like Madame Zéphyrine, but the corpse in the bed leads to a violent and dangerous situation that lacks the insouciance and control of camp.

The self-mockery of Stevenson and his characters is not perfectly insouciant and there are disquieting aspects (such as when the Young Man crushes 'the nine remaining tarts into his mouth, and swallowed them at a single movement each' (NAN, CT: p. 4)), which go beyond camp excess.

Taking 'camp' as a critical term helps us to understand in a unitary way a great deal of the NAN stories. The 'spirit of the dandy' which Sandison uses in his interpretation is very close to

camp, but perhaps camp can add a little more to our understanding, not only in those areas shared by dandyism (self-representation, undermining of dominant ideology, foregrounding of style) especially in the areas of the theatricality of excess, emphasis on gender indeterminacy, self-mockery and winking complicity with the reader.

By adopting what we see as a camp approach to social reality, Stevenson is able to confront, through frivolous mockery, his difficult relationship in this period with bourgeois and patriarchal authority and with the literary marketplace. In this text, camp humour allows Stevenson to express his feelings of marginality, to defy a dominant ideology through frivolity and irony and the presentation of Being-as-Playing-a-Role (Sontag, 1964/Cleto, 1999: p. 56): existence as performance.

End Notes

Note: I have used the texts of the stories as printed in the first edition and then republished in the Tusitala Edition (vol. I); I have used the abbreviation NAN and the title *New Arabian Nights* to refer to the 'Florizel Stories', even though the first edition does not explicitly identify them with this name, which applies also to the short stories in the second volume (however, the 'Florizel Stories' are implicitly associated with the title by references in the text to the 'Arabian author', and the Tusitala and other editions identify them specifically with it).

1. Information on the dates of composition from Swearingen, 1980.
2. Taking the lead mainly from Cleto, 1999.
3. For the end of dandyism see Barthes, Roland (1968) 'Le dandysme et la mode', Rpr. in Carassus, 1971.
4. A proposed definition of camp 'like attempting to sit in the corner of a circular room' (Mehurst, 1991 qu. Cleto, 1999: p. 4) even has a Zen-likeclusiveness about it. Isherwood (1954/Cleto, 1999: p. 52) makes a similar analogy when he says

‘[camp] is terribly hard to define. You have to meditate on it and feel it intuitively, like Lao-tze’s *Tao*’. For the indefinability of camp, see also Cleto, 1999: pp. 5-6, 37n6, and Mauries, 1979: p. 65.

5. For the essentially gay definition of *camp* see Meyer, 1994; for the rejection of this thesis see Cleto, 1999: pp. 16-22.
6. The ‘off-stage theatricality’ of camp is relevant to homosexuals because of often having to act the part of a non-homosexual (Cleto, 1999: p. 90).
7. ‘If [camp’s] transgression of boundaries ever threatened to produce the redefinition of [boundaries], the *frison* would be lost, the thrill of “something wrong” would disappear’ (Britton, 1978/Cleto, 1999: p. 141)
8. The feminine and a-sexual may also be imitated for another reason: as types of the marginal (Booth, 1983/Cleto, 1999: p. 141)
9. The dandy feels ‘le besoin ardent de se faire une originalité, contenu dans le limites extérieures des convenances’ (Baudelaire, 1863/Natta, 1989: p. 204)
10. Meyer (1994: p. 75) interprets Ware’s ‘passing English’ to mean ‘ephemeral English’ (though it could also mean ‘disappearing’); Meyer sees the dictionary as ‘documenting the jargon of his decade’, i.e. the first few years of the century. Since it supplements Farmers *Slang and its Analogues* (1890, 1904) he assumes that it contains words that have appeared since then (though it could easily include words previously extant but simply omitted by Farmer). The title’s reference to the ‘Victorian era’ (not ‘the late Victorian era’ or ‘the Edwardian era’) suggests clearly, however, that the dictionary was intended to cover usage of quite a broad period. The reason for Meyer’s interpretation is later made clear: ‘Wilde’s own signifying codes of dress, gesture and speech that were built upon and preserved as the signifier of the new identity. I suggest that the performance of these codes is what became known as “Camp”, a *new word that appeared along with the identity during the years immediately following the [Wilde] trials*’ (Meyer, 1994: p. 105; emphasis added) The word

camp therefore by this definition has to be post-1895. I would say, however, that though *camp* as 'homosexual performance of signifying codes' is very probably post-1895, the word with its wider and not specifically homosexual meanings could well be earlier (as the 1869 use of *campish* suggests).

11. Another possible early allusion may be in Meredith's short story 'The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper' (1877): Lady Camper is a dominant comic Lady Bracknell type who inverts gender distinctions, has an overbearing authority, considers herself above convention and is associated with the transgressive hints of the text.
12. The Oxford English Dictionary has an entry for *campish*, defined as 'Savouring of the camp, in manners, etc.' with only two quotations, one unproblematic from 1581, and the following from 1868: 'He was of military tastes, not a little campish in his licence', which suggests a self-consciousness in performance in the word 'tastes', an over-fastidious precision in 'not a little campish' and a disregard for normal behaviour in 'licence'. The whole quotation reminds us that the military camp was a temporary theatre where men played roles, indulged in sartorial display and – though bound by rules – were beyond the normal rules of everyday society.
13. 'camp' is a 'queer(ing) semiotic' that probably emerges 'around 1860' (Cleto, 1999: p. 44)
14. Saposnik (1974: p. 69) remarks that 'the Suicide Club... is merely a stage setting of cardboard flat and painted tableau', where actions are 'gestures in a make-believe world'.
15. The first definition, is marked '? Obs.' in the volume of the OED published in 1913, and without the question mark in the second edition of 1986.
16. A similar case of 'flickering' meaning created by exploiting a normal and a rare meaning of the same word can be seen elsewhere in *Jekyll and Hyde*: quite in the title 'Dr Jekyll was Quite at Ease'. A related technique is the use of the standard meaning and a transgressive colloquial meaning (cf. Dury, 1992: p. 39).

17. James refers to 'the strange politeness of the young man, leading on to circumstances stranger still' (1887/J.A. Smith: p. 153).
18. 'the tales... mock themselves' (Samson, 1926: p. vviii)
19. This point was first made by Mallardi, 1989: p. 272.
20. Reviewers noted the number of Gallicisms in this text, see Maixner, 1980: p. 107, p. 118; cf. also Dury, 1993: p. 92 n18.
21. An early translation of 'The Arabian Nights' seems to have included 'cream tarts' in one of the stories: Walter Scott refers to 'Bedreddin Hassan, whom the vizier, his father-in-law, discovered by his superlative skill in composing cream-tarts with pepper in them' (*Heart of Midlothian* ch. 49). The more accurate translation by Burton (1885-88) refers to recognition via the preparation of 'a conserve of pomegranite grains' ('Tale of Nur al-Din Ali and his son Badr al-Din Hasan'). Stevenson has just taken an element from the original story without any attempt to follow any other part of the narrative at all; this borrowed element could easily have been attractive because of its meaning as a literally-translated French phrase.
22. Definitions from *Trèsor de la langue française* (Gallimard), and *Le Robert* (Robert). The phrase derives from Molière's *École des femmes* 1.1.97-100 where it is the silly reply in a word-game that shows you have not understood the rules and are 'd'un ignorance extrême'.
23. 'camp exists in the smirk of the beholder' (Hess, 1965 qu. Cleto, 1999: p. 278)
24. Barrere and Leland (1889), Farmer (1890).
25. Here, one may remember the equivocal play on 'the back way' in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), p. iv, p. iii.
26. James (1888/J.A. Smith: p. 153) says 'the company that we guess, given the locality' and the Baedeker guide to London of 1899 lists Edwin Scott in Coventry Street and Blue Posts in Rupert Street (both near Leicester Square) as oyster bars and adds 'Pas de dames le soir dans les deux maisons'.
27. Oxford English Dictionary, THIS, 3b

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‘All life that is not mechanical is spun out
of two threads’; Women Characters in Robert
Louis Stevenson’s *Catriona* (1893)

Olena M. Turnbull

Stevenson’s contemporaries describe his works as ‘manly’¹, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle refers to Stevenson as the father of ‘the modern masculine novel’ (Conan Doyle: p. 264), and a consensus of critical opinion argues that Stevenson’s male characters are infinitely stronger than his women characters, although representations of women become increasingly more important in his later works. However, Katherine B. Linehan² argues that it is time to ‘revalue’ male-female relations in the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, claiming that ‘The quantity of Stevenson’s attention to male-female relationships is indeed readily defensible, especially once one looks beyond the famous triumvirate of *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and *Jekyll and Hyde*’ (Linehan: p. 34). Linehan makes the excellent point that ‘Stevenson put marriage or courtship at the centre of three novels (*Prince Otto*, *David Balfour* (or *Catriona*), and the unfinished *Weir of Hermiston*) and over a dozen works of short fiction (ibid.). J. C. Fumas tells us that ‘1892 saw [Stevenson] writing *Catriona*, embarking on *The Young Chevalier*, planning *Sophia Scarlett* (to involve three heroines), and making early drafts of *Weir of Hermiston* – all containing love affairs and each (except *Sophia Scarlett*, which was never begun) notable women’ (Furnas: pp. 423-424). Stevenson himself writes in an essay entitled ‘The Lanter-Bearers’ (1888) that ‘All life that is not mechanical is spun out of two threads’ (Stevenson: *Essays*, p. 310). This paper, in two parts, contends that ‘masculine’ rather than ‘feminine’ terms have been over-emphasized in critical commentary of Stevenson’s works and examines women characters in *Catriona*.

Both the Scottish psyche and the psyche of the Victorians from the mid-century onwards have been described in terms

of fragmentation and division³, and it seems to me that these presumed rifts have been depicted in a manner reminiscent of the same types of binary oppositions that relate to gender difference. The post-structuralist French feminist, Helene Cixous, asks a particularly probing question about logocentrism, namely 'Is the fact that logocentrism subjects thought – all of the concepts, the codes, the values – to a two-term system related to "the" couple man/woman?' (Marks and de Courtivron: p. 91) Stevenson's writings, bound up as they are with 'contrast and counterpoint, juxtaposition and antithesis, paradox and parallelism' (Bold: p. 2), suggest that Stevenson was very much aware of opposed couples within a two-term system and the ways in which these operate at all levels of language and he, like David Balfour, was inclined 'to set the ladies the first'⁴ (p. 269).

Stevenson's stepson Samuel Lloyd Osbourne writes that his stepfather held some fairly radical views about 'The Woman Question' and social reform. Osbourne states that 'Stevenson was emphatically what we would call today a feminist,' and that 'Women seemed to him the victims alike of men and nature (Tusitala Edition, I: p. XV). His stepson further remarks that, in this respect, Stevenson was 'far ahead of his times' (ibid). Unfortunately, Osbourne proceeds to undermine these fascinating insights into his stepfather's political ideas when he comments that 'many of Stevenson's strongest opinions failed to find any expression in his books' (ibid). Osbourne 'imagines' that this was so because Stevenson may have thought that 'there was no audience for such opinions' (ibid.). Whatever Osbourne's imaginings may have been, it seems to me that his comments do little justice to Stevenson either as a writer or a thinker, although Osbourne himself may have felt that he was protecting Stevenson's 'manly' literary reputation. The threat of civil unrest was very real at the time Stevenson was writing. A reactionary British government had dropped its earlier *laissez-faire* policies to intrude into the lives of its citizens more forcefully than it had ever done before, and radical political views were firmly suppressed. If Stevenson was a supporter of women's rights and social reform as Osbourne claims,

then it is unlikely that the preponderance of pro-establishment male critics and commentators would have chosen to find any expression of Stevenson's 'strongest opinions' in his books. Stevenson himself speaks of the 'painful suppressions' which are an essential part of the writer's experience. However, he makes the point that 'such facts as, in regard to the main design, subserve a variety of purposes, [the writer] will perforce and eagerly retain'.⁵ Surely it is inconceivable that Stevenson would have suppressed his 'strongest opinions' and most deeply-held beliefs in everything that he wrote?

Numerous of Stevenson's commentators and critics remark upon historical and political aspects of his writings but, all too often, they arrive at the conclusion that Stevenson's works are both ahistorical and apolitical. However Emma Letley for example recognizes that, 'Both *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* have their genesis in Scottish history, both in their characterization and their employment of historical fact'. She comments that '*Catriona* is a much more political book than its predecessors' and that 'The concerns that inform the text are crucial to *A Footnote to History*' as both texts are 'concerned with the ways in which politics, rhetoric, and biased [sic] judges cloud the process of justice'.⁶ Subscribing to the view that Stevenson, like the rest of us, felt himself to be involved in the historical process does not necessarily preclude one from agreeing with critics like Cairns Craig who has recently argued in *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (1999) that 'In the work of the historical novelist of the nineteenth century what was being created was a national imagination' (Craig: p. 9). In an earlier work entitled *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (1996), Craig contends that 'The structural experiments which the major Scottish writers engage in are not refusals of the demands of history, but challenges to the confining truth, to the limits of the historical and the real' (Craig: p. 81), and his observation that 'Counter-history is the inevitable product of a history that [...] leaves so much out of history' (ibid.) seems apt in relation to the works of Robert Louis Stevenson. If one views history as a process, then history is not merely concerned with the

past, it is also concerned with the present and the future. Stevenson undoubtedly believed in history as a process. Stephen Arata has noted that 'a radical historicizing of character' is a central narrative strategy of many *fin-de-siecle* writers (including Stevenson) which permits them to 'set their own critical discourse in opposition to the various diseases' (Arata: p. 22) – and dis-eases – that were perceived to beset late-Victorian society, while Jenni Calder states that 'Stevenson's fiction was, inevitably, a product of time as well as place. [...]: it was very much a series of experiments in locating, understanding and coming to terms with the present. And the present was deeply disturbing' (Calder: p. 28). The subject of Stevenson's *Catriona* is, to borrow Craig's phrase, 'the imagining of the nation as both the fundamental context of individual life and the real subject of history' (Craig: p. 9). If Scotland is 'a country under erasure whose past offers no relationship with the present' (Craig: p. 20), then Scottish history would seem to share a good deal in common with women's history since many feminist writers argue that women's history has also been subject to constant erasure. Henry James clearly understood that Stevenson's incorporation of Scottish historical characters and events was central to his design in *Kidnapped* and comments that such passages read 'like a series of inspired footnotes on some historic page' (Noble: p. 172). The same could be said of *Catriona*, and there would seem to be some playful irony at work in Stevenson's decision to entitle his factual history of Samoa in 322 pages *A Footnote to History* in 1892.

Fanny Stevenson tells us about the physical conditions in which Stevenson wrote *Catriona*, remarking that 'Never was a novel written in more distracting circumstances' (Vailima Edition, Introduction, X: p. 4). She comments that 'the natives [were] on the verge of war' (ibid.) and that Stevenson lived and worked amid the most kaleidoscopic political changes, uncertain as to what moment his personal liberty might be restrained, his every action misconstrued and resented' (ibid.). That Stevenson includes threats to individual liberty and a mass of historical and political content in *Catriona* comes as little surprise given the circumstances in which the book was written. Add to that the fact that 'the New Woman' debate was

at its height, and the result is a text which, like those highlighted by Joseph A. Kestner, namely Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* (1883), George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1881) and Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895), demonstrates what Kestner refers to as 'the force of literature to engage and advance the parameters of the gender debate during the 1880s and 1890s'; a novel which interrogates 'the concept of separate spheres for men and women and [...] patriarchal constructions and attitudes' (Kestner: p. 7).

Viewed in the light of 'the New Woman' debate, it is surely no coincidence that *David Balfour* (renamed *Catriona* when it was published in Britain in book form the following year) was first serialised in the British Girl's magazine *Atalanta* in 1892, since *Atalanta* is the mythical Greek maiden who agreed to marry any man who could outrun her. She is defeated in a race by the deceitful Hippomenes who drops three golden apples which *Atalanta* pauses to pick up. Letley considers Stevenson's placement of *David Balfour* in *Atalanta* odd. However, if one reads *Catriona* as a kind of complex palimpsest, then the *Atalanta* myth becomes central to the meaning of Stevenson's text. Annette Federico has remarked that 'Some modern readers [...] have found it difficult to accept that Stevenson's stories do not have an ideological agenda' (Federico: p. 128). She contends that '[Stevenson's] later commitment to activism only affirms a commitment present in the adventure stories by "R.L.S." written for boys – boys who will inherit and so possibly reform the privileges belonging to men' (ibid.). Contained within the *Atalanta* myth, there is an obvious reference to the Fall which occasions the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (and to which *David Balfour* refers on page 23 of Stevenson's text), there is possibly an assumption about the supposed avarice of woman, and perhaps there is also the implication that a woman's favour can be bought. However, it is interesting that in the Classical myth, man is the tempter who wins his power over woman by deceit, and that this tale basically inverts the respective roles of man and woman in relation to 'original sin'. Since numerous commentators on the Victorian period have noted, as Masao Miyoshi does, that 'border crossings

among genres is one of the important features of Victorian writing' it could be argued that *David Balfour* or *Catriona* is as much a moral fable for girls as it is an adventure story for boys. It is also a moral and political indictment of a Victorian, imperialist, patriarchal society, more than half of whose members are disinherited, disenfranchised and treated as an underclass. In describing *Catriona*, Francis Russell Hart refers to it as an 'argumentative and ironic book' (Hart: p. 160), and he perceptively comments that David Balfour 'has become quite sophisticated; unpolished still, but bravely ethical in a world where simplicity and adolescence are duped and endangered' and where 'a desperate realpolitik' prevails (ibid.). Hart considers the 'more romantic problem' in the book to be *Catriona's* rather than David's, and he highlights the fact that David recognises *Catriona's* problem to be 'an extraordinary and dangerous innocence, which in a corrupt and compromised world isolates and immobilizes her' (ibid.). Stevenson obviously believes that innocence is dangerous because it makes dupes out of those who lack the knowledge to defend themselves. In *Catriona* – as the myth of Atalanta – innocence is not bliss and knowledge is power, which is why feminists of the period saw education to be 'the key to a broader range of freedoms' (Levine: p. 26).

Recalling Fanny Stevenson's account of the circumstances in which *Catriona* was written, David Balfour – that 'tall strong lad of about eighteen [who speaks] like a Lowlander and has no beard' (p. 28) – and all of the women characters in the book live, like Stevenson himself, amid 'kaleidoscopic political changes, uncertain as to whether [their] personal liberty might be restrained, [their] every action misconstrued and resented' (See reference above). Stevenson's text draws numerous parallels between his situation in Samoa and that of women who, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had been agitating for political reforms that would alleviate the injustices they were obliged to live under. In *Catriona*, young people of both sexes are portrayed as being moulded as much by their environments and social conditioning as by hereditary factors⁷, and the laws concerning Scotland and women are put under a microscope. While Robert Kiely may have

thought that Stevenson's text contains 'incidents without serious moral implications, characters without psyches, politics without issue, and history without consequences' (Kiely: p. 96), the personal is political in *Catriona* and this is marked by the shift from the public sphere of Scottish political life in the first part of the novel to the private, domestic sphere in the second. Moreover, the topic of law is introduced early on in Stevenson's text (p. 21) in David Balfour's curious encounter with that 'weird old wife' Auld Merren. Merren is sitting under a gibbet where her 'twa joes' or sweethearts, are hanging for stealing 'twa shillin' Scots frae a wean' (that is, for stealing a small sum of money from a child), and the punishment would seem to be rather harsh considering the sum involved is so insignificant. Although Stevenson appears to be commenting upon the fact that the punishment seems somewhat inordinate in relation to the crime, perhaps thus emphasising the need for legal reform, he may also be referring obliquely to the events that led up to the Act of Union in 1707 when some other apparently insignificant sums changed hands and a nation's children were effectively disinherited. It would be true to say that after the Act of Union, not just the currency of Scotland, but all things Scottish including its history and literature, were effectively 'devalued'. Auld Merren is as enigmatic a character as Jennet Clouston in *Kidnapped*. W. W. Robson states that Jennet's presence in Stevenson's earlier text is 'inexplicable', and he concludes that she must be 'a genre-signal: a sort of musical quotation from the old kind of romance (Calder ed.: p. 94). Both Jennet Clouston and Auld Merren could be interpreted as a kind of genre-signal just as Robson suggests. A good deal of humour, pointed irony, and parody marks much of Stevenson's best works, so the fact that Jennet and Merren recall some of Sir Walter Scott's wilder and more "romantic" creations such as Madge Wildfire or Meg Merrilies (a sort of quotation from the old kind of romance indeed) is probably an intentional ploy on Stevenson's part. However, Jennet is an old woman who has been 'harried out of house and home' by Ebenezer Balfour, the representative of a corrupt and decayed patriarchy, while Merren is described as a 'daft' old woman. Both of these women are portrayed as victims – 'the victims alike of men and nature'.

Apart from Auld Merren and the two, main female protagonists – Catriona Drummond and Barbara Grant – there are a number of other women who, in Linchan's phrase, 'haunt the margins' of Stevenson's novel. These include Alison Hastie, Barbara's two sisters and aunt, the redoubtable Lady Allardyce, 'two-three lasses on the braes' (p. 185), Mrs Gebbie, and the merchant's wives. Moreover, there is a veiled reference to the mythical Helen of Troy in some lines of Alan Ramsay's (p. 39), and some rather more explicit references to the historical personages of Catherine Douglas, Lady Grange and Jean Key,⁸ all of whom were the victims of abuse or abduction at the hands of self-seeking men who sought political or financial gain by their actions. In *Catriona*, James More MacGregor exploits his daughter for financial gain, while Lord Advocate Prestongrange exploits all of the 'young folk' – David Balfour, Catriona Drummond, and his own daughters – for political ends. Indeed, after his experience of politics, David Balfour cynically remarks that, till the end of time young folk (who are not yet used with the duplicity of life and men) will struggle as I did, and will make heroical resolves, and take long risks; and the course of events will push them upon the one side and go on like a marching army' (p. 173). Older women such as Barbara Grant's aunt and Lady Allardyce comply with and are exploited by the patriarchy in that they fulfil the set roles assigned to them. Catriona Drummond is, as Hart claims, a comparative innocent because she has had few positive role models to turn to in her life. However, Barbara Grant is an interesting study in that she has a thorough knowledge of the rules of patriarchy and, in the process of learning them, has discovered that she can bend them to suit her own purposes. David Balfour comments of her 'that there was something rather alarming about the young lady, and papa might be more under her domination than I knew' (p. 130).

Catriona is a book about the clash of cultures – male/female, Highland/Lowland, Scottish/Dutch/Other – in which the innocent and uncorrupted, unconventional and untutored are juxtaposed against the corrupt, sophisticated, conventional, and socially – and politically – aware. Leslie A. Fiedler considers

Catriona to be a 'failure' in terms of its representations of women and sexual love, but he rather seems to miss the point that David and Catriona are immature and sexually-inexperienced, and it is no part of Stevenson's project to depict sexual love between these two characters. Fiedler argues that, prior to *Weir of Hermiston*, Stevenson's women characters are 'sickly or wooden' (Fiedler: p. 88), but Catriona is neither, as her lonely, nocturnal hillside rambles carrying food to her proscribed father and uncles, who were in hiding from redcoat soldiers (p. 184), and her daring leap from a ship into a small boat (p. 191) attests. She is a courageous and athletic young woman. In fact, in that respect, Catriona bears a striking resemblance to Alison Hastie who is referred to only as 'a bold, bonny lass' in *Kidnapped*. Kiely comments of Catriona's dream that she 'should have been a man-child' (p. 79) that this is 'an avowed case of sex envy' (Kiely: p. 96). However, what Catriona wants is to 'have the best of it' just like David and Lieutenant Duncansby and to make 'fine speeches all through just like Mr David Balfour' (p. 79). In other words, she wants the opportunity to act and to be heard. Catriona's history (that is, women's history) is subsumed into the tale of David Balfour 'in twa-three pages' (pp. 184-185), in the same way that the history of Scotland is subsumed into British history but, just as Stevenson could not permit eight years of trouble in Samoa to go unrecorded, neither does he suffer Catriona's history nor the history of Scotland to undergo erasure. By inscribing Scotland and women into the text of *Catriona*, Stevenson effectively writes what might be termed an alternative or counter-history.

The ostensibly conventional ending of Stevenson's novel in the marriage of Catriona Drummond and David Balfour has been the cause of much argument among critics, but Stevenson's views about the representation of women and marriage were arguably just as complex as his views on everything else. In a letter to Sidney Colvin about his projected novel *Sophia Scarlett*, which was to be a regular novel in two parts dealing with the story of three women, Stevenson comments that 'The first start is hard, [...]. The problem is exactly a Balzac one, and I wish I had his fist [...]. Three

people have had it, the real creative brush; Scott [...] – Balzac – and Thackeray in *Vanity Fair*' (Booth and Mehew, 7: pp. 231-232). Having read Thackeray's *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without A Hero* (1847), Stevenson would have been familiar with the following passage:

As his hero and heroine pass the matrimonial barrier, the novelist generally drops the curtain, as if the drama were over then; the doubts and struggles of life ended; as if once landed in the marriage country, all were green and pleasant there; and wife and husband had nothing to do but to link arms together, and wander gently downwards towards old age in happy and perfect fruition (Thackeray: p. 250).

In *Catriona*, 'the drama' and 'the doubts and struggles of life' continue because, as David Balfour tells his children, they 'will be not so very much wiser than their parents' (p. 269). Stevenson's definition of marriage as 'one long conversation chequered by disputes' is well-known, but perhaps not so well-known is his contention that 'in the intervals [between the disputes] the whole material of life is turned over; ideas are struck out and shared; the two persons more and more adapt their notions one to suit the other, and in process of time, they conduct each other into new worlds of thought' (Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits/Other Essays and Reminiscences*: p. 102). Stevenson's 'border-crossings' are not merely confined to questions of genre. Written in Samoa at a turbulent time in that nation's history, *Catriona* turns 'the whole material of life' over (that is, fact and fiction liberally embroidered with Classical, Biblical, and literary allusion), and the reader is conducted 'into new worlds of thought'. As national myth, palimpsest, and counter-history, *Catriona* provides evidence of the fact that Stevenson could imagine a future for a united Scotland, whether inside or outside of a united kingdom of Britain, just as he could envisage roles for men and women other than within the conventional scenario of heterosexual love and marriage. George MacDonald Fraser comments of Barbara Grant that 'she appears

to be still unmarried at the end of the book, and for all her charm, we are not surprised' (Fraser: Introduction, p. vi), but he does not feel similarly obliged to comment on the marital status of the 'immortal' (ibid, p. x) Alan Breck Stuart. Stevenson, however, is aware that duality is an intrinsic element of human language and the human condition, and that 'feminine' terms are just as important as 'masculine' ones. If Alan and David are 'immortal', then so too are Catriona Drummond and Barbara Grant; so too is Scotland itself.

Jennie Calder astutely comments of Stevenson that he 'was fascinated by what he saw as the split personality at the heart of Scottish character and Scottish experience and struggled all his life 'to confront and explain his own background and the country that had shaped him' (Watson and Calder: Introduction to *Catriona*, p. xi). On the other hand, and illustrating Stevenson's contention that 'All life that is not mechanical is spun out of two threads', one cannot but agree with George MacDonald Fraser's final comment in his Introduction to *Catriona*. Fraser states that the text 'shows [Stevenson's] gift for language, his mastery of style, and his genius for capturing human nature, burning as bright as ever' (Fraser: Introduction, p. x). It seems to me that each of these perspectives – the masculine and the feminine – complements the other and is therefore equally valid. Perhaps in time they will lead us 'into new worlds of thought'. As Linehan argues, there is a need to 'revalue' women characters in Stevenson's works. There is a need too, as many scholars currently recognize, to 'revalue' and re-evaluate the history and literature of Scotland. In writing to Henry James on 5th December 1892, Stevenson joked that he was 'an Epick writer with a k to it, but without the necessary genius', and confided that 'you don't know what news is, nor what politics, nor what the life of man, till you see it on so small a scale and with your liberty on the board for stake. I would not have missed it for much' (Booth and Mehew, 7: p. 449). Stevenson's hard-won insights make *Catriona* one of his most powerful and intriguing novels. As Fiedler remarks, 'It makes a difference [...] whether one thinks of the World Across the Border as Faerie or Frontier, fantasy or history'.

End Notes

1. Paul Maixner's *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London, Boston & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) provides a representative sample of contemporary reviews.
2. See Linehan's article 'Revaluing Women and Marriage in Robert Louis Stevenson's Short Fiction' which appears in *English Literature in Transition*, Volume 40 No.134-59.
3. Re: MacDiarmid, Muir, Craig, Daiches, Naim, McCrone, Crawford and others for the Scottish context, and the work of Buckley, Briggs, Bergonzi, Miyoshi, Sanders, Sutherland, Coote and others for the Victorian context.
4. All textual references are to Watson and Calder's Canongate Classics Edition of Stevenson's *Catriona* (page numbers included in the text). See 'List of Works Cited'.
5. See 'A Note on Realism' in *Letters and Miscellanies of Robert Louis Stevenson: Sketches, Criticisms, etc.* Volume XXII (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 271.
6. Consult Letley's Introduction to *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* in the World's Classics edition of Stevenson's texts, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. vii-xxvii, particularly p. xii, p. xix, and p. xx.
7. Stephen Arata provides a good summary of the range and scope of the heredity versus environment debate in 'Strange Cases, common fates: degeneration and fiction in the Victorian fin-de-siecle' in *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin-de-Siecle*, pp. 22-27.
8. Aside from available histories of Scotland, consult Ian Galbraith's invaluable notes in the Konemann Classic Edition of *Catriona*, printed in Hungary in 1996, for further information. See also *Virgins and Viragos: A History of Women in Scotland from 1080 to 1980* by Rosalind K. Marshall (London: Collins, 1983) and Sir Walter Scott's Introduction to *Rob Roy*.
9. See *Cross the Border - Close the Gap* by Leslie A. Fiedler (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1972), p. 72

‘Faithful to his Map’: Profit and Desire in
Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*
Oliver S. Buckton

In August 1894, four months before his death, Robert Louis Stevenson – by now one of the world’s most famous authors – published an article entitled ‘My First Book’ offering advice to young writers on the best route to literary success. The ‘first book’ of the essay’s title is, of course, *Treasure Island*. Wendy R. Katz points out that this essay offers ‘RLS’s reconstruction of events surrounding the text’ in which the ‘crucial elements of map, island, sailing ship and pirate are all part of RLS’s retrospective account of his first book’ (p. xix). Yet, while Katz does not contest Stevenson’s curious designation of *Treasure Island* as ‘my first book,’ it is remarkable how the full title of the essay: ‘My First Book: *Treasure Island*’ discreetly erases six previously published works from his *curriculum vitae*. In fact, Stevenson’s first published book was *An Inland Voyage* (1878), an account of his canoe trip along the canals and waterways of France and Belgium. This was immediately followed by a study of the history and culture of his native town, *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes* (1878), and the following year Stevenson published another travel narrative, *Travels with A Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879). One explanation for the remarkable erasure of his literary origins as a travel-writer in ‘My First Book’ can be found in Stevenson’s disclaimer: ‘I am not a novelist alone. But I am well aware that my paymaster, the Great Public, regards what else I have written with indifference, if not aversion; if it call upon me at all, it calls on me in the familiar and indelible character; and when I am asked to talk of my first book, no question in the world but what is meant is my first novel’ (p. 277). If the public is his ‘master’ then he is the obedient servant – indeed the hired hand – who recognizes the economic necessity of giving the public what it wants.¹ Ironically, Stevenson had turned to travel writing at the

beginning of his career specifically to free himself from financial dependence upon his father.²

Throughout this late essay, in fact, Stevenson's recollections of his early literary labours are inextricably intertwined with the profit-motive: his initial pleasure in writing *Treasure Island* – described by Stevenson as the 'funds of entertainment' (p. 279) derived from characters such as John Silver – becomes inseparable from the pecuniary funds he hoped to realize with a successful transition from travel-writing to fiction. The turning point in the conception of his first novel, Stevenson makes clear, was the drawing of the imaginary map. 'I made the map of an Island; It was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression' (My First Book: p. 279). Moreover, it is only after the map has been drawn that 'the future character of the book began to appear there visibly among Imaginary woods' (p. 279). The map serves as an inspiration for the creation of the novel and, thus, lies at the origin of *Treasure Island* itself – as Stevenson states 'I had written it up to the map. The map was the chief part of my plot' (p. 282) – and thus serves as a guide both to the buried treasure in the story and to literary success itself. Indeed, Stevenson concludes his essay with this advice to the young writer: 'it is my contention – my superstition, if you like – that who is faithful to his map, and consults it, and draws from it his inspiration, daily and hourly, gains positive support, and not mere negative immunity from accident' (p. 283).

The profitable results of this fidelity to the map are recollected in a particularly telling passage, where Stevenson writes of abandoning his collaboration with his wife Fanny on 'a joint volume of bogie stories' (p. 278) for a new kind of collaboration with his stepson Lloyd Osbourne, for whom the romance is designed. Realizing, in the midst of writing *Treasure Island*, that he had for the first time produced a valuable literary commodity, Stevenson welcomes Alexander Japp as a visitor '*ex machina*' (p. 281) who 'carried away the manuscript in his portmanteau' (p. 281) and arranged for its publication in *Young Folks*. Japp's role

in guiding Stevenson to a new audience is crucial in the author's creation of his first commodity-text.

The commodity-text, according N.N. Feltes's valuable study *The Mode of Production of Victorian Novels*, should not be confused with the category of 'best seller' which 'simply indicates value accrued through distribution and exchange, rather than through the production process' (pp. 9-10). Nor can the notion of writing to a formula, for a pre-fabricated audience, accommodate the concept of the commodity-text, for Feltes maintains 'whereas a formula novel takes its value from something reduced and mechanical, and prior to its production, a commodity-text takes its value from the labor power ("imagination") expended in the very process of interpellation' (p. 9). The key to the commodity-text is that, rather than appealing to a pre-existing audience, it produces – or interpellates – its own readership, and this work of interpellation is the 'labor' the text performs.³ Within this capitalist mode of production, the map functioned as what Benedict Anderson has termed a 'logo map' which 'could be wholly detached from its geographic context' and thus 'entered an infinitely reproducible series' (p. 175). In this case, the map was both an indicator of the commodity-status of *Treasure Island* – it became, in effect, the logo for the book and 'penetrated deep into the popular imagination' (p. 175) – and a trace of Stevenson's earlier travel-writings: unprofitable journeys from which he had nevertheless learned the importance – and marketability – of location, adventure, and the quest for profit.

The 'imaginary' journey in *Treasure Island*, made by RLS's fictional protagonist Jim Hawkins, is at once materialistic, collective, and carefully-mapped. This new dependence on the map – no longer as a childish plaything but as an essential guide to success – points to a dramatic contrast between the unstructured journeys of the travel narratives, and the disciplined, profit-driven venture of Jim Hawkins, Dr Livesay and Squire Trelawney in *Treasure Island*. A key to Stevenson's realization of the profit from his travels was the interpellation of a new audience of 'boy,' the readers of *Young Folks*. Yet this group also included adult readers

– important literary allies such as W.E. Henley, Andrew Lang, and Edmund Gosse – who were willing to revert to boyhood, thereby joining a homosocial coterie through the guise of ‘romance’. Crucial to this process, the map gives direction both to Stevenson’s career in fiction and to Jim’s journey to a carefully-concealed ‘treasure’: a new audience of ‘boys’.

Identifying his stepson Lloyd as the original audience of *Treasure Island*, Stevenson writes in ‘My First Book’ of a surprising addition to this privileged circle: ‘I had counted on one boy, I found I had two in my audience. My father caught fire at once with all the romance and childishness of his original nature’ (p. 280). Thus, from its very inception the power of *Treasure Island* to interpellate, indeed to seduce, adult males (including the stern patriarch, Thomas Stevenson), by appealing to the ‘childishness’ of their ‘nature’ is crucial to its success. The potent fantasy-appeal of the map for adult men is again vividly captured by Henley’s vignette of one Professor Beesley, discovered by his family while secreted in his study, ‘his history books thrown by [...] his Herbert Spencer all forgotten, sunk to the throat in ‘Treasure Island’. He had a magnifier at his eye, and through that magnifier he was (historian-like) a-studying the map of Captain Flint’ (Maixner: p. 142). The reference to the studious Beesley absorbed in the perusal of the map discloses the key to the romance’s success in the secret cartographical pleasure of the text in this Victorian ‘study’.⁴

Martin Green has commented on the importance of the map in *Treasure Island* to ‘changing the conventions of adventure’: ‘the story began with the drawing of the map and [...] it was told to his stepson, with his father’s collaboration. It is palpably the fantasy of men-being-boys’ (p. 228). While Green explores the ideological force of this fantasy for the expansion of empire, he does not emphasize its homoerotic implications. The map, however, is not only a selling point for readers, but becomes an object of desire for characters within the narrative – the pursuit of which involves a flagrant interest in or invasion of other male bodies. Jim discovers the map while searching Billy Bones’ chest with his mother, for payment of the dead pirate’s bill. Yet Jim can

only gain access to this chest by violating Bones's corpse. While Mrs Hawkins asks with distaste, 'who's to touch it I should like to know' (p. 31). Jim, despite professing 'a strong repugnance,' proves eager: 'I tore open his shirt at the neck, and there, sure enough, hanging to a bit of tarry string [...] we found the key' (p. 31). The last object they remove is an 'oilskin packet' which Jim takes to 'square the account'. Yet the immediate outcome is not to square but the squire, as Jim immediately proceeds to Trelawney's house. Here the bundle that Jim has excitedly snatched from the dead man's chest, becomes an object of desire for the older men, a desire then displaced onto Jim's body: 'The doctor looked it all over as if his fingers were itching to open it' (p. 41). So aroused is the doctor's interest in the contents of Jim's 'packet' that he immediately announces his intention 'to keep Jim Hawkins here to sleep at my house' (p. 41).

Both men revert to boyish pleasure under the influence of the map, and fantasize about immeasurable wealth: Jim narrates that 'brief as it was, and, to me incomprehensible, it filled the squire and Dr Livesey with delight. "'Livesey"' said the squire, "you will give up this wretched practice at once. Tomorrow I start for Bristol [...]. We'll have favourable winds, a quick passage, and not the least difficulty in finding the spot, and money to eat – to roll in – to play duck and drake with ever after'" (p. 44).

It is perhaps not surprising that Jim should confuse this eroticised masculine interest in the map with a desire for himself. Enchanted by the attentions of John Silver, for example, Jim declares him 'the most interesting companion' (p. 55); yet is soon jealous as Silver's attentions are redirected to another 'young seaman': 'You may imagine how I felt when I heard this abominable old rogue addressing another in the very same words of flattery as he had used to myself' (p. 68). Seeking to attract the new boy to a life of piracy, Silver admits, 'I've [...] never denied myself o' nothing heart desires' (p. 68). Yet what Silver's heart 'desires' is neither Jim nor his rival, but the map to which both boys might offer access: as when Captain Smollett produces a map 'Long John's eyes burned in his head as he took the chart;

but by the fresh look of the paper, I knew he was doomed to disappointment. This was not the map we found in Billy Bones's chest, but an accurate copy' (p. 74). Even in the presence of this copy, however, Silver experiences a rejuvenation as he looks at the island – 'You'll bathe, and you'll climb trees, and you'll hunt goats you will [...]. Why it makes me young again. I was going to forget my timber leg. It's a pleasant thing to be young [...]' (p. 74). Like many readers of the novel, Silver is able to indulge the fantasy of 'men being boys' – though only in the presence of one who, he later says, 'is the picter of my own self when I was young and handsome' (p. 168).

Stevenson treasured the map as the key to attracting a homosocial clique of readers. Hence, what distinguished his new project is its strictly limited appeal to a specialized audience or 'class' of readers, a choice that in turn dictates the style of the work: 'It was to be a story for boys; no need of psychology or fine writing. And I had a boy at hand to be a touchstone. Women were excluded' (My First Book: p. 279). This abrupt dismissal of 'women' from the scene of the fiction is a declaration of Stevenson's new fictional manifesto and foreshadows the extent to which women are excluded from (or at least marginalized in) many of his fictional ventures. The woman – at least, the invading 'mother' – is seen as a threat to the romance of the boyish collaboration with Lloyd, and so must be 'excluded' from it.⁵ Stevenson's sexual passion for his wife is here displaced by this quasi-erotic fascination for maps: 'I am told there are people who do not care for maps, and find it hard to believe. The names, the shapes of the woodlands, the courses of the roads and rivers, the prehistoric footsteps of man still distinctly traceable [...] here is an inexhaustible fund of interest *for any man* with eyes to see' (p. 279, emphasis added). Stevenson inevitably foregrounds the gender-specific appeal of the work for his imaginary community of map-obsessed men – precisely the audience interpellated by Stevenson's commodity-text – inspiring both admiration and emulation in fellow-writers such as Henley, Haggard, Lang, and Kipling. Marking the location of an imaginary boundary separating the

domestic domain of women – as wives, mothers, readers – from the external spaces of male empire and adventure, the map of this ‘romance’ inevitably takes on a specifically masculine, indeed homoerotic significance.⁶

Yet membership of this community entailed a willingness to surrender to the childish pleasures of treasure hunting. The exclusivity of this imagined community founded on boyhood, romantic adventure, and profit is again foregrounded in 1884, when, Henry James’s influential paper praises ‘the delightful story of *Treasure Island*’ because ‘it appears to me to have succeeded wonderfully in what it attempts’ (p. 209), while also criticizing the story’s lack of realism, pointing out that ‘I have been a child, but I have never been on a quest for buried treasure’ (p. 209). In his famous rejoinder, ‘A Humble Remonstrance,’ Stevenson described James’s statement as a ‘wilful paradox; for if he has never been on a quest for buried treasure, it can be demonstrated that he has never been a child’ (p. 218). Stevenson identifies the fantasy of such a quest as the defining fact of childhood, a literary map from which James is thenceforth barred: ‘There never was a child (unless Master James) but has hunted gold, and been a pirate, and a military commander, and a bandit in the mountains’ (p. 218). James’ lack of a boyhood disqualifies him, in Stevenson’s account, from the community of men committed to romance, those who, he relates, ‘have ardently desired and fondly imagined the details of such a life in youthful daydreams’ (p. 218). Stevenson admits that he has calculatedly exploited these ‘daydreams’ of boys and childlike men for profit: ‘the author, counting upon that, and well aware (cunning and low-minded man!) that this class of interest, having been frequently treated, finds a readily accessible and beaten road to the sympathies of the reader, addressed himself throughout to the building up and circumstantiation of this boyish dream’ (pp. 218–19).

Stevenson’s repackaging of the narrative of journey for the ‘boy’ reader rested on his success in ‘both accepting and changing the conventions of adventure’ (Green: p. 228), by writing a book that was a recycling of his own rejected travel writings. Jacqueline

Rose argues that the breakthrough of *Treasure Island* is a technical one, involving the adaptation of travel writing for a reader interested in 'colonialist venture': '*Treasure Island* is remarkable for the way it perfects this form for the child reader [...] the way that it conceals the slide between nature study and suspense.' (p. 80). Rose's is over-literal in identifying the implicitly naive 'child reader' as the target of this technique. Indeed, *Treasure Island* is a work that provoked and produced desire in its adult male readers, a desire that the text re-routed from potentially subversive masculine desire towards the 'innocent' object of colonial venture and buried treasure. Stevenson – who wrote in 'A Note on Realism' that the romancer 'must [...] suppress much and omit more' (p. 267) – produces 'romance' as an art of sublimation, its desire being 'buried' with the treasure and subsequently excavated by its adult male readers posing as boys, or its boy readers posing as pirate-adventurers. Indeed, the novel's homoerotic investment in the map and treasure is blatant throughout, its divestment from the 'moral purity' ethos of childhood all-but-absolute. The treasure itself though referred to as 'hidden' and 'buried' (p. 42), is declared at the outset of the narrative as having already been found – 'there is still treasure not yet lifted' (p. 11). Hence, as the pirates discover when their search party stumbles upon 'a great excavation, not very recent' (p. 197) the promise of 'discovering' the treasure has always been foreclosed. The map, despite being a highly-charged object of desire, proves quite useless as a guide to the treasure. Yet the secret of the treasure's location cannot be disclosed because, as Livesay tells Silver, 'it's not my secret, you see' (p. 185).

Stevenson was confident of profiting from his powers of stirring desire in 'boy' readers, writing Henley: 'I believe there's more coin in it than in any amount of crawlers [...]. If this don't fetch the kids, why, they have gone rotten since my day' (Maixner: p. 124). What would 'fetch the kids,' among other things, is that the narrator is 'one of them': as Green observes, 'what is new about it [*Treasure Island*] in a generic way is that a boy plays the leading part and tells the story' (*Dreams*: p. 228). This Stevenson's own ability to revert to boyhood, in constructing his narrator, is part of

his resolution that 'I'll make this boy's business pay' (Maixner: p. 125). In 'A Humble Remonstrance,' Stevenson describes 'himself [as] more or less grown up' (p. 219) and it appears that the adoption of this persona, 'the boyish man', author of boys books for men, is a carefully-calculated move to exploit a growing market in fiction. Stevenson's public persona, increasingly associated with his adventure stories, also featured a boyish love of exploration and demonstrated 'the compulsion [...] to live out something of an adventure himself' (Green: p. 228).

However, the boyhood romance ends not with a dream but a nightmare, as the desired destination promised by the map becomes the last place on earth one wishes to return to. Disillusion with the outcome of the journey is one feature that carries over from the travel narratives, as Jim finally confesses that 'Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island; and the worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts, or start upright in bed, with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: "Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!"' (p. 208). The acquisition of profit, which has been the sole purpose of travel, now makes further travel unnecessary and, in Jim's case, abhorrent. By May 1883 Stevenson was celebrating the sale of *Treasure Island* to Cassel's in language worthy of Squire Trelawney himself: 'There has been offered for *Treasure Island* – how much, do you suppose? [...] A hundred pounds, all alive oh! A hundred jingling, tingling, golden, minted quid. Is not this wonderful?' (*Letters*: pp. 119-20). Abandoning his collaboration with Fanny to write a story that excludes women, Stevenson substitutes being 'faithful to his map' for marital fidelity. Yet this assertion of loyalty is firmly rooted in commercial self-interest, the map offering a 'mine of suggestion'. As another source of profit, the 'mine' of boy readers proves far from exhausted: as with the famous Island itself, there is 'still treasure not yet lifted' (p. 11).⁷

End Notes

1. Stevenson writes with disdain of these early literary efforts in 'My First Book,' 'I had written little books and little essays and short stories; and had got patted on the back and paid for them – though not enough to live upon' (p. 277). Hence, the works that have not been profitable enough 'to live upon' are simply discarded from the record.
2. As Paul Maixner notes, 'Accounts of travel were then in vogue and judged against other examples these volumes were clearly superior, though they did not rank high in Stevenson's own opinion, having been written according to him chiefly because they could be turned out easily and might be profitable' (p. 8). In actuality, they earned little for him although the reviews were generally favourable. Hence, the travel narratives are retrospectively dismissed as wasteful digressions, and included among 'the succession of defeats [that] lasted unbroken till I was thirty-one' (My First Book: p. 277).
3. Feltes insists that the actual format of the work is less significant than this (capitalist) mode of production and extraction of surplus value: 'whether the commodity-text is to take the particular form of a series of books, a magazine serial, or a part-issue novel, series production, by allowing the bourgeois audience's ideological engagement to be sensed and expanded, allows as well the extraction of ever greater surplus value from the very production (or "creative") process itself' (p. 9).
4. So important was the map for interpellating the adult reader as boy, that when H. Rider Haggard wrote *King Solomon's Mines* in 1885 – a work produced in direct competition with *Treasure Island* and also published by Cassells – he not only dedicated the book 'To all the big and little boys who read it' (p. 1), but also included a map leading to the treasure, in this case the diamond mines of King Solomon (p. 27).
5. As Koestenbaum writes, 'Male writers revered Stevenson's "books for boys" because they omitted women. Henry James, in particular, celebrated the absence of women from Stevenson's

fiction' and 'claimed that Stevenson had "given to the world the romance of boyhood"' (p. 36). Of the collaboration with his stepson Lloyd, Koestenbaum writes, 'Stevenson and his stepson share a romance of boyhood involving a map to a fictional country' (Shadow: p. 41).

6. Reviews of *Treasure Island* commented on the novel's likely appeal to men as well as to boys. Henley writes that 'Primarily it is a book for boys [...]. But it is a book for boys which will be delightful to all grown men who have the sentiment of treasure-hunting and are touched with the true spirit of the Spanish Main' (Maixner: p. 132). Lang, asking, 'will *Treasure Island* be as popular with boys as it is sure to be with men who retain something of the boy?' has no hesitation answering in the affirmative (p. 138).

7. Interestingly, the reviews of *Treasure Island* were not fully supportive of Stevenson's transition to boys' author. Publicly judging that Stevenson's fiction was 'even stronger than [his] humorous and sentimental journeying' (Maixner: p. 139), Lang went on to urge that, 'After this romance for boys he must give us a novel for men and women' (Maixner: p. 139). Similarly, the reviewer for *The Graphic*, who found 'passages in this romance surpassing in power anything that Mr Stevenson has yet done' concluded by stating, 'Yet we want no more boys' books from Mr Stevenson' (p. 141).

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More Than a Library: the Ethnographic Potential of Stevenson's South Seas Writing.

Liam Connell

The concern of this paper is with Stevenson's South Sea's writing and the use that has been made of this writing as ethnographic material by commentators, critics, and, it is tentatively suggested, the common reader. Given the diversity of Stevenson's writing about the Pacific, its use in this way is not wholly surprising, especially in the case of the amorphous *In the South Seas*. Literary critics have noted the generic indeterminacy of these 'letters' (Hillier, 1988; Menikoff, 1992) but in many ways they resemble much of the writing about other cultures written by amateur observers during the late Victorian period. Stevenson himself was familiar with the work of the missionary Robert Codrington on *The Melanesians*, who had attended lectures by Tylor at Oxford and whose writing is now regarded as typical of ethnographic material of the period (Codrington, 1891; Stevenson, 1998: p. 28; Stocking, 1992: p. 18). Much like Stevenson's South Sea 'letters,' Codrington's book offers 'no unified interpretive hypothesis' and is comprised of a series of 'low-level generalizations and the amassing of an eclectic range of information' (Clifford, 1988: p. 27). Stevenson's technique of arranging diachronic details around a single topic mirrors Codrington's work, which provides comparative information on a given topic for all of the island groups of 'Melanesia'. Despite British anthropology's attempts, from the mid-1880s, to improve the nature of the material that it relied upon – seeking to direct the nature of enquiry and eschewing explicitly fictional texts – it would be some fifty years before the trained field-worker became the established source of ethnography. In the 1890s it was highly conventional for anthropologists who had never left the metropole to use writing such as Stevenson's *In the South Seas* as the chief evidence supporting anthropological conjecture. In this

context, it comes as no surprise to find Stevenson's friend, Andrew Lang, citing Stevenson's 'letters' as evidence to support his own position in regard of 'tapu' in *Magic and Religion* (Lang, 1901: p. 268). Indeed, as Robert Crawford has hinted (Crawford, 1992: p. 156), Stevenson's friendship with Lang may prove a useful route into understanding his writing and this is particularly true of *In the South Seas*. Lang provided one of the most complete versions of the work for the Swanston edition of the *Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Stevenson, 1912a; Swearingen 1980: p. 138) and *In the South Seas* displays all the ambivalence contained within Lang's shift from Tylorian evolutionary-anthropology to a more modern, relativist, conception of human mentality (Stocking, 1995: pp. 50-63).

It may be this ambivalence that produced what is now taken for generic uncertainty and it is useful to think of Stevenson as engaged in a dialogue with the disciplinary limits of anthropology at that time. *In the South Seas* frequently questions the means of acquiring evidence about Pacific cultures used by other writers, comparing his own experience with that documented elsewhere, and seeking authority for his own native informants – even if he is sometimes overly credulous about the information he receives. Interestingly, in hinting at Lang's influence on his thinking about Pacific cultures, Stevenson appears to offer a mild rebuke of the Victorian anthropologist's disinclination for travel. Noting the assistance that 'the effigies of Mr. Andrew Lang' provided him in communicating with the Marquesans, Stevenson comments that:

[here] is a place for him to go when he shall be weary of Middlesex and Homer. (Stevenson, 1998: pp. 11-12)

Stevenson seems to be urging the Victorian anthropologist into the field in a particularly modern way and, in so doing, effectively stakes a claim for the value of his own account. This claim was one that Stevenson was to make quite explicitly in a letter to Charles Baxter after less than two months among the Pacific islands:

I shall have a fine book of travels, I feel sure; and will tell you more of the South Seas after very few months than any other writer has done – except Herman Melville perhaps. (Stevenson, 1912b)

It is not immediately clear whether Stevenson is parading his ability as a writer or his sensitivity as an observer but the claim that he is capable of providing greater insight into Pacific culture than any other writer is virtually categorical. It may be this certainty which distinguishes Stevenson's ethnography from other contemporaneous examples, and it should be remembered that when he made the statement Stevenson had no knowledge of the local languages. Indeed, despite an active interest in the structures of the languages he encountered, Stevenson's linguistic competence remained limited during the period that he wrote *In the South Seas*. This is significant, since Victorian anthropology's preference for amateur accounts such as Stevenson's depended to a large extent on the linguistic knowledge that these resident-informants possessed (Clifford, 1988: p. 26, p. 27). Stevenson's lack of linguistic expertise would have undermined the value of *In the South Seas* for late-Victorian anthropology. However, it also appears to anticipate modern fieldwork-anthropology's belief that the ethnographer 'could efficiently "use" native languages without "mastering" them' (Clifford, 1988, pp. 30-31). Notably, although in his first encounter with Pacific islanders Stevenson is concerned that 'Not one soul aboard the *Casco* ...knew, except by accident, one word of any of the island tongues' (Stevenson, 1998: p. 6), he is quick to point out, at the start of the next letter, that 'the impediment of tongues was one that [he] particularly over-estimated', the local languages being 'easy to smatter' (Stevenson, 1998: p. 10).

This combination of a lack of linguistic ability and his insistence that his account of the South Seas is authoritative produces one of the most enlightening glimpses of the core assumptions behind *In the South Seas*. In a frequently cited passage Stevenson recommends a sort of *quid pro quo* where the traveller offers the

indigenous population stories from his or her own culture in order to encourage them to respond with their own tales in return.

I hit upon a means of communication which I recommend to travellers. When I desired any detail of savage custom, or of superstitious belief, I cast back in the story of my fathers, and fished for what I wanted with some trait of equal barbarism: Michael Scott, Lord Derwentwater's head, the second-sight, the Water Kelpie – each of these I have found to be a killing bait; the black bull's head of Stirling procured me the legend of Rahero; and what I knew of the Cluny Macphersons, or the Appin Stewarts, enabled me to learn, and helped me to understand, about the Tevas of Tahiti. The native was no longer ashamed, his sense of kinship grew warmer, and his lips were opened. It is this sense of kinship that the traveller must rouse and share. (Stevenson, 1998: p. 13)

The emphasis upon 'kinship' at the end of this passage is what most attracts critics to it, and it is often cited as proof of Stevenson's identification of affinities between Pacific culture and the Scottish Highlands: although the suggestion that the islanders should be 'ashamed' of these stories is never fully interrogated. Robert Hillier simply glosses Stevenson's account, stressing his 'eagerness to tell them sagas of the Scottish Highlands' (Hillier, 1987: p. 32). Similarly, Rod Edmond identifies a 'series of parallels between Marqueasan and Scottish Highlands culture' as 'Stevenson's most frequent method of settling the unease provoked by strangeness' (Edmond, 1997: p. 163). Edmond remarks of this particular instance that:

In this way the problem of communication which had so frustrated Stevenson on his arrival is partly overcome. (p. 164)

While it needs noting that Stevenson initial frustration is more linguistic than cultural, it seems more important to acknowledge that Stevenson's interpretation of the responses he received gives them a status that may not have been intended by his informants. Although he implies a fair exchange of his stories for theirs, the significance that is attached to these stories is not equal. Bluntly, he offers stories, which he explicitly identifies as historical, in return for what he takes to be 'custom' or firmly held 'belief'. Not only does his 'method', if we may call it that, make an equation between a Pacific present with a Scottish (and barbarous) past, but it also seems to rely upon a collapse of the fictional with the factual: Stevenson treats the islanders' stories as literal expressions of local culture.

For literary critics there may be nothing contentious about this, especially given the prominent assumption of a corollary between the literary and culture in general within literary studies. Nevertheless, the temptation to interpret fiction as ethnography must be tempered by a generous acknowledgement of the imaginative potential of fictional texts.¹ Stevenson's willingness to interpret the stories that he was told as informative about the nature of Pacific culture seems to derive from two sources. In the first instance it is a consequence of his earnest desire to testify to the veracity of his accounts, to present himself as a reliable witness to the South Seas and a singularly gifted chronicler of what he saw there. But, perhaps more importantly, it appears to be born of a profound belief in the revelatory potential of fiction. Both these impulses are perfectly combined in Stevenson's own estimate of his novella, *The Beach of Falesá*, of which he most famously wrote that it was the 'first realistic South Sea story', through which it was possible to 'know more about the South Seas ...than if you had read a library' (Stevenson, 1912b, XXV: p. 103). In his 1883 'Note on Realism' Stevenson distinguishes between the 'tendency' towards 'the extreme of detail', which for him characterises realism, and 'the fundamental truth' that is arrived at by other means (Stevenson, 1912c), and his insistence on the 'realistic' quality of *The Beach of Falesá* seems to be based upon his having captured the 'details' of

Pacific life (Stevenson, 1912b, XXV: p. 103). This was a point he had already made in an early reference to the story when he told Colvin that it was 'really good, well fed with facts [and] true to the manners' (Stevenson, 1912b, XXV: p. 76). In light of this it is not wholly surprising that critical commentators have been inclined to read Stevenson's fiction as ethnographic material about the Pacific region, effectively imitating Stevenson's collapsing of fact and fiction in relation to the stories that he heard in the Pacific islands. The main bulk of what follows comprises a consideration of the serial publication of *The Beach of Falesá* as 'Uma: or the Beach of Falesá (Being the Narrative of a South-Sea Trader)' in the *Illustrated London News* (ILN) in an effort to identify why this might have happened (Stevenson, 1892b). It suggests that the material surrounding Stevenson's story would have encouraged its readers to interpret *The Beach of Falesá* as ethnographic material which allowed its incorporation into the imperial propaganda that was the mainstay of the ILN. Finally, this interpretation is supported by a demonstration of how Stevenson's biographers have similarly read 'The Bottle Imp', allowing them to use it as the basis for unsubstantiated anthropological judgements about non-European cultures.

The ethnographic potential of *Uma: or the Beach of Falesá*.

Although the critical response to *Island Nights' Entertainments* was mixed, contemporaneous reviews both emphasised the realistic portrayal of the south Pacific and Stevenson's growth as writer due to his travels in the region (Maixner, 1981: pp. 408-422). Undoubtedly, the fact that Stevenson persistently used his physical presence in the Pacific to lend authority to his accounts would have encouraged these types of readings, and reviews of *Island Nights' Entertainments* often made reference to Stevenson's polemical writing from the Pacific. Of course, the literal presence of Victorian authors in the colonial locations from which they wrote was commonplace and it seems likely that part of the pleasure gained from reading works by writers such as Kipling, Henty,

Haggard and Stevenson derived from the conviction that their work bore witness to British imperial possessions: as Phillips has argued, adventure fiction imaginatively mapped the empty spaces of Empire (Phillips, 1997: p. 13). It has already been argued that, wittingly or otherwise, Stevenson's letters home supported such a belief and that he understood his fictional work, just as much as his ethnography, to have an instructive element. Certainly his frequent correspondence with the *Times* between 1889 and 1894 on German conduct in Samoa constantly asserted his position as an authoritative witness (Swearingen, 1980: pp. 128-29). This is often implicit but, in the case of the letter dated 22 June 1892, published in the *Times* on 23 July, Stevenson vigorously defends himself against the accusation of 'a New Zealand paper' that if the 'curious conspiracy which Mr Stevenson appears to have unearthed... had any real existence... [it] would be known to everybody on the island' (Stevenson, 1892a). Yet even without access to Stevenson's letters it is possible to see how the publication of his fictional material similarly encouraged his Victorian readers to interpret it as containing factual, ethnographic, information about the South Seas. The publication of 'Uma' in the *ILN* can be seen to emphasise meanings for the text that have not been generally recognised by surrounding the text with material more in tune with the dominant mode of imperial propaganda.

The most notable difference between the serial publication and the version of *The Beach of Falesá* that is now most frequently available are the illustrations by Gordon Browne which were also used in the 1893 edition of *Island Nights' Entertainments* (Stevenson, 1893). Arguably, these illustrations contributed to the censorship of Stevenson's story as described by Barry Menikoff in his edition of *The Beach of Falesá* (Menikoff, 1984). Given the fact that in the nineteenth century physiological features such as the shape of the skull were as significant as chromatic gradients as indicators of race (Cowling, 1989: p. 55; Street, 1975: pp. 50-55), Uma is depicted as relatively Caucasian despite her exotic dress and the darkness of her skin. If Mary Cowling is correct to argue that painted figures in the Victorian era were composed

and read within the prevalent assumptions of physiognomy and phrenology, then Browne's illustrations may be felt to soften the impact of the story's miscegenation by gently erasing, or at least diminishing, Uma's racial difference. This is most evident in the depiction of her in the final instalment, published on 6 August 1892, where Uma is shown collapsing after having been shot by Case. Unlike the earlier images and in contradiction of the textual insistence that she had 'nothing on but her kilt,' which is retained, she is now fully clothed in a manner resembling Greco-Roman dress (Stevenson, 1892b: pp. 169-170). The decision to clothe Uma in this instance may be due to the parabola of her fall, with the publishers being unwilling to depict the naked form in such arched activity. However, it is possible that her newly clothed status may have been intended to signal Wiltshire's civilising influence upon the savage native, since they are now legitimately married. Certainly, one effect of this picture is to further erase the markers of racial difference and so undermine Stevenson's critique of colonial activity.

Stevenson was not entirely happy with the illustrations, particularly those of Uma (Swearingen, 1980: p. 155), but if we are to read this as a resistance to censorship it is important to be aware of the extent to which Stevenson's own text undoes the controversy surrounding miscegenation by subtly depicting Uma as racially superior. The Victorian reader of *The Beach of Falesá* would have been well aware of the implications of Wiltshire's first description of Uma's 'long face' and 'high forehead' (Stevenson, 1996: p. 7). Despite the declining significance of physiognomy, the distinction between 'the white or Caucasian race, identified as markedly orthognathous' – that is, displaying a large cranium – and 'the prognathous "savage" races' – that is, with a prominent jaw and receding forehead – was still well established in the late nineteenth century (Cowling, 1989: p. 60). It is highly likely that Victorian readers of Stevenson's novella would have immediately understood the description of Uma's skull as a signal of her superior intellect and, however unconsciously, would have associated this with the white 'race'.² Such a reading would have been consistent

with a nineteenth century understanding of Polynesian societies, which were characterised by the attractiveness of their women and their relative proximity to European 'civilisation' in comparison with neighbouring Melanesian island-groups (Thomas, 1989). If Browne's illustrations undermine the novella's challenging engagement with miscegenation, it must also be recognised that he took his cue from textual prompts in Stevenson's original.

The illustrations for the serial publication of 'Uma' have an additional significance in so far as they harmonise Stevenson's story within the general style of the *ILN*. This is achieved effectively and, due to the manner in which discrete items are set out on the page, results in some blurring of Stevenson's story with the surrounding material: in particular, the positioning of illustrations often sees different items merging with one another typographically. On 2 July 1892 for example, the first instalment of 'Uma' ends at the bottom of column two on page 11 and is followed in column three by an interview with 'Prince Bismark At Friedrichsruh'. An illustration relating to this item, of Bismark with 'Emperor William I', is positioned in the centre of the page, breaking column two and indenting column one. Although this illustration is a retouched photograph, a technique commonly used in the *ILN* at this time but which distinguishes it from the illustrations of Stevenson's story, the fact that it occupies the space allocated to Stevenson's story makes it difficult to read 'Uma' in isolation from the surrounding material. While it is reasonable to suppose that the Victorian reader would be more adept at *reading* the layout of this magazine, it still seems likely that the relatively smooth transition from Stevenson's story into other items would have led them to connect Stevenson's story to the general imperial ethos espoused in the magazine. Additionally, an inattentive reader of Stevenson's story would gain a more immediate impression of it from the illustrations than the text and, if John Mackenzie is correct in asserting that the *ILN* was seen by large numbers of people who were probably only able to *read* the illustrations (MacKenzie, 1985: p. 21), then this effect would be exaggerated.

The contribution of the *ILN* to the propaganda of empire is well documented and the assimilation of Stevenson's writing into its general content must be seen as having a transforming effect upon the meaning of his text. As a consequence of the 1892 General Election the issues of the *ILN* in which 'Uma' appeared pay less attention to colonial matters than one would usually expect. Nevertheless such territories still have a prominent presence within its pages. For instance, on 2 July the regular column, 'Hampshire Vignettes' a, presumably, fictionalised account of Hampshire life contains a tale of a wild local boy who, as an indication of his maturity joins the navy:

The unforeseen result of his training had been to refine as well as to develop him ('The author of "Mademoiselle IXE"', 1892).

The suggestion that the boy's waywardness may be due to 'gypsy blood' perhaps indicates that this story is a glorification of empire-in-miniature, with British institutions performing a civilising function by quelling his natural instincts. The motor for the story is the young man's death by disease – 'that invisible foe who, more persistently than bullet or blade, thins the ranks of our two great armies' – in 'the far South,' which is probably an unspecific reference to the Pacific region. His death, however, is not presented as tragic but is rather ennobled by his grave in that far away place:

For when we remember by whom, as well as to whom, the pile was raised, that everyone from the captain to the shipboy gave... his stone to the cairn, that it stands a memorial not only of what was lovable in the lad himself, but of what was loving and reverent in his shipmates, of that tenderness which... goes hand in hand with the highest daring, of all, in fact that makes the typical English sailor the darling of the English heart – why then we feel that the end of our

sailor's poor little story is not such a lame and impotent conclusion after all.

In this final paean the story transforms the danger of military service into martyrdom and an effective endorsement of the naval life. The fact that this martyrdom occurs in the same location as Stevenson's story is merely coincidental, but the extent to which acts of heroism in such settings were a mainstay of imperial propaganda is illustrative of how radical a critique *The Beach of Falesá* was of this tradition. The rough, hypocritical, and possibly murderous Wiltshire is a striking contrast to the young seaman of the 'Hampshire Vignettes'. However, just as the excision of the back-story at the start of *The Beach of Falesá* can be interpreted as censoring the novella by removing some of the ambivalence behind Wiltshire's motives (Menikoff, 1984; Stevenson, 1996, XXXV: p. 260), the physical proximity of 'Uma' to overtly colonial material must surely have further softened its critique. It seems likely that, for the Victorian reader turning from the 'Hampshire Vignettes' to 'Uma', Stevenson's story would have appeared to compliment the former tale by offering details of the possible worlds that they might visit should they too choose the naval life.

Of course, the reverse is possible and Stevenson's critique may have upset the imperialist impulse of the *ILN*'s propaganda. However, the sheer quantity of such propaganda makes such a proposition less likely. Instead, it seems probable that the publication of 'Uma' in *ILN* severely altered the manner in which it was read by its Victorian audience. Such a conclusion is supported by the similarity of Stevenson's representation of his material as instructive to the dominant mode of presentation adopted for the content of the *ILN*. In particular, it seems enlightening that one constant of that presentation, especially for material that concerned colonial territories, was an insistence upon the physical presence of British writers as witnesses to the Empire. This had two impulses: first it allowed the *ILN* to present itself as a reliable source of information, whose account could be trusted because it was provided by firsthand sources; second, it constituted an acting

out of the sort of imperial competition which characterised late nineteenth century European foreign policy. In the context of frequent journal articles detailing the expansion of other powers across the globe, including the Pacific region (n.a., 1893; Rees, 1888), the physical presence of writers in these locations acted as an indication of British imperial success to the detriment of its competitors such as Germany, Russia and the United States. Since Stevenson's movements overseas were well publicised, the prominent use of his name in the title-piece to each episode at once traded upon his reputation as a writer and testified to the presence of the author in the South Seas. To that extent the presentation of Stevenson's story matches the presentation of a great deal of the *ILN*, including much genuinely ethnographic material. A few examples will suffice.

In the *ILN* from 23 July 1892, which contained the fourth episode of 'Uma', the material that immediately preceded Stevenson's story includes illustrations of 'Kangaroo Hunting in Australia' and sketches from East Africa. Both items employ the same dynamic of presence and authenticity as Stevenson utilised throughout *In the South Seas*. For instance, in the description of the Australian illustrations, the *ILN* explains that the sketches are 'by one who has shared in these Australian hunts' and, in doing so, it positions its illustrator as an authoritative source of information about such events: his depiction can be trusted because he was present as a witness to that which he represents (Illustrated London News, 1892a). Similarly, on the following page, the magazine carried a series of 'Sketches in Equatorial Africa, by Bishop Tucker' which it again attributes to the man on the spot:

At this anxious crisis in the prospects of the combined effort made by the Church Missionary Society and by the British East Africa Company to maintain establishments for promoting civilisation, English trade and Christian instruction in the troubled Kingdom of Uganda, fresh illustrations of the region of Africa, or even of the route from the sea-coast to Lake Victoria Nyanza, possess more

than ordinary value. We are favoured by the English Bishop of Equatorial Africa, the right rev. Alfred Robert Tucker, D.D., who is an accomplished artist, with a few sketches made by him in January and February last, during his journey to visit the mission stations of Taveta, Mochi and Chagga, which are situated just south of Mount Kilimanjaro, near the frontier line dividing the German and the British territorial jurisdictions from each other, perhaps a hundred and sixty miles inland from the seaport of Mombasa.

(Illustrated London News, 1892b)

Not only does this explanation precisely locate Bishop Tucker within Africa, testifying to the reliability of his depictions by the specificity of its description, but it also places him at the 'frontier' of the British Empire to act as a safeguard against German expansion. British treaties with local rulers in Uganda were little more than eighteen months old and it would be another two years before the British government declared Uganda a protectorate. In a political climate in which a British presence was still tenuous, the Bishop's location in the region is explicitly figured as an activity that can protect British interests. The combination of 'civilisation, English trade and Christian instruction' hints to the fact that the civilisation and Christianity to be preserved are similarly national. Even more important perhaps is the suggestion that the reader of the *ILN* is in some way engaged in a similar act of preservation by viewing the sketches that the Bishop has sent home. The paper suggests that the illustrations themselves, 'possess more than ordinary value' because of the political context in which they were drawn. Their value resides in the information that they supply: information that is necessary for the preservation of British interest. As a witness to the region Tucker is able to send back dispatches – in the form of sketches – that provide important information for controlling the region. However, implicit in this equation is the information's recipient, the audience that can utilise these sketches to form an understanding of the Ugandan

situation. In this way, the *ILN* implicitly constructs a relationship between its texts and its readers in which its readers are positioned as witnesses safeguarding the British Empire.

In this context it is revealing to consider the type of information that the Bishop's sketches convey. There are three sketches on the page: 'Mount Meru, from the Mochi Mission Station', 'Bridge at Taveta', and 'Native House, Taveta'. While the first of these sketches provides some topographical information, showing 'Mount Meru, which rises west of Chagga, about 9000ft. above the surrounding plain', and the second illustrates something of the local infrastructure, the last of these has a primarily ethnographic function. The picture shows a dome shaped grass-hut outside of which sits the said 'native' and a few domestic implements. In fact all of the sketches contain depictions of Africans so that even the two pictures, which seem chiefly intended to provide geographical information, also offer details necessary for a typology of the indigenous population. A similar tendency is evident in an item from the issue of 30 July on 'The Volcanic Eruption in Sanguir' (*Illustrated London News*, 1892c). This item recounts how reports were 'recently brought to Borneo' of 'the total destruction of the island', a Dutch colony in the Malay Archipelago, 'and its inhabitants'. While the article is mainly concerned to explain the reason why volcanic activity is so prevalent in the region, the five illustrations predominantly depict native physiological characteristics and details of native life. In addition to the sketch of 'Sanguir from the Sea', showing the smoking volcano, the sketches are titled 'Houses of Natives', 'A Native of Sanguir', 'Natives of Sanguir' and 'A Native Boat'. While these illustrations clearly provide background detail for a story with little available particulars, they also serve a crucially ethnographic function by illustrating classificatory features of the indigenous population. In the late nineteenth century ethnographic enquiry was still largely concerned with the classification of racial typologies and determining the boundaries of cultures as racial classifications (Thomas, 1989: p. 27). The extent to which these pictures would have performed that function is doubtless limited by their

appearance within a popular magazine, which was primarily concerned with entertaining its readership. However, the extent to which 'reading' corresponded to 'the acquisition of information' for the Victorian reader (Stocking, 1991: p. 759) and the frequency with which pictures in magazines such as the *ILN* were doctored so that they might more adequately represent British imperial dominance (Ryan, 1997; p. 220), suggests that there existed the potential for such pictures to perform a dual function – at once entertaining and instructing the reader as ethnographic material. These pictures are different from the illustrations to Stevenson's story. Their style is quite distinct, with the former being precisely drawn, seeking to mimic photographic exactitude, and the latter having a more fluid, expressive quality, attempting to capture something of the drama of Stevenson's tale.³ Additionally, the use of titles perform quite separate functions: Browne's illustrations all use quotations from the text in order to refer to some incident in the story and to borrow from it some dramatic moment; by contrast, the ethnographic material that surrounds Stevenson's story uses short precise descriptive titles that indicate the instructive, classificatory, nature of their content. Nevertheless, even accepting the fact that Stevenson's story occupies a quite different generic position from the other material printed alongside it, it is difficult to see how the context for 'Uma' would not have influenced the manner in which it was read by its Victorian audience. The fact that so much of the *ILN*'s content equated location with authority must have encouraged its contemporaneous readers to imagine that Stevenson's story contained valuable information about Pacific culture, a reading which Stevenson himself encouraged. Moreover, while Stevenson may have been anxious for his readers to identify the manipulation of the indigenous population by European imperialists amongst those facts, the general support for Empire within the *ILN* must have fatally hampered the impact of his critique. Instead, the physiognomic depictions of Pacific people in and around Stevenson's story would have combined with a general system of belief that understood the location of British subjects within imperial territories to guarantee the integrity of

the British Empire. Crucially, this guarantee depended upon a stream of information from the colonial territory back into the metropolis. In this context, irrespective of any critique it may contain, Stevenson's story helped to support the imperial carapace by serving as the testimony of a witness to British expansion.

Reading 'The Bottle Imp' as ethnographic material.

Evidence to support the suggestion that the publication of 'Uma' in the *ILN* encouraged interpretations of that story as an ethnographic record of Pacific culture may be found in precisely that sort of reading of 'The Bottle Imp' by a number of Stevenson's biographers. Critical responses to this story have largely been biographical, with even Hillier's treatment being most concerned with a correspondence between Stevenson's biography and details of the story (Hillier, 1987: pp. 41-46). Typical of these responses is that of Frank McLynn in his 1993 biography of Stevenson. Here, McLynn identifies the story's 'greatest impact' as that which it exerted on 'the natives' following its translation for a Samoan paper:

At once the Samoans were able to solve a riddle that had long puzzled them: how could a mere teller of tales be wealthy? Knowing nothing of the simultaneity of world-wide communication made possible by books, and regarding stories... as the expression of naturalistic truth, the Samoans naturally assumed that the source of RLS's riches was this exact imp that he kept in a bottle. The seeds of his later reputation as the thaumaturge 'Tusitala' were already being sown. (McLynn, 1993: p. 371)

McLynn's characterisation of Samoan belief chimes neatly with nineteenth century evolutionary theories of culture, defining it as a lack of knowledge rather than as a culturally different relationship to art. His assertion that the Samoans literally believed Stevenson's story is repeated by a number of Stevenson's

biographers who all explain that during a visit to his house some Samoan dignitary would summon the courage to ask the whereabouts of 'the bottle' (Balfour, 1901, II: p. 109; Furnas, 1952: p. 328; Moors, 1910: p. 99). Crucially, none of these biographical accounts provide a source for this particular information, although Moors and Balfour imply that their presence testifies to the veracity of their accounts. However, evidence of their source exists in a common lexicography and a structural proximity to an account of such events in a letter from Stevenson to Conan Doyle, written in August 1893. In this letter Stevenson explains the difficulties involved in re-narrating Doyle's story *The Engineer's Thumb*, and the effect that the story had upon his audience once this was achieved. He concludes by suggesting that Doyle should 'disabuse' himself of the idea that he would be thought the author of the tale should he come to Samoa:

They do not know what it is to make up a story. *The Engineer's Thumb* (God forgive me) was narrated as a piece of actual and factual history. Nay, and more, I who write to you have had the indiscretion to perpetuate a trifling piece of fiction entitled *The Bottle Imp*. Parties who come up to visit my unpretentious mansion, after having admired the ceilings by Vanderputty and tapestry by Gobbling, manifest towards the end a certain uneasiness which proves them to be fellows of an infinite delicacy. They may be seen to shrug a brown shoulder, to roll up a speaking eye, and at last secret burst from them: 'Where is the bottle?' (Stevenson, 1912b, XXV: p. 340)

This passage requires close attention because, although it insists that the Samoan's had no conception of the literary, it implies that the nature of Stevenson's narration both presupposed and reinforced such a belief. Stevenson explains that he 'narrated' *The Engineer's Thumb* as if it was 'a piece of actual and factual history' but this narration serves as proof of the Samoan's interpretation of it as such. As with Stevenson's response to the islanders' stories,

he erases the distinction between fact and fiction in order to provide ethnographic details about Pacific culture.

Yet, what is perhaps more interesting, is the fact that so many of his biographers have taken Stevenson at his word. Indeed, in the case of McLynn, Stevenson's claim becomes the source for a more general speculation about the nature of belief among 'traditional peoples' throughout the world. In attempting to explain the respect that the Samoan people had for Stevenson, McLynn attributes it partly to Stevenson's reputation as a 'Warlock' and concludes that:

Since it was a common perception among traditional peoples in Africa, Asia and Oceania in the nineteenth century that the white man was a spirit and came from the land of the dead, RLS's status as magus and thaumaturge had three main components: he was an *aitu* himself, he commanded a spirit in a bottle and he had as a wife a woman who was an important witch in her own right. (McLynn, 1993: p. 400-1)

Given that McLynn's only source for the Samoan belief that Stevenson 'commanded a spirit in a bottle' appears to derive from Stevenson's letter, it is curious to find him comment with authority about the nature of beliefs throughout 'Africa, Asia and Oceania'. Nothing in McLynn's biography indicates an alternative source for such knowledge. The use that his biography appears to make of Stevenson's writing replicates the relationship between Victorian anthropology and the amateur ethnographer of the nineteenth century: that is, McLynn uses 'The Bottle Imp' and the accompanying letter as ethnographic material sufficient for constructing general theories about human cultures and classifying racial typologies.

The similarity of McLynn's discussion of 'The Bottle Imp' to that of other biographers indicates something significant about the way in which Stevenson's claims to authority have shaped the interpretation of his Pacific material. Stevenson's representation

of his presence in the South Seas as a guarantee of the insight of his observations can be seen as altering the status of his fiction by positioning it as ethnography about remote and unfamiliar cultures. Although the relationship between nineteenth century anthropology and amateur ethnography would have encouraged a reading of his Pacific writing in this way, its apparent value as ethnography over a century later suggests that there is something in the structure of the text which encourages such a reading.

This paper has argued that Stevenson's repeated claims for the accuracy and faithfulness of his depictions coincided with the identification of testimony as a consolidation of British imperialism in the Victorian popular press. The publication of 'Uma' alongside more explicitly ethnographic material was capable of emphasising the story's ethnographic potential because both texts shared a common belief in empiricism: the connection between presence and authority. Extraneous details such as the illustrations to Stevenson's story, a blurring of the discreteness of Stevenson's material and that which surrounds it, and a vigorously imperialist ethos throughout the magazine, all serve to blunt the edges of Stevenson's critique of Empire. However, this effect is complimented by textual evidence and Stevenson's presentation of his texts as libraries on the Pacific. The argument of this paper, then, is literary critics keen to assert Stevenson's critique of Empire in his South Seas writing must be sensitive to the extent that these texts conform to the dominant late-Victorian discourses of Empire and to the extent that contemporaneous contexts of readership were further capable of incorporating his texts into these discursive modes.

End Notes

1. I have written elsewhere about the dangers of reading so-called magic realism as a transparent representation of pre-modern systems of belief (Connell, 1998).
2. Support for this physiognomic reading of Wiltshire's description of Uma may exist in the manuscript version,

where her 'shy, strange, blindish look, between a cat's and a baby's' was originally written as 'sly' (Stevenson, 1996: p. 261). The identification of character attributes in physical appearance is the very cornerstone of physiognomy and the comparison of human and animal appearance was a constant feature of physiognomic writing (Cowling, 1989: p. 14). In this light, the description of Case's 'hawk's nose' may also be instructive (Stevenson, 1996: p. 5), as is Stevenson's reference to physiognomy in his attempt to describe the Marquesans' response to his family photograph album (Stevenson, 1998: p. 11).

3. Although Browne's illustrations have a more realistic quality to them than the companion pictures by W. Hatherell in *Island Nights' Entertainments* (Stevenson, 1893).

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‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’:
Stevenson, Hogg, and Samoa
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In considering ‘Stevenson, Hogg, and Samoa’ this essay will focus on two texts written during Stevenson’s South Seas period, *The Beach of Falesá* and *Weir of Hermiston*. It will also suggest that the early-nineteenth century Scottish poet and novelist James Hogg (‘the Ettrick Shepherd’) is a strong presence in *Weir of Hermiston*. However, let us begin, not with Hogg (to whom we shall return), but by approaching Stevenson’s time in the South Seas in the 1890s by way of Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, which was first published in monthly numbers in 1847–48.

Like *Weir of Hermiston*, Thackeray’s novel is set in the Britain of the 1810s;¹ and like *The Beach of Falesá* it is much concerned with Imperial themes. In *Vanity Fair*, engagement with Empire emerges in the novel’s central focus on the British Imperial triumph at Waterloo, and also in its more oblique comments on Jos Sedley’s activities as a servant of Empire in India. Additionally, an Imperial dimension can be seen in Thackeray’s depiction of the rich young West Indian heiress, Miss Swartz. Like the children of Wiltshire and Uma in *The Beach of Falesá*, Miss Swartz is of mixed-race parentage. Here is what Wiltshire has to say about his ‘half caste’ children in the final paragraph of *The Beach of Falesá*:

My public house? Not a bit of it, nor ever likely; I’m stuck here, I fancy; I don’t like to leave the kids, you see; and there’s no use talking – they’re better here than what they would be in a white man’s country. Though Ben took the eldest up to Auckland, where he’s being schooled with the best. But what bothers me is the girls. They’re only half castes of course; I know that as well as you do, and there’s nobody thinks less of half castes than I do; but they’re

mine, and about all I've got; I can't reconcile my mind to their taking up with kanakas, and I'd like to know where I'm to find them whites?²

Here Stevenson uses Wiltshire's voice to strike some troubling, uncomfortable notes, but *Vanity Fair* takes us into territory that is still more uncomfortable when the crass *nouveau riche* merchant Mr Osborne urges his son George to reject the recently impoverished Amelia Sedley, with a view to marrying Miss Swartz instead:

'I ain't going to have any of this dam sentimental nonsense and humbug here, sir,' the father cried out. 'There shall be no beggar-marriages in my family. If you choose to fling away eight thousand a year, which you may have for the asking, you may do it: but by Jove you take your pack and walk out of this house, sir. Will you do as I tell you, once for all, sir, or will you not?'

'Marry that mulatto woman?' George said, pulling up his shirt-collars. 'I don't like the colour, sir. Ask the black that sweeps opposite the Fleet Market, sir. *I'm* not going to marry a Hottentot Venus.'³

Thackeray provided his own illustrations to *Vanity Fair*, and the text is embellished by a portrait of Miss Swartz that seems to be thoroughly in tune with George's dismissive views:



At all events George waxes eloquent to Amelia on the subject of Miss Swartz:

‘My sisters say she has diamonds as big as pigeon’s eggs,’ George said, laughing. ‘How they must set off her complexion! A perfect illumination it must be when her jewels are on her neck. Her jet-black hair is as curly as Sambo’s. I dare say she wore a nose-ring when she went to Court; and with a plume of feathers in her top-knot she would look a perfect Belle Sauvage.’ (pp. 244–45)

And there is more to follow:

‘Diamonds and mahogany, my dear! Think what an advantageous contrast – and the white feathers in her hair – I mean in her wool. [...] Her father was a German Jew – a slave-owner they say – connected with the Cannibal Islands in some way or other. He died last year, and Miss Pinkerton has finished her education. She can play two pieces on the piano; she knows three songs; she can write when Mrs. Haggistoun is by to spell for her; and Jane and Maria [George’s sisters] already have got to love her as a sister.’

‘I wish they would have loved me,’ said Emmy, wistfully. ‘They were always very cold to me.’

‘My dear child, they would have loved you if you had had two hundred thousand pounds,’ George replied. (p. 246)

Again, confirmation of George’s view seems to be provided by one of Thackeray’s illustrations:



According to Thackeray's narrator, Miss Swartz's wealth is real and substantial: she owns many plantations in the West Indies and has 'a deal of money in the funds'. Furthermore, it seems that various people in *Vanity Fair* set a high value on her two hundred thousand pounds, and later in the novel we are told that old Osborne (a widower) 'had proposed for Miss Swartz, but had been rejected scornfully by the partisans of that lady, who married her to a young sprig of Scotch nobility' (p. 535), the 'Honourable James McMull' (p. 537).

What are we to make of all this? Clearly, George Osborne's comments on Miss Swartz are racist, but unfortunately this does

not seem to be simply a case of the dreadful George expressing his own dreadful views. Setting out to describe the scene depicted in the second of the illustrations reproduced, the narrator records that George:

had then been to pass three hours with Amelia, his dear little Amelia, at Fulham; and he came home to find his sisters spread in starched muslin in the drawing-room, the dowagers cackling in the background, and honest Swartz in her favourite amber-coloured satin, with turquoise-bracelets, countless rings, flowers, feathers, and all sorts of tags and gimcracks, about as elegantly decorated as a she chimney-sweep on May-Day. (p. 252)

The narrator here seems almost as racist as George, and indeed the whole weight and authority of the text seems to be attempting to point a moral to the effect that Osborne *père* and James McMull (the rapacious 'young sprig of Scotch nobility') are so shockingly lost to human decency that their overwhelming greed makes them willing to ally themselves by marriage to a West Indian woman, the daughter (it seems) of a union between a 'German Jew' and an African slave. Clearly, and to put it mildly, *Vanity Fair*'s presentation of Miss Swartz is deeply unpleasant; and it seems equally clear that this problem has something to do with the ways in which Britain's Imperial power-structures operated. Like Wiltshire's children, Miss Swartz has to confront real difficulties as a 'half caste' within Imperial society.

Nevertheless, a distinction can be drawn between the presentation of Miss Swartz's dilemma in *Vanity Fair* (a text of the 1840s) and the presentation of the dilemma of Wiltshire's daughters in *The Beach of Falesá* (a text of the 1890s). As she sits at her piano, we are invited to regard Miss Swartz as less than fully human: she is only able to play two pieces, she only knows three songs, and, in short, she has nothing whatsoever to commend her other than simple-minded good nature and her two hundred thousand pounds. In inviting its readers to deplore the willingness

of old Osborne and McMull to marry this 'Hottentot Venus' for her money, Thackeray's novel seems to take it for granted that Miss Swartz cannot possibly be admired for anything other than her wealth. In *Vanity Fair* it is assumed that the sub-human Miss Swartz is of no possible interest in and for herself. This novel's mental world simply does not have room for the notion that a sympathetic account might be given of the dilemmas, insights, and experiences of Miss Swartz as she moves from her life in the West Indies into a difficult and disturbing encounter with the London of the 1810s. However, things were less straightforward for Stevenson when he was writing *The Beach of Falesá* in the South Seas in the early 1890s. The crass Imperial assumptions of the 1840s no longer remain unquestioned in this text, as can be seen in Wiltshire's account of his mock wedding with Uma:

She was dressed and scented; her kilt was of fine tapa, looking richer in the folds than any silk; her bust, which was of the colour of dark honey, she wore bare only for some half a dozen necklaces of seeds and flowers; and behind her ears and in her hair, she had the scarlet flowers of the hybiscus. She showed the best bearing for a bride conceivable, serious and still; and I thought shame to stand up with her in that mean house and before that grinning negro. I thought shame I say; for the mountebank was dressed with a big paper collar, the book he made believe to read from was an odd volume of a novel, and the words of his service not fit to be set down. (p. 123)

The jarring phrase 'that grinning negro' calls to mind the way in which Miss Swartz is portrayed in *Vanity Fair*, but at least Uma is being taken seriously in *The Beach of Falesá*. Nevertheless, Wiltshire goes through with the ceremony, and he goes on to describe how Uma is given a marriage certificate which reads:

This is to certify that Uma daughter of Faavao of Falesá island of _____, is illegally married to Mr John Wiltshire for one night, and Mr John Wiltshire is at liberty to send her to hell next morning.

John Blackamoor
Chaplain to the Hulks.

Extracted from the register
by William T. Randall
Master Mariner.

That was a nice paper to put in a girl's hand and see her hide away like gold. A man might easily feel cheap for less. But it was the practise in these parts, and (as I told myself) not the least the fault of us White Men but of the missionaries. If they had let the natives be, I had never needed this deception, but taken all the wives I wished, and left them when I pleased, with a clear conscience. (p. 124)

Here Wiltshire is revealing much more than he realises. This is powerful stuff, and in the description of the mock wedding in *The Beach of Falesá* Stevenson provides a devastating image that sums up the nature of Imperial exploitation of Polynesians in the South Seas.

It may be that postcolonial theory will help provide an insight into the nature and significance of the ways in which Polynesians are portrayed in *The Beach of Falesá*. In the early 1980s Ranajit Guha made what has proved to be a fruitful and influential distinction between what he called 'the elite' and what he called 'the subaltern classes'. Writing about Indian society in the days of British Imperial rule, Guha suggested that a dominant elite then operated in tune with the interests of the British raj, and contained 'foreign as well as indigenous' groups. The foreign elements included British officials, industrialists, missionaries, planters, and merchants, while the indigenous elements included 'the biggest feudal magnates, the most important representatives

of the industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie and the native recruits to the uppermost levels of the bureaucracy'. Contrasted with this Imperial elite, Guha writes, were 'the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country – that is, the people'.⁴

Following on from Guha's distinction, 'Can the subaltern speak?' has become a famous question in the debate about Imperial-era and post-colonial texts. Among other things, this question suggests that the power structures of Empire set out to silence the subaltern voice, in order to establish the validity of an Imperial (rather than a subaltern) account of the process of colonisation. In the official Imperial story, the Empire is presented as being engaged in bringing the light of progress and civilisation to 'dark' places still enmeshed in 'savagery'. Naturally, the people on the receiving end of this process would tend to take a very different view of the arrival of Empire, but were they in a position to give voice to that view? At all events, it was very much in the Imperial interest to silence their alternative stories. Edward Said makes the point as follows:

Stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history. The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves *are* narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.⁵

To what extent and in what ways is the Imperial story being challenged in *The Beach of Falesá*? To what extent does Stevenson's

text allow the subaltern Uma to speak? It may be useful here to consider a West Indian woman in a novel published (like *Vanity Fair*) in the 1840s – Bertha Mason, the first Mrs Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847). In Charlotte Brontë's novel, Bertha is the madwoman in the attic, and she is like Miss Swartz in that her story does not get a hearing. Famously, however, the madwoman's story *is* told in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Because it is willing to look at events from Bertha's point of view, Jean Rhys's novel is able to question and subvert aspects of *Jane Eyre*. In the process, these two texts become competing narratives. Each narrative offers its own perspective, its own version of events. Each narrative seeks to establish and validate its own version of the truth.

This paper will argue that *The Beach of Falesá* and *Weir of Hermiston*, in their different ways, grow out of Stevenson's response to his disturbing encounter with the operations of Empire in the South Seas. On this view, *The Beach of Falesá* is in some sense an attempt to enable the subaltern voice of a colonised people to be heard: unlike Miss Swartz in *Vanity Fair* and Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, Uma does get a hearing, her story does get told. However, what exactly is the nature of the hearing that Uma's story gets?

The Beach of Falesá (1893) has been seen as a precursor of *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Famously, Conrad's novella challenges the official Imperial story by offering a devastating critique of the situation created by the European Imperial presence in the Belgian Congo towards the end of the nineteenth century, a situation Conrad had experienced at first hand during his visit to the Congo in 1890. There is certainly a case to be made for the view that Stevenson anticipates aspects of Conrad's critique of Imperialism in *The Beach of Falesá*. Indeed, there may also be a case for arguing that Stevenson's story actually goes beyond *Heart of Darkness* in some ways, not least in its willingness to try gain a hearing for a subaltern story, and not least in its openness to the possibility that there was real value in the pre-Imperial cultures of peoples the European Empires tended to dismiss as 'savages'.

In spite of the powerful anti-Imperial strand in Conrad's novella, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe has argued that

racist Imperial assumptions are present, both in Conrad himself and in *Heart of Darkness*. In 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', Achebe writes:

Conrad was born in 1857, the very year in which the first Anglican missionaries were arriving among my own people in Nigeria. It was certainly not his fault that he lived at a time when the reputation of the black man was at a particularly low level. But even after due allowance has been made for all the influences of contemporary prejudice on his sensibility there remains still in Conrad's attitude a residue of antipathy to black people which his peculiar psychology alone can explain. His own account of his first encounter with a black man is very revealing:

A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards.

Certainly Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate fondness of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts.⁶ (p. 258)

For Achebe, *Heart of Darkness* is 'a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today'. Achebe goes on to argue that Africa, in *Heart of Darkness*, operates as a setting that 'eliminates the African as human factor', and he also writes of Conrad's novel's 'dehumanization of Africa and Africans' (pp. 259, 257).

It is possible to accept the thrust of Achebe's case with regard to Empire and Africa, while still feeling that a defence of *Heart of Darkness* is possible. For example, Wilson Harris has written:

Achebe's essay on 'the dehumanisation of Africa and Africans' by 'bloody racists' is, therefore, in the light of western malaise and postimperial hangover, a persuasive argument, but I am convinced that his judgement or dismissal of *Heart of Darkness* – and of Conrad's strange genius – is a profoundly mistaken one.⁷

Whatever case might be made for *Heart of Darkness*, however, it seems clear that Achebe's hostility towards Conrad's novel draws its strength from an entirely convincing perception that *Heart of Darkness* does not show any willingness to recognise the existence of a valuable pre-Imperial African culture. Achebe does not necessarily demonstrate that *Heart of Darkness* is a failure as a work of art, but he does demonstrate that *Heart of Darkness* remains entangled in the crass old Imperial assumptions about the sub-human status of the peoples Kipling described as 'lesser breeds without the law'. *The Beach of Falesá*'s openness to pre-Imperial cultures, and its willingness to let the subaltern voice be heard, are great achievements in the context of the 1890s.

While these achievements are real, however, it remains possible to question the extent to which a genuine subaltern Polynesian voice can be heard to speak in *The Beach of Falesá*. At this point, let us consider *Weir of Hermiston* (1896) as another text of Stevenson's Samoan years. *Weir* is about Scotland, of course – but my suggestion is that Stevenson, having encountered the elite / subaltern problem in its severe South Seas manifestation, turns in *Weir* to an exploration of that problem in its Scottish manifestation.

In *Weir*, there are many representatives of Scotland's intellectual, legal, and social elite: people such as Adam Weir and Lord Glenalmond, who are well able to operate comfortably within the power structures of the Imperial Britain of the 1810s. However, Stevenson's novel also finds a place for the Elliotts of Cauldstaneslap, representatives of a subaltern Scotland whose roots lie in the old oral culture of the ballads. Like the Polynesians of *The Beach of Falesá* (who are likewise products of an old oral

culture), the Elliotts are presented in *Weir* with a sympathy that is very real as far as it goes. This sympathy emerges, for example, when we learn that the dark-haired brothers of the Elliott family (the four Black Brothers) have avenged the death of their father in a heroic exploit that seems to belong to a former age: 'Some century earlier the last of the minstrels might have fashioned the last of the ballads out of that Homeric fight and chase'. (p 79)

The Elliotts are introduced in detail in 'A Border Family', one of the sections of the chapter in *Weir* entitled 'Winter on the Moors'. We learn that this subaltern family has become moderately prosperous, but nevertheless the narrator stresses that 'scarce the breadth of a hair divided them from the peasantry' (p. 88). Revealingly, it appears that marriage between elite and subaltern has the potential to be problematic, not only in the South Seas of *The Beach of Falesá*, but also in the Scotland of *Weir of Hermiston*. Exiled to the moorland estate of Hermiston because of his rebellion against his father, Archie Weir falls in love with Christina Elliott of Cauldstaneslap. Problems arise, however, for a relationship between the son of the Lord Justice Clerk and a young subaltern woman scathingly described as a 'milkmaid' by the fashionable young lawyer, Frank Innes. Indeed, Innes puts the problem to Archie with a brutal clarity:

There are two horns to your dilemma, and I must say for myself I should look mighty ruefully on either. Do you see yourself explaining to the four Black Brothers? or do you see yourself presenting the milkmaid to papa as the future lady of Hermiston? Do you? I tell you plainly, I don't! (p. 148)

It is at this point that we return to James Hogg the Ettrick Shepherd, because it has long been recognised that Dand Elliott (a shepherd, a poet, and one of the four Black Brothers) is modelled on Hogg. With an echo of well-known passages about dogs and storms in Hogg's *The Shepherd's Calendar*, Stevenson tells us that 'nobody could train a dog like Dandie; nobody, through the peril

of great storms in the winter time, could do more gallantly' (p. 85). Like Hogg, Dand makes Robert Burns 'his hero and model'; and (again like Hogg) he helps Walter Scott collect old ballads for publication in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (p. 86). Indeed, Dand and Hogg know each other: 'The Ettrick Shepherd was his sworn crony; they would meet, drink to excess, roar out their lyrics in each other's faces, and quarrel and make it up again till bedtime' (p. 86).

As one of the General Editors of the Stirling / South Carolina Research Edition of the Collected Works of James Hogg, I confess that I find Dand somewhat irritating as an oblique portrait of Hogg. It is, of course, entirely apt to place Dand / Hogg in the 'Homeric' context of the old ballads – but Stevenson makes it very clear indeed that Dandie is no Homer. The damningly faint praise is: 'No question but he had a certain accomplishment in minor verse' (pp. 85–86). The portrait of Dand Elliott in *Weir of Hermiston* is much more sympathetic and perceptive than the portrait of Miss Swartz in *Vanity Fair*, but there seem to be limits to the extent to which Stevenson is willing to take his subaltern bard entirely seriously.

One wonders if 'a certain accomplishment in minor verse' is wholly adequate praise for a figure apparently based on the author of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). However, and revealingly, it seems that Stevenson could not quite bring himself to believe that Hogg was indeed the author of that remarkable novel. In 'Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*', Eric Massie has argued cogently that *The Master of Ballantrae* owes a significant debt to Hogg's novel.⁸ As part of his argument Massie points to a letter written by Stevenson to George Saintsbury on 17 May 1891. In this letter Stevenson comments on Saintsbury's recently-published *Essays in English Literature 1780–1860*, a book in which the suggestion is floated that the Oxford-educated John Gibson Lockhart may have collaborated with Hogg in writing the *Justified Sinner*.⁹ Stevenson's comment is as follows:

I particularly like your Hogg, and your admirable quotations from the unequal fellow. Your theory about the *Justified Sinner* interests and (I think I may say) convinces me; the book since I read it in black, pouring weather on Tweedside, has always haunted and puzzled me. One felt it *could not* be Hogg. I had heard Lockhart mentioned, and much as I admire *Adam Blair*, it seemed beyond the reach of Lockhart. But with the two together, it is possible.¹⁰

'One felt it *could not* be Hogg'. By the 1890s, Hogg had come to be generally regarded as a rather boorish 'peasant poet' who no doubt had 'a certain accomplishment in minor verse', but who certainly did not deserve to be taken entirely seriously. At this period people like Stevenson and Saintsbury had the intelligence to perceive the value of the *Justified Sinner*. This placed them in a dilemma, however, because they assumed that Hogg was a boorish peasant whose real but decidedly limited talent did not – indeed, *could not* – go beyond 'a certain accomplishment in minor verse'. The Ettrick Shepherd, wrapped in his plaid while herding his sheep, might well have been able to dream up some pretty lyrics, but obviously such a man *could not*, unaided, have produced a novel as complex and sophisticated as the *Justified Sinner*. Stevenson and Saintsbury therefore cheerfully assumed (without any supporting evidence) that the peasant poet must have had the assistance of a gentleman (Lockhart, for example) in creating that remarkable work. This subaltern shepherd-poet might to some extent be able to speak, but clearly there were limits to what such a man could say if unaided by one of his betters.

In 'Father and Son', the second chapter of *Weir of Hermiston*, Lord Glenalmond speaks to Archie:

"[...] Yet I would like it very ill if my young friend were to misjudge his father. He has all the Roman virtues: Cato and Brutus were such; I think a son's heart might well be proud of such an ancestry of one."

"And I would sooner he were a plaided herd," cried Archie, with sudden bitterness.

"And that is neither very wise, nor I believe entirely true," returned Glenalmond. "Before you are done you will find some of these expressions rise on you like a remorse. [...]" (pp. 26–27)

It does not seem very likely that Archie is being rebuked here (either by Glenalmond or by Stevenson) for his manifest unfairness to 'plaided herds': on the contrary, Glenalmond's rebuke is concerned with Archie's unfairness to the Lord Justice Clerk. In *Weir*, such subaltern figures as Dand Elliott and James Hogg may be admirable in their way: they may indeed have 'a certain accomplishment in minor verse', and they may even rise to involvement in Homeric adventures. However, it is clear that, in the world of Edinburgh's elite, one would not wish one's father to be such a person; and one would not wish one's daughter to marry one. Such attitudes are not very far removed from Wiltshire's views (already quoted) about the marriage prospects of his 'half caste' daughters: 'I can't reconcile my mind to their taking up with kanakas, and I'd like to know where I'm to find them whites?'

Perhaps Stevenson's inability to accept Hogg as the author of the *Justified Sinner* connects with a rigid and inflexible application of the elite / subaltern distinction. On such a view a plaided herd is a plaided herd, and a South Sea islander is a South Sea islander—and while such people may be admirable in their own ways, they must necessarily operate within the limitations of their subaltern status and nature: they do not and cannot operate at the same level of sophistication as a university-educated nineteenth century gentleman. In this context, when an author like Stevenson tries to speak from within the elite on behalf of the subaltern, what readers tend to hear is the voice of an elite ventriloquist, rather than a genuine subaltern voice.

However, the elite / subaltern distinction can be more interestingly complex than is suggested by the neat and uncomplicated binary opposition outlined above. The example

of the Ettrick Shepherd may be relevant here. In one of the most valuable books on Hogg so far published, Douglas Gifford makes a celebrated distinction between what he calls 'Ettrick Hogg' and 'Edinburgh Hogg'.¹¹ I would like to focus on a similar but not identical distinction, between 'Hogg's Ettrick world' and 'Hogg's Edinburgh world'. In order to open this matter out, it will be useful to quote from that wonderful book, David Daiches's *Two Worlds: An Edinburgh Jewish Childhood*. One of Daiches's two worlds was the Scotland he experienced as an Edinburgh schoolboy, and later as a student at Edinburgh University. The other was the Jewish culture he experienced through growing up in the home of his father, Dr Salis Daiches, Rabbi of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation from 1919 till 1945 and one of the most important figures in the religious life of Scotland during the twentieth century. In *Two Worlds*, David Daiches writes that the competing claims of his two worlds became strongly felt during his years as a university student:

The change which resulted in my life when I left school and entered Edinburgh University was enormous, and had far-reaching consequences. At school I had done my work and gone home, taking no part in sports or other extra-curricular activities. But the University was different. There was a great variety of social and intellectual life outside the lecture room, and it was not mostly confined, as non-academic school activities were, to Friday night and Saturday; I found myself joining societies, writing for the student magazine, making friends among my non-Jewish fellow students. [...] The sense of liberation was intoxicating. I had not realised before how narrow and indeed lonely my life had previously been.¹²

Nevertheless, the pull of the Jewish world remained strong; and Daiches writes of returning one winter evening from a happy and lively meeting of a university society to attend a Friday night service at the Synagogue.

There was only a handful of people, old men mostly, at the service, and as the slow and melancholy notes of the concluding hymn *Yigdal* rose thinly up to the roof, I thought of the centuries during which this hymn had been sung, of long dead Jewish congregations in Provence, the Rhineland and Poland, who had held so steadfastly to their Jewish way of life and passed their heritage unchanged on to their children. I thought of the long roll of Jewish martyrs, those who had given their lives for 'the sanctification of the Name'. I thought of my own ancestors, of my grandfather and of *his* father, Aryeh Zvi Daiches, whose picture I had seen on the wall of my grandfather's study, a noble looking man in a fur-trimmed cap, one of the innumerable Jewish scholars and teachers from whom I was descended.¹³

Hogg, like Daiches, put down roots that drew nourishment from two very different worlds. In Hogg's case, one of these worlds was the post-Enlightenment Edinburgh of the heyday of Sir Walter Scott – the Edinburgh of *The Edinburgh Review* and of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. This elite Edinburgh world can fairly be described as one of the major centres of cultural production in early nineteenth century Europe, and it liked to claim for itself the title of 'the Athens of the North'. It provided the mature Hogg with the core of his audience, and it was through this world that he got in contact with the institutions that published his writings. Access to this intellectually vibrant world no doubt brought to the Ettrick Shepherd the same kind of liberating excitement that Edinburgh University provided for the young David Daiches just over a century later. In the final analysis, however, Hogg's loyalty to the oral and ballad-based subaltern culture of his native Ettrick meant that he could not wholly share the assumptions of the elite Edinburgh intellectual world in which he began to move. Indeed, it can be argued that this subaltern's best writing is driven by his need to explore and speak about his areas of disagreement with an elite Edinburgh world which he understood well, and in which he was able to operate effectively (although not always comfortably).

It is clear that Stevenson was in sympathy with the Scottish subaltern world of Dand and the other Elliotts in *Weir of Hermiston*: that sympathy can be seen very strongly in (for example) the account of the conversation between Archie and the older Kirsty in the chapter entitled 'A Nocturnal Visit'. There were limits to that sympathy, however. Wonderfully, the portrait of Uma in *The Beach of Falesá* is much more perceptive and sympathetic than the portrait of Miss Swartz in *Vanity Fair*—but nevertheless one cannot imagine Uma, any more than Dand Elliott, rising to authorship of a complex and sophisticated novel such as *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. In short, Stevenson to some extent remained enmeshed in the Imperial assumptions of his time about 'native' peoples and their cultures: as Jenni Calder has observed, he was a man of his time, someone who 'seems to have shared the belief held by even the most enlightened investigators that tribal societies represented a primitive stage in human evolution which would inevitably give way to "civilisation"'.¹⁴

We have already quoted Edward Said:

Stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history. The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative.

The Beach of Falesá and *Heart of Darkness* take part in this battle of the stories from an interesting perspective. These are not stories (like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, say, or Hogg's *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*) through which a colonised or subaltern people find their voice and 'assert their own identity and the existence of their own history'. The colonised subaltern does not fully find a voice in *The Beach of Falesá*, and is still less able to speak in *Heart*

of *Darkness*. Instead, these novellas by Stevenson and Conrad do something else, and something of great value: they draw on direct and disturbing personal experience to question the Imperial story from a position within the Imperial project. These two texts emerged at a pivotal moment when the European Empires were beginning to lose the self-confidence, the certainty, and the moral blinkers that had helped to sustain the great European Empires in earlier years. In its devastating critiques of Empire, *The Beach of Falesá* stands alongside *Heart of Darkness* as one of the most powerful and significant stories of the past century and a half.

End Notes

1. At Hermiston, Archie Weir 'stirred the maidens of the county with the charm of Byronism when Byronism was new': Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston: An Unfinished Romance* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1909), p. 66. Subsequent page references are to this edition, and are given in the text.
2. Menikoff, Barry; *Robert Louis Stevenson and 'The Beach of Falesá': A Study in Victorian Publishing, with the Original Text* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), p. 186. Subsequent page references are to this edition, and are given in the text.
3. Thackeray, William Makepeace; *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero*, ed. by John Sutherland, World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 259. Subsequent page references are to this edition, and are given in the text.
4. Guha, Ranajit; 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in *Subaltern Studies*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 1–8 (p. 8).
5. Said, Edward; *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. xiii.
6. Achebe, Chinua; 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', in Conrad, Joseph; *Heart of Darkness*, Norton Critical Editions, 3rd edn (New York: Norton, 1988), pp. 251–62 (p. 258). Subsequent page references are to this edition, and are given in the text.

7. Harris, Wilson; 'The Frontier on which *Heart of Darkness* Stands', in Conrad, Joseph; *Heart of Darkness*, Norton Critical Editions, 3rd edn (New York: Norton, 1988), pp. 262–68 (p. 263).
8. Massie, Eric; 'Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*', *Studies in Hogg and his World*, 10 (1999), 73–77.
9. Massie, p. 73.
10. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994–95), VII, 125–6.
11. Gifford, Douglas; *James Hogg* (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head, 1976), pp.9–30.
12. Daiches, David; *Two Worlds: An Edinburgh Jewish Childhood*, Canongate Classics 7 (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987), p.142.
13. Daiches, *Two Worlds*, p. 146.
14. Stevenson, *Tales of the South Seas*, ed. by Jenni Calder (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987), pp. xiv–xv.

Stevenson Reading

Stephen Arata

Stevenson was a very good reader, a gifted one. He was also an extremely interesting theoretician of reading. In that respect he was very much of his period. In the history of reading practices, the 1880s mark a moment of significant transition. The activity itself of reading – what it is, how it is best done, and to what ends – comes under increased, and increasingly sophisticated scrutiny. Not that there weren't sophisticated and self-conscious readers prior to this period. But if one peruses literary essays and reviews in the periodical literature of, for example the 1820s or the 1850s, and compares them with those written in the 1880s and '90s, what they may find is a subtle but significant shift in emphasis. Roughly speaking, where earlier the focus was on What to Read, later the emphasis more often falls on How to Read.

The importance of this shift is usually not fully recognized. We are still living and working in its aftermath. How to Read – or rather, How to Read Well: that's an issue that all scholars and teachers are continually engaged with in their professional lives. Indeed, the bulk of their professional activities as academics might be said to originate in the belief that a wide gulf separates simply reading from reading well. Implicit here too is the claim that knowing how to read well is itself a fundamental virtue, one that provides the necessary ground for the cultivation of other virtues. Certain habits of attention, of intellectual rigor, the refinement of sensibility and emotional response, as well as of the ability to analyze, to synthesize, to discriminate, to evaluate: the development of these and other positive character traits has for us been bound up for a long time now with the cultivation of close reading skills.

But when did that become true? At what point did the practice of close reading, as we now understand it – assuming, that is, that we do understand it even now – when did that emerge as an

ideal? The fact is that 'close reading' has a history. Thus, a form of 'contextual reading' is required to begin to make sense of it. It is clear that the 1880s is a key moment in that history, when the cluster of virtues mentioned previously begins to coalesce under the sign of Reading Well. What also happens is that the relationship between reading on the one hand and virtue and vice on the other begins to be refigured. Reading, especially reading fiction, has of course always been viewed with suspicion precisely because of its assumed effects on one's character. One reads a vicious book and, unless they happen to be of sufficiently sound mind and sturdy soul, they run the risk of being infected by that vice. Traditional defences of fiction and its moral beneficence tend simply to invert the terms of the same argument. In either case, the act of reading was viewed in relatively unproblematic ways. If one could read at all, they could read well enough to be open to whatever influences, baleful or otherwise, the text might contain. Near the end of the century, however, that situation started to change. As reading itself became an object of critical attention, critics began to posit that the virtues inherent in a text, or at least in some kinds of texts, might be available only to certain kinds of readers – the kinds of readers who took seriously the practice of reading, and who did it well. In the same way, the practice of good reading could render inert whatever contagion an 'immoral' text might harbour. As all professional readers still implicitly believe, such skills provide one with immunity even in the company of the most heinous works.

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, secular reading was invested with a new level of importance, a new seriousness. For example Meredith, or Pater, or James, place a lot of moral weight on the art of reading. Pater's key essay, 'Style,' for instance, argues that literature exists precisely at that place where the artistry of the writer meets what Pater calls 'the willing intelligence' of the reader. The writer's artistry has 'for the susceptible reader the effect of a challenge for minute consideration; the attention of the writer in every minutest detail, being a pledge that it is worth the reader's while to be attentive too'. In James's essays as well there is often the sense that it hardly matters what one reads so long as they

read it with sufficient intensity and purpose. James's exasperation with Trollope or with Walter Besant is precisely that, as writers, they deflect attempts to read them seriously, proceeding instead on what James in 'The Art of Fiction' calls the 'comfortable, good-humoured feeling that a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it [is] to swallow it'.

Stevenson is a fascinating writer to contemplate in this context, if only because he moves within so many different orbits. Dispersed throughout his essays, periodical pieces, and letters of the 1880s are some extremely interesting and sophisticated meditations on reading; at the same time, he can be an exuberant, unrepentant gourmand of the pudding school of fiction, as well as a proponent of its value. Indeed, an essay such as 'A Humble Remonstrance' shows him in both modes. Here we see a willingness to engage and dispute with James on his own terms coupled with the impulse, occasionally indulged, to say to James, in effect: lighten up. Stevenson is unusual among writers of this period for the conspicuously divided nature of his literary loyalties. Like Haggard or Lang or Conan Doyle, he wrote (and championed the value of) light entertainment in the form of adventure tales, seeing such tales not only as an escape from the moral earnestness of much High Victorian fiction but also as an antidote to the occasionally oppressive seriousness of the period's high art. It is perhaps his casual dismissals of the impulse to sacralize art that has led Stevenson to be relatively neglected by twentieth century theorists of fiction, at least in the United States. Consistently, Stevenson puts pleasure at the centre of his theories, and even today that would be enough to generate the suspicion of more high-minded critics. 'In anything fit to be called by the name of reading', Stevenson writes in 'A Gossip on Romance', 'the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our mind filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images'. We dig in a text for our pleasures, he writes, 'like a pig for truffles'. That last is a great image, and one it's hard to imagine occurring to many other critics either then or now.

Like pigs, too, we snuffle for what is rare and valuable in any given text. The truffle-digging image is successful in part because it provides us with a transition to the cluster of topics that will be covered in this essay: reading as searching, digging, uncovering: grubbing after pleasure and meaning. Our way in is through the literary detail, and what Stevenson has to say about it. 'In literature', Stevenson writes in 'A Note on Realism', 'the great change of the past century has been effected by the admission of detail'. By 'detail' Stevenson here means the naturalistic 'fact', the accumulation of which distinguishes the nineteenth century novel from earlier kinds of prose fiction. He traces this kind of thick description back to Scott and Balzac and sees, as did many others, its apotheosis – which is also clearly a perversion – in the work of Zola. Where once prose fiction trafficked in the general and the representative – the stories of Voltaire, he says, were as 'abstract as parables' – now it revels in the particular. Like others, Stevenson worries that the fetishizing of details for their own sake is bad for art. Taken singly, each detail is a potential distraction from the overall pattern of an artwork; taken together, details in their sheer proliferation threaten to overwhelm readers with mere information. Balzac, Stevenson wrote in an 1883 letter to his cousin Bob, 'smothered under forcible-feeble detail... He would leave nothing undeveloped, and thus drowned out of sight of land amid a multitude of crying and incongruous details. Jesus, there is but one art: to omit! O if I knew how to omit, I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knew how to omit would make an Iliad of a daily paper'.

The Modernist note is distinctly audible here. According to Stevenson, the function of literary art is not to reproduce 'life' but to make a pattern, a pattern whose relation to external reality will always be asymptotic. The status of the detail within the artwork is also changed. A fact or bit of information whose only purpose is to contribute to the text's air of verisimilitude is, strictly speaking, extraneous, Stevenson claims. The only details that ought to be allowed into a genuine work of art are those than can be made to serve multiple functions. As one can read in 'A Note on Realism':

'The artist has one main and necessary resource which he must, in every case and upon any theory, employ. He must, that is, suppress much and omit more. He must omit what is tedious and irrelevant, and suppress what is tedious and necessary. But such facts as, in regard to the main design, subserve a variety of purposes, he will perforce and eagerly retain. And it is the mark of the very highest order of creative art to be woven exclusively of such. There, any fact that is registered is contrived a double or treble debt to pay, and is at once an ornament in its place, and a pillar in the main design... Nothing would be allowed in such a story that did not, at the same time, expedite the progress of the fable, build up the characters, and strike home the moral or the philosophical design'.

To suppress much and omit more is not to diminish the significance of the literary detail but instead greatly to augment it. Everything must tell, and tell multiply. But of course each detail 'tells' only in the presence of sufficiently attentive readers. Indeed, texts that work by suppression and omission are not, Stevenson acknowledges, likely to find favour among casual readers. The kind of close, attentive reading required to make sense of such works does not come naturally. It is a difficult craft – a word Stevenson often uses when he discusses aesthetics – a craft analogous to that of writing and one that in effect completes it. One aim of essays such as 'A Note on Realism', 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', and 'A Humble Remonstrance' is to delineate strategies of effective reading, strategies that are geared largely towards elucidating the literary functions of the detail. In her 1987 book, *Reading in Detail*, Naomi Schor traces the history of the detail as it has been theorized from Hegel to Barthes and Derrida. While Schor does not say so explicitly, her account makes clear that by the last quarter of the nineteenth century discussions of the detail are to be found not just in high philosophical and aesthetic discourse but also – and more and more frequently – within the pages of periodicals like the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Contemporary Review* or the *Westminster Review* (Stevenson wrote for all three).

Even in the popular press then, increasingly firm distinctions begin to be drawn between the inattentive or lazy reader and

the good reader, the reader who reads closely and who thus is sensitive to the text at its minutest level. One may recall that 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature' moves from a discussion of the balance of one sentence against another, to a discussion of the meaningful placement of individual words within sentences to, finally, a discussion of the patterns of sounds within and between words or even syllables. 'We begin to see', Stevenson writes in conclusion, 'what an intricate affair is any perfect passage; how many faculties... must be held upon a stretch to make it; and why, when it is made, it should afford us so complete a pleasure. From the arrangement of according letters, which is altogether arabesque and sensual, up to the architecture of the elegant and pregnant sentence, which is a vigorous act of the pure intellect, there is scarce a faculty of man but has been exercised'. The faculties being exercised, it is worth emphasizing, are those of both careful writer and close reader.

On the one hand, this and other of Stevenson's essays on style clearly situate themselves in a tradition of classical rhetorical analysis. But they also lay the groundwork for some distinctly modern forms of reading. The reader will have noticed, for instance, the importance Stevenson places on being able to read not only what is in the text but also some things that are not there. The artist suppresses much and omits more: he omits what is tedious and irrelevant but only suppresses what is tedious but necessary. The distinction between omitting and suppressing is something that needs to be highlighted. In both cases something is made absent from the text, but when it is suppressed its absence is felt; we are required to note and then to try to account for such absences. Suppressions, in other words, leave discernable gaps which readers are invited to fill. Much Modernist writing of course works by way of just such suppressions: for example, teaching stories by Katherine Mansfield and Ernest Hemingway, one can spend a lot of time discussing what is left unwritten in these stories. We assume, and not without justification, that the meanings of such texts reside largely in their silences, their suppressions. This mode of reading – what students always refer

to as reading between the lines – is so familiar to us that we often forget to note its oddity, or stop to recall how recent a practice it is.

For Hemingway and Mansfield, or for just about anyone writing or reading after Freud, what is suppressed is precisely what is most important, most telling. Stevenson by contrast says that the writer suppresses things that may be necessary to his story, but are tedious. For Stevenson, omission and suppression are important primarily because they are the tools with which a writer makes of his work a pleasing artistic pattern. What makes it artistic is just that: its patterning. Putting aside the distinctions separating the different arts, Stevenson writes, 'it may be said... that the motive and end of any art whatever is to make a pattern; a pattern, it may be, of colours, of sounds, of changing attitudes, geometrical figures, or imitative lines; but still a pattern. That is the plane on which these sisters meet; it is by this that they are arts'. In passages like this – and there are many in Stevenson's essays – it is interesting how decisively he turns away from representation as the primary end of fiction. Over and again he will claim that literature is not an effective medium for imitating life, and so it should not make imitation one of its first goals.

This is his most fundamental disagreement with James in the 'Art of Fiction' debate. Art does not 'compete with life', as James had insisted. Indeed, 'the whole secret is that no art does "compete with life" ...The arts, like arithmetic and geometry, turn away their eyes from the gross, coloured and mobile nature at our feet, and regard instead a certain figmentary abstraction.' Literature in particular 'pursues an independent and creative aim' that is quite apart from the claims of mimesis. It might be said that, like James, Stevenson directs our attention to the figure in the carpet, but for him that figure is purely a formal design; its interest and value resides in that, whereas James teases us by implying that the figure, once we discern it, will be the portal to some further (and more important) revelation. James is acknowledged, for obvious reasons, as an indispensable figure in the history of reading practices, but here at least it should be noted that the more radical position is

Stevenson's. It's Stevenson who is saying that 'literary' readers attend first to what Joseph Frank would later, and influentially, call 'spatial form' in modern literature, and only secondarily to plot or thematic material.

A while back there was reference to one of Walter Pater's essays. Pater and Stevenson are not often spoken of together, but in fact Stevenson's essays form an important intertext for some of Pater's better-known meditations, particularly his 1888 essay, 'Style'. Like Stevenson, Pater argues that literary writers and readers are first and foremost "lovers of words" for their own sake; they recognize, too, the historical density of English, which is, in Pater's words, 'product of myriad various minds and contending tongues, compact of obscure and minute association, a language [with] its own abundant and recondite laws'. Language is thus not a transparently expressive medium; the writer recognizes that 'the material in which he works is no more a creation of his own than the sculptor's marble'. Stevenson makes this identical point in 'Technical Elements' and again in 'A Note on Realism'. For both men, 'style' denotes the idiosyncratic way in which a particular writer manages and manipulates the recalcitrant material at his disposal. For Pater, style is signature: to apprehend fully the elements of a writer's style is to gain access to the 'soul' of that writer, since it is by means of his peculiar, his unrepeatable, style that the writer conveys not a picture of the world but of his sense of the world. This is one way Pater attempts to overcome the solipsism that haunts his writings, to break out of those solitary dreams of the world to make a connection. Stevenson, on the other hand, moves in a different direction, away from the idea that style is a form of self-revelation. For him, the more fully-realized a writer's style is, the more impersonal it becomes. In general, Stevenson defines good reading as an ever more refined and sophisticated attention to the surface elements of a text. One is not trying to read through the text to get at something else. Here again Stevenson is taking up the more radical, or at least the less common, theoretical position.

From what has been said so far, a strong case can be made for Stevenson as an important and highly innovative theoretician of reading – one who helps move us toward High Modernist writers such as Eliot or Woolf and, beyond them, to post-modern theorists such as Roland Barthes – even though only a small selection of his essays have been studied here. Over and against the pieces quoted from, could be set numerous essays with, collectively, a completely different theoretical agenda. Essays such as ‘Popular Authors’, ‘A Gossip on Romance’, ‘A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured’, ‘Talk and Talkers’ and many others are memorable for their often joyous accounts of what we – not Stevenson – might call the ‘lower’ pleasures of reading, particularly the pleasures of plot and incident. Few essayists have written so engagingly on the virtues of popular fiction. If in this essay there was an effort to locate and trace a different thread in his work, that’s because it has gone largely unnoticed, or at least not fully appreciated. A full account of ‘Stevenson Reading’ would need to bring together the Stevenson of ‘On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature’ with the Stevenson of ‘A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured’. This cannot be covered here, though one thing that links the two Stevensons is their shared emphasis on pleasure, on good reading as necessarily an ‘absorbing and voluptuous’ activity.

There is also one further, and quite significant, connection between the ‘high’ and the ‘low’ Stevenson, and that’s their shared distrust of, or perhaps just lack of interest in, reading ‘in-depth’ or below the surface. The notion that close reading involves reading through the surface of a text to get at underlying meaning or truth is, of course, very deeply (so to speak) engrained in us. Our touchstone here is probably Freud rather than Pater. But Stevenson doesn’t read in that way, though of course he is often read in that way.

No Sign is an Island

Sudesh Mishra

An island is the irreducible third, the ineffable name, the metaphor. It is the yoking together of two unlikely figures to forge a third that defeats nomenclature. Yet this 'yoking together' is not tantamount to an act of 'soldering' involving the conjugation, the conjugal union, of two parts and of two partners. The noun is built on an error, a slip of tongue that lends to the syllable *ile* the muted gravity of the consonant 's', hence *isle*. Before and beyond this is an etymology based on a series of mutations as *ile* turns to water and *land* to *terra firma*. Instead of serenity the coupling of water and land inspires a strife that is ruinously fertile, both on the epochal and semantic scales. As magma ejaculation in the sea generates a miasma that fades into metaphysic, so the violent conjoining of water and land engenders a symbol verging on the sublime, the unattainable third possibility. Island, as sign, is dispatched by the skirmishing and duelling of its constituent parts (water; land) to a semantic clearing that lies beyond the congealed, hybrid noun, beyond the name *as it is*, vanishing into the spindrift mistiness of allegory, symbol, metaphor, or fetish - this last exemplified by the ubiquitous postcard evoking the tropical sublime.

Island as sign is always the other of the sign 'island'. Since this other is the fugitive third, achieved through the sublation and sublimation of wet and land, brine and rock, the sign can only propagate substitutes or envoys for its semantic evasions. The envoys serve as metaphors in that they stand in for the sign itself and also as metonyms in that they supply the part that suggests the whole. Such envoys are *symptropes*. They are symptoms that camouflage and supplant the original etymological trauma and also tropes that, by venturing into the figurative domain, signal that which cannot be bounded by the sign. Symptropes are heterogeneous sites, including but not strictly confined to topography. Symptropic sites can be corporeal and ethical,

cultural and metaphysical, economic and disciplinary. They can be spaces as well as values. It is not rare for a symptrope to trespass on the site of another symptrope. For instance, the tatau (tattooed body) is a corporeal symptrope aspiring to the aesthetic; the cyclone is a climatic symptrope verging on the ethical; the beach is a topographic symptrope often reduced to the touristic; and the tabu (tabooed object) is a quasi-religious symptrope inextricably (and sometimes inexplicably) linked to tropes of scarcity and anthropophagy. Like a *ronde* enacted around a talismanic being, symptropes waltz around the third fugitive possibility shadowed in the sign 'island'. Since it is not the thing itself, the sign of the third possibility, the symptrope is a figure of evasion. On the other hand, since it 'steps in' for the sign 'island,' rift as it is by an ancient internecine strife that withholds the third possibility, the symptrope is a substitute masquerading as the third possibility, disguising the evasion. This proem (a paper as prelude to a poem) is a voyage into four distinct symptropes. Let me begin with the most obvious one.

The Beach

A beach symptropically defines an island. It is the limit point necessary to any attempt at mapping an island. Even when there is no beach in sight, the crag, the scarp, the mangrove swamp and the littoral rocks are potential beach sites. This potentiality may be epochal in that the bruising struggle between water and land throws up a beach, or it may be economic in that the tourist industry will carve out a beach where there is none (often by vandalizing another beach), or it may be philosophical (or recreational, if you like) in that the roving eye (mind, nose, ear) 'surfs' the extremities for signs of a beach. A beach is born as a result of a physical act or action. Sent on an errand by Degei, creator of islands, Rokomouto drags his lavalava along the foreshore and beaches spring up behind him.

As a limit point the beach is, however, obstinately protean. Even as the cartographer's hand traces the contours of an island

- and the beach is a point in an island's contour - the beach site demonstrates the vanity of the ambition by obeying the law of tidal flows. When we think it is a part of the land, the flood-tide converts the beach to water; and when we think it is a part of the ocean, the ebb-tide proves us wrong again. In this sense at least, the two symptropes - the beach and the lagoon - are swappable sisters. They both defy inscriptions of immutability, the finality of diagrams, charts and maps. Either sea or land, neither sea nor land, the beach is that grainy, pointillistic, terraqueous tissue (composed of salt, decayed coral, a mishmash of bones and skeletons, but also of soil, leaves, shingles and assorted telluric debris) that makes the definition of an island at once possible and impossible. As a mutable space, constantly appearing and disappearing, the beach is the evanescent home of beachcombers, who, since they are neither upright citizens nor usurping rebels, stay 'beached' until some inner urge or a passing ship persuades them to renew their aimless peripatetic calling. The beach is ruled by neither time nor telos; it is an abstract limbo rendered earthly. The beachcomber sprawls on the beach, waiting, but this waiting is emptied of temporality, history and significance. On the beach, existence itself is in abeyance. A creature spawned in the nineteenth century, the beachcomber is a maritime rover for whom the beach affords a lull to his peregrinations. More often than not, he is an ex-tar from a whaler who has violated his vessel's articles through voluntary shipwreck. For this bedouin, the beach is the limbo space of gentlemanly leisure based on a rejection of commodity values. The shore provides him refuge from the indefatigable pursuit of commodity aboard whaling or trading ships. Sometimes this choice leads to his destitution. A vagrant is, as the expression goes, a bloke *on the beach*. Undoubtedly the beach is also the site where goods are exchanged (copra, banana, sandalwood, breadfruit, nails, muskets), but it is the trader and not the beachcomber who figures here. The modern tourist cuts an entirely different figure. For the tourist (who is no defiant, peripatetic nomad), the beach is the limbo space of simulated pleasure saturated by commodity values. The beach is commodity.

One inhabits a golden curvature inside a travel brochure.

Yet the beach is not always a packaged, non-minatory site. There is a distinction to be drawn between touristic beaches that resemble oases untainted by the quotidian, where each transient has a homebound ticket, and desert beaches that proffer no such solace for the castaway. The touristic beach is populated by a glib transitory species that has a stake in the values of the enclave. The solitude of the touristic beach is stage-managed in a way that unfailingly reminds us of the artifice of modernity into which we, the transitory subjects, are comfortably gathered. For this reason, the touristic beach is rarely menaced by the other, although the other is perpetually there as servant and mirror. The solitary footprint on the sand may induce textual nostalgia, but is unlikely to inspire panic, anxiety or alarm. Initially the castaway (who is no tourist) may be lulled by the music that creeps by upon the waters, allaying untold furies and terrors, but in the end the preternatural solitude, by withholding the other necessary for self-recognition, besieges the mind with a battery of wraiths and voices. All signs, including those concerning the nature and purpose of solitude, are exhausted of the unknown for the touristic subject. The tourist *expects* the pleasures of *déjà vu*. His island is bereft of the terrors generated by new encounters. For the castaway it is otherwise. Newly marooned, he has an insufficient grasp of the signs around him. Endeavoring to unravel the marks in solitude but lacking a community that may prove or disprove his project, the castaway loses control of both reason and narrative. A paranoid schizophrenic, he is startled by his own shadow. Signs become exaggerated, sounds become amplified. *Cracking a sea-louse, I make thunder split*. A lone footprint sets him wildly speculating about sprites, devils and cannibals. In the end he cannot tell whether the footprint belongs to him or to some other. Is he frightened by the chimera of his own imagining or does the spoor betray a second being? At the back of his mind the castaway suspects the presence of a dangerous double. His desire wills the other into being; his terror wishes his away. Like all who are visited by the muse of madness, the castaway propagates imaginary beings. He

converses with the air, alternately calming and scaring himself with the conversation.

For both sailor and castaway apparitions merely delay the fact's appearance. Dreaming of a concupiscent sea-nymph, the sailor wills her to appear *in flesh* on the beach - and succeeds. The siren (who is also an odalisque) lures him with her legendary wiles and a meretricious lei of flowers. She too is spellbound by the news of newness; the other is a novel bearer of exotic commodities. The sailor succumbs to the solicitation. The sea-nymph succumbs to syphilis, measles, smallpox and, more contemporaneously, AIDS. Whole communities are decimated. The beach is the deadly contact-point between bodies, moralities and practices. A noxious floating isle, the ship unleashes a thousand devils upon the beach, the gateway to the rest of the island. Germs and gendarmes, rodents and radioactivity, cockroaches and Christ. However, the ship is not merely a bearer of bad gifts; it bestows good gifts as well. If it receives gifts of breadfruit, shelter and sex, it also gives gifts of iron, medicine and seed. It goes without saying that gifts, good or bad, may be received equivocally. The beach is the site of an ambivalent transaction. Seen from afar, the figure on the beach may be a tawny beauty or an aficionado of long-pigs. Amatory desire may yield enigmatically to the terrors of anthropophagy. An exchange of gifts may end in a bloody skirmish. The castaway is as likely to stumble upon the crushed petals from a lory-lory as he is upon the charred remains of a cannibal feast. The first ignites a fit of delight, the second prolonged retching and flight. It is for this reason that the castaway never build his house on sand; he settles on a less exposed site, less prone to forays from the interior - a cave or a cove, or he bolts, pursued by furies real and imagined, straight for the anonymity of the bush.

The Bush

A bad bush is better than an open field. When one enters the bush from the beach via a river or a pig-run, one switches symptropes. If the beach is the skin-tissue of an island, oozing allegories

of exteriority and exposure, the bush is its most important organ, pulsating with a tenebrous interiority. The bush has an indecipherable heart, but it knows no limit point and certainly no frontier. It violates its own definition, turning into wilderness or waste or, at its most extreme, impenetrable jungle. Not being a border between sea and land, the bush is disdainful of contact. The message in the bottle is never found in the bush. If pursued, the mutinous seaman makes for the bush, thereby setting off a quest into himself. He *goes bush*, that is to say he goes native. He swaps one value-system for another or, rather, he attempts to convince us, in what is no doubt an aporia, that he can convey his *going native* in novelistic prose. Sometimes he is admitted into the tribal fold and becomes a puissant warrior and chief but more often he becomes the long-pig of his own overheated fantasy. It is as likely for the runaway to stumble upon a hospitable valley as it is for him to encounter the kai cola, the unredeemed cannibal. If he has the fortunate role of the narrator, he survives on wild berries, eventually gaining the shore where a passing ship ferries him back to civilisation; if he is a minor figure, a sidekick, his body parts end up among the lovo stones. Rovers, traders, missionaries - all have declared in extensive tracts their fascination for the epicures of human flesh? An island plot worth its salt is driven invariably by a suspicion of anthropophagy.

Yarns are spun about the bush, but the bush does not spin yarns. What appears on the beach (castaway or cannibal), disappears into the bush. Often irredeemably. To venture into the bush is to court silence and silent fears. That said, it is by plodding through the bush and scanning the seascape from a promontory that one discovers an island - and the self enisled. What the mind surmised on the beach, the eye, having penetrated the bush (as distinct from beating about it), having undergone the customary trials and tribulations, now ratifies as fact. An island is laved on all sides by the sea. This island, *my* island, is pickled and preserved in brine. It promises the insularity of a moated castle; or an olive. A summit makes an emperor of any fool; it is customary to lay claim to all that one descries from an imperial height: bush, savage, beach,

lagoon, sea, sail, even the sad oil-heavy bulk of the cachalot - an island unto itself. No man is an island, says the poet, but forgets to mention that every knave will own one. An odyssey through the bush may end in knowledge, but not necessarily self-knowledge.

Had I plantation of this isle, my lord. It is tempting to put the old courtier on an elevated part of the island-stage. What follows the remark is a delirious, dishonest elaboration, charged with contraries, for no society based on sovereignty is ever utopian. And yet an island is more or less than the *thing* that is observed. Seen from the vantage point of one who has braved the bush (and hence acquired a type of sovereignty), the island is potentially a plantation, a prison, a resort or a leper colony. (Although the perspective alters when one studies the same scene through the seasick eyes of the *girmitya*, prisoner, leper. The island becomes *narak*, hell.) When it has served its primal function, the rite of passage or initiation, the bush is ripe for domestication. *Had I plantation of this isle, my lord* - what comes next has the predictability of a potboiler. The taro patches of a subsistence economy are displaced by cane farms, copra groves, ginger fields, cement factories; the savage dawdling eternally in the bucolic shade of the palmetto is made into a conscientious worker and, failing that (and all natives know the danger attendant upon this failure), slaves and indentured servants are imported as substitutes; the vital organs of the island are ripped out in the merciless pursuit of minerals (phosphate, gold, copper); the village itself is banished to the outskirts of the intended city, not far from the festering rubbish tip; the sacred haunts of the island dryads are converted into rugby fields and golf greens; the soft glow of the tagimoucia, that rarest of blossoms, is extinguished by the gusts of nuclear storms; the sea-dreams of the mighty dakua are reduced to a handful of woodchips; and all the beautiful noises are smothered in the general roar of trade and traffic. Thus tamed, the bush is no longer a symptrope for interiority, the cause and refuge of primal desires and fears associated with islands. There is little of the bush in the purchaseable humour of a curio stall bedecked with tongue knives and brain forks. The bush survives here and there, but as

a relic from the past affording the postmodern rover the nostalgic pleasures of ecotourism.

Tapu; Tatau

It is no new thing to say that an island is a laboratory, an experimental chamber or a site where *difference* is rendered in experimental terms, as something to be classified and described or to be cured or destroyed. An island may be a botanical or zoological hothouse, a Galapagos of unique life-forms; it may be the site of improbable genetic accidents and afflictions, giving rise to a society of *maskuns* or colour-blind people; it may be the breeding ground for fabulous creatures such as the Rukh, which lays an egg so enormous that Sinbad mistakes it for a gigantic dome; it may be an atollic organism exposed to the insanities and abominations of a nuclear age; or, finally, it may be an ark stranded in prehistory, inhabited by tribal units whose *peculiar* practices form the subject of tomes authored by a horde of self-appointed specialists.

It is impossible to extricate the islandness of an island from the cultural symptropes of the islander. Any attempt to describe an island's particularity entails an account of the peculiarity of the islander. It is no cheap rhetorical ploy to profess that the islander is the isle, the isle the islander. An islander loitering in New Bedford, *some twenty thousand miles from home, by the way of Cape Horn*, bears the telltale signs of an island upon his body. What dread tales of isolation and insularity, privation and depravity - in short, otherness - are told in the hieroglyphic profusion on the visage of a savage! Is the island savage born after the fact of his body or before? The tattooed visage tells us what we already know about islands, even as it rouses the suspicion that the marks mask an unutterable secret. The swagger and hauteur in a savage moves us to comment on his dignity or annoys us to the point of derision. The dangerous, disfiguring currents run beneath his skin, yet he is as self-possessed as a rock. The non-islander cannot decide on the precise value ascribable to the decorated body. When offered

the gift of the tatau, he reels back in horror at the prospect of the ruin of his 'face divine'. Is the work of the creator flawed that the savage wants to improve it? The encounter between man and god rules out art, artfulness, artifice. The tatau betrays the heretic, the turncoat, the fiend. To accept the gift would entail the forfeiture of a *face* that makes possible the homeward journey. Yet, when accosted with a detailed representation of birds, crabs and fishes *on the face of the other*, he wonders if the tatau is an aesthetic elaboration on corporeal matter. Is the body a pictorial museum, an archival tapestry? Could the epidermis of a human being constitute a perishable, portable canvas? Has the savage attained the ultimate artistic dream of transforming life into an artefact? If so, it follows that nature is culture, the savage is civilised, the island is a state. Beneath all the wisecracks about the wandering professors of the fine arts, there is this grudging admission - that the savage is not a savage at all.

On the back of this admission rides the anthropologist, flogging a dead horse. The *mana* of the *tatau*, a notion bordering on the sublime, is harnessed to a desultory thesis. *Curious to say, the tools of the tattoo are a shark's tooth, a wooden mallet and a coca-bowl of dye extracted from vegetable matter: it appears that the more luxuriant the tattoo, the greater the social rank and masculinity of the subject, which is why the chief stands out like a fanned peacock among chickens or a variegated rock in the sea; it is worth noting that women are sparingly adorned in conformity with the lowly status of their gender; the tattoo can also be regarded as a rite of passage for the impetuous stripling; and, somewhat inexplicably, it is an offense to gaze upon the body while it is being tattooed, or upon an island while it is being formed.* What is inexplicable here, what eludes the predatory prose is precisely that which no sign can domesticate: the *mana* of the islander-as-island.

Another symptrome that inspires the non-islander to attempt the impossible, to say the unsayable, is the tapu. *It is a customary law of prohibition.* The translator is a traitor in that he annihilates even the memory of the proper name, all the while imagining that his manoeuvres guide him ever so closer to the thing itself. The sign-moths flit about the flame of final significance, singeing papery

wings. It is said that the chiefs person is tapu, *for he is the sacred one and also because the taboo diminishes the risk of assassination*; that the tapu groves are off-limits to non-warriors, to infants and to women, *for on this site weighty tribal matters are decided and the mana of fallen enemies appropriated*; that the tribal emissary, rendered untouchable by the tapu, *has a freedom of movement not enjoyed by the rest of the island*; that the tapu *bequeaths a similar freedom to the fool's incessant tongue*; that the tabooing of the breadfruit tree in the wake of a storm or the reef-cod after a bout of unrestrained fishing *demonstrates the rational side to the practice*; that the injunction against men's presence in the affairs of women - such as tapa making - *is based on the sexual division of labour*; that the injunction against women approaching the drua *is on the whole absurd*; that the tapu *covers the whole field of law and propriety*; that it can be used to *safeguard and deify on the one hand and to outlaw and outcast on the other*.

To describe the indescribable, to seize the unseizable, to say the unsayable - these aporias are already built into the symptropes of tatau and tapu. The tattooed body belies the islander and the non-islander fills him with all the anxieties and desires reserved for islands. Similarly, the tabooed thing bears about it the imprecise aura of an island; and this imprecision returns us to the third (unsayable) possibility with which I began this paper.

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