# Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate



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# "Speak, Mnemosyne": Genre Performance and Metagenre in Petina Gappah's Memoir-Novel The Book of Memory

KATRIN BERNDT

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This article is the first entry in a debate on "'Speak, Mnemosyne': Genre Performance and Metagenre in Petina Gappah's Memoir-Novel *The Book of Memory*" (<a href="http://www.connotations.de/debate/genre-perfomance-and-metagenre-in gappahs-memoir-novel-the-book-of memory">http://www.connotations.de/debate/genre-perfomance-and-metagenre-in gappahs-memoir-novel-the-book-of memory</a>). If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to <a href="mailto:editors@connotations.de">editors@connotations.de</a>.

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#### **Abstract**

This article contends that the genre of the memoir-novel is inherently metageneric in purpose and design, arguing that it combines the novel's aesthetic and thematic diversity with the memoir's confessional self-reflection in order to produce selfreferential comments on the characteristics of both genres, while simultaneously drawing attention to its own, hybrid form. Petina Gappah's The Book of Memory (2015) is a memoir-novel that exemplifies several forms of metagenre. The analysis identifies the novel's foregrounding of its own production as a story, its confessional qualities, the self-reflexive and retrospective construction of memories, and the implementation of telling names as a convention of other genres as explicit forms of metagenre; implicit forms include inter- and transtextual references to Greek mythology, to the writings of Vladimir Nabokov, and to different cultural narratives. Among the implicit forms, there is also the protagonist's suggestion that her narration of her own story is based on unreliable memories, which undermines her credibility and hence deviates from the genre convention of the memoir-novel. Gappah's novel moreover contains examples of implicit metagenre that are transformed into explicit forms: it foregrounds the status of progressive myths as cultural narratives in order to subvert them, and it stages genre conventions of the memoir-novel as motifs. Both conversions are transpositions that have the potential to substantiate as well as undermine the subjective, confessional quality of the memoir-novel, suggesting a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of metagenre overall.

We think we have some kind of privileged access to our own motives and intentions. In fact we have no clear insight into what moves us to live as we do. The stories we tell ourselves are like the messages that appear on Ouija boards. If we are the authors of our lives, it is only in retrospect.

(John Gray, The Soul of the Marionette 137)

### 1. Introduction

This article discusses Petina Gappah's The Book of Memory (2015) as a memoir-novel, a genre whose inherently metageneric design and purpose combine the novel's aesthetic and thematic diversity with the memoir's confessional self-reflection in order to comment on the characteristics of both genres, while simultaneously drawing attention to its own, hybrid form.1 The analysis identifies the novel's confessional qualities, its self-reflexive and retrospective construction of memories, its foregrounding of its own production as a story, and the implementation of telling names as a convention of other genres as explicit forms of metagenre. It will also draw attention to implicit forms, such as the novel's inter- and transtextual references to Greek mythology, the writings of Vladimir Nabokov, and different cultural narratives, as well as its deviation from genre conventions of the memoir-novel.2 In addition, the article will argue how implicit metagenre becomes transformed into explicit forms in the novel when it foregrounds the status of progressive myths as cultural narratives and stages conventions of the memoirnovel, such as the genre's claim to present the protagonist's story truthfully, in self-reflexive ways as a motif of the imaginative (re)creation of memory. These conversions are transpositions that substantiate as well as undermine the subjective, confessional quality of the memoir-novel, suggesting a more comprehensive understanding of its genre-typical relations to other texts, and of the phenomenon of metagenre overall.<sup>3</sup>

In her discussion of the role of metagenre in academic learning, Janet Giltrow has argued that "meta-genres are atmospheres of wordings and activities, demonstrated precedents or sequestered expectations—atmospheres surrounding genres" (195). To identify a particular form as metagenre, its "context" and "use" must be considered, since "meta-

genres—like genres themselves—are situated expressions" (196). Drawing on this general proposition on the purposes of metagenre, Burkhard Niederhoff has rendered Giltrow's observations more specific by adding that the phenomenon represents "an awareness of the rules and conventions governing a particular text type such as a newsletter, a student essay or a medical report" (3), which can include references of a text to its own or to another genre (see 8). In literary scholarship, "the prefix meta" moreover needs to be understood as describing any form of "[s]elf-reflexiveness [...] where metalanguage and object language are the same" (4). In other words, the particular "atmosphere" (Giltrow 197) defined as the "context of use" (190) of metagenre would, in literary criticism, both call upon and provide critical (meta)language and terminology to comprehend object language, which may directly express self-reflexiveness or invoke it in indirect manner. With regard to literary genre, Niederhoff suggests distinguishing between explicit and implicit types of metagenre: whereas "[f]ully explicit examples are rare [... since they would] have to [literally] name a genre and draw a connection to the text itself" (8), implicit types of metagenre occur whenever "the genre status of a text is only suggested, not pointed out in [any] obvious and direct manner" (9). Implicit metagenre hence comprises common and established rhetorical and narrative strategies, such as "genre within genre," "transtextuality," and "the violation of genre norms" (12).4

Both metalanguage and object language, as well as explicit and implicit distinctions of metagenre, can be found in *The Book of Memory*, whose analysis in what follows is situated within a comprehension of atmosphere and context,<sup>5</sup> the subgenre of the memoir-novel, and Gappah's own formal and thematic concerns.<sup>6</sup> To begin with the last of these, Gappah's work has so far demonstrated a particular interest in the intersections of personal and national history, in the re-evaluation of colonialist and postcolonialist ideologies, and in reflecting on the production of historical and cultural knowledge in general. In spite of her professional background as a lawyer and expert on international

trade, Gappah's primary motivation for writing is her fascination with history:

I'm a frustrated historian, which is probably clear from [*The Book of Memory*]. I'm interested in excavating the social histories of Zimbabwe. For instance, Zimbabwe was built on a very unjust system of racial segregation; I know that. But I also know that there were amazing stories of love across the races. And there were some really nasty white people in Zimbabwe. But there were white people like Peter Garlake, who lost his job because he argued that the Great Zimbabwe ruins were built by black people and not by Phoenicians.

History's always distorted to suit a political purpose, but fiction can try to redress the balance. And those are the stories I'm interested in telling—the stories of everyday normal people, who even in this injustice still managed to find their humanity. (Gappah, "Petina Gappah on Zimbabwe" n.p.)

Gappah's fascination with history also influences her interest in contemporary social and legal justice. In *The Book of Memory*, the portrayal of contemporary Zimbabwean society is fashioned as a "thick" cultural narrative, a "genre within [the] genre" of the novel that can be understood as an implicit and transtextual form of metagenre with which Gappah makes historical references meaningful.<sup>7</sup>

Another distinguishing feature of her writing that will be attended to in the metagenre context is Gappah's wry sense of humour. Oscillating between sarcasm and empathy, her prose mocks or laments social ills, hypocrisies, and institutional corruption in present-day Zimbabwe. Gappah's first book of fiction, the short-story collection *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), was praised by South African Nobel Laureate J. M. Coetzee for its "scathing satire of Zimbabwe's ruling elite" and the "earthy comedy [that gives] sensitive accounts of the sufferings of humble victims of the regime" (cover endorsement). Another collection of stories, *Rotten Row* (2016), was influenced by German writer Ferdinand von Schirach's *Crime* (2012) and *Guilt* (2012), and by the broad coverage Zimbabwean media dedicates to crimes of various kinds, from felonies to minor transgressions. Gappah's stories shed light on the Zimbabwean criminal justice system, which, she argues, "links everyone together, from the top politicians to the street vendors—it cuts across the

boundaries of race and class. So it was a theme that allowed me to build up a whole panorama of Zimbabwean society" (Gappah, "I want to write" n.p.). Her most recent work is the historical novel *Out of Darkness, Shining Light* (2019), which imagines the journey of the remains of Scottish explorer David Livingstone (1813-1873) that were carried from Central Africa to the East African coast to be shipped back to Britain. Gappah narrates this story from the perspectives of the African women and men who had been Livingstone's attendants and companions. *Out of Darkness, Shining Light* includes metafictional reflections on how history, historiography, and knowledge are produced, and whose contributions have come to be acknowledged in the process.<sup>9</sup>

Such considerations connect Gappah's work with both the emergence of the British memoir-novel in the long eighteenth century and major themes and forms of post-independence, contemporary Zimbabwean literature. To begin with the historical connection, Britain's "[e]arly novelists [had] tried to accommodate their [then] new genre to the forms of personal history, imitating biography, autobiography, collections of correspondence, or explicitly claiming, as [Henry Fielding's] Tom Jones does, the essential identity of novel and history" (Meyer Spacks 48). The Book of Memory is a memoir-novel, a genre that originated in the long eighteenth century and that is inherently "self-reflexive" as it "comments on the genre[s] it belongs to" (Niederhoff 2) in denomination and features. A memoir-novel "purports to be a 'true' autobiographical account but [...] is wholly or mostly fictitious. Thus, [it is] a kind of literary convention or fictional device [...] of which Daniel Defoe appears to have been the first practitioner with Robinson Crusoe (1719) and Moll Flanders (1722)" (Cuddon 504). Popular throughout the eighteenth century, the genre reflects on the boundaries of fact and fiction by purpose and design and is, therefore, inherently metafictional: its "pseudo-autobiographical mode" (Baldick 150) relies on exhibiting convincingly the pretension that events, experiences, and sentiments are truthfully represented. In the Romantic period, the memoirnovel came to be used to make evident and complicate beliefs in the powers of the imagination, authorship, and the individual self while

also engaging with political, social, and legal concerns of the time. While Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) was a "popular satirical attack on what she perceived as the excesses of contemporary radical thought" (Perkins n.p.), William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) laments the pitfalls of confessional self-exploration: its protagonist claims that he wrote his "memoirs [...] with the idea of vindicating my character" only to arrive at the conclusion that "I have now no character that I wish to vindicate" (434). Other Romantic memoirnovels feature a "narrator [who] is not, like [Defoe's] Crusoe, the central actor in the drama, but an observer merely," such as Thady Quirk in *Castle Rackrent* (1800) by Maria Edgeworth (Watson xvi).

Satire, confession, and the motif of an individual self who is drawn as an observer to their own identity and history also feature prominently in contemporary, post-independence Zimbabwean literature. Modern Zimbabwean classics such as Chenjerai Hove's Bones (1988), Yvonne Vera's Nehanda (1993) and Without a Name (1994) have explored the entanglement of individual and collective narratives as an intersection of memory and history that frequently challenges the reliability and truthfulness of both. Marita, the protagonist of Hove's Bones, is also portrayed as an observer of her own (hi)story: "Constantly addressed and spoken about, she nevertheless does not belong to the group of the novel's narrators. She is omnipresent in the text, yet her voice is heard only through the voices of others. Although she dominates the narrated time, she is excluded from the time of telling" (Primorac, Place of Tears 90). Both Vera's and Hove's novels employ a narrative strategy that African-American Nobel laureate Toni Morrison has called "rememory," which describes the "continuous movement to and fro between past and present" (Tate 129) in the "effort to both remember and not know [...] the pitched battle between remembering and forgetting" that comprehends memory as a "mutation of fact into fiction [and then into] folklore and then into nothing" (Morrison n.p.). It is this deliberate transposition of the cultural narrative, as a form of collective memory, into a fictional text that can not only be identified in Gappah's *The Book* of Memory, but also be defined as an explicit form of metagenre, when

the novel foregrounds the status of progressive myths as cultural narratives in order to subvert them. Satire and confession feature strongly in more recent works by Zimbabwean writers: the satirical attack on authoritarianism and political corruption in No Violet Bulawayo's *Glory* (2022) "explores what happens when an authoritarian regime implodes, [...and] politics becomes a farce" (Mushakavanhu n.p.). <sup>10</sup> Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) portrays her main character's bitter struggle with legitimizing her own, cruel actions in a self-reflexive story about the pains of disappointed development, and is rendered in the style of biographical confession. <sup>11</sup>

Overall, Petina Gappah's The Book of Memory combines several of the characteristics of contemporary Zimbabwean writing that have also featured in the memoir-novel genre's early British history. Her novel also exemplifies what ultimately distinguishes the memoir-novel from its cousin genres<sup>12</sup> memoir, biography, and autobiography, including fictional biography, fictional metabiography, and fictional metaautobiography. 13 Other than these, the memoir-novel does not have to be concerned with what Ina Schabert described as "real-life orientation [and] the comprehension of real historical individuals by means of the sophisticated instruments of knowing and articulating knowledge that contemporary fiction offers" (4). While other forms of biographical writing seek to communicate factual claims by narrative and aesthetic means, the memoir-novel writes a fictional life and is therefore more concerned with the creative and imaginative instruments it uses. When such a "comprehension" refers to a distinctive convention of a particular genre, we are dealing with an example of metagenre. In addition to such instances of generic self-reflection, it is a characteristic of the memoir-novel to reflect on the concept of the memoir, as it pretends to give an autobiographical and truthful account of a life. In this way, and as illustrated by the confession of the narrator in Caleb Williams quoted above, and as shown in the following, in-depth analysis of Gappah's The Book of Memory, it can be argued that memoir-novels are always self-reflexive and, hence, inherently metageneric.

# 2. Strategies of Metagenre in The Book of Memory

## 2.1. The Narration of Memory as Genre Performance

The presence and significance of metagenre in Gappah's *The Book of Memory* is intricately connected with the concept of memory which looms large in the form of several (literal and figurative) meanings in the novel. To begin with, the title explicitly refers to the eponymous protagonist, a young woman named Memory, and announces the leitmotif, namely the presentation of (her) memory in the form of a coherent book, whose production is pursued, foregrounded, and self-reflexively discussed in the text. In this sense, "memory" is also a major convention of the particular subgenre of the text. Moreover, the title invokes an intertextual reference to (the books of) the Bible, suggesting a canonical authority that is at odds with the subjective significance of a personal memoir. With this implicit claim, the title also challenges the genre norms (see Niederhoff 11) of the memoir-novel.

In *The Book of Memory*, several properties of the memoir-novel can be identified in the novel's first sentences, which introduce the protagonist, two major elements of the plot, and the overall story development. Memory, a young Zimbabwean albinotic woman in Harare's high security Chikurubi prison, has been sentenced to death for the murder of her white adoptive father, Lloyd Hendricks, who bought her from her parents at the age of nine. She is prompted to narrate her life by a US-American activist-journalist, who has "made a career out of exposing miscarriages of justice" and is in Zimbabwe "to research a series of essays on our benighted justice system" (9). Memory relates her childhood and youth to this journalist because of the vague prospect that she might be granted a new trial that would acquit her:

The story that you have asked me to tell you does not begin with the pitiful ugliness of Lloyd's death. It begins on a long-ago day in August when the sun seared my blistered face and I was nine years old and my father and mother sold me to a strange man. (1)

These sentences feature several conventions of the memoir-novel that draw attention to the genre: they make explicit the text's confessional quality, they emphasize the retrospective reconstruction of memory, and they include imaginative elements that characterize the first-person autodiegetic narrator. Memory's "blistered face" will soon be revealed to refer to her albinism, and the "sold me to a strange man" comment temporarily morphs into the internal focalization of Memory's younger, experiencing self to solicit sympathy for the child she was and, consequently, for the imprisoned woman she, the narrating self, has become. This motivation is further clarified soon afterwards, when the narrator reveals that it actually "was a happy day for me" (1) because it was "really my mother" (1) she had reason to fear as a child, since her mother was emotionally unstable and occasionally violent. The initial confession that she was "sold to a strange man" thus assumes a new quality: what appeared to be the self-conscious perception of the nine-year-old girl transforms into an implied characterization of her mother and her parents' decision to give Memory away.

The inherent ambiguity of the self-reflexive, autodiegetic narrator is an often-discussed characteristic of Tsitsi Dangarembga's modern Zimbabwean classic, *Nervous Conditions* (1988). In this Bildungsroman, Dangarembga "skilfully manipulates the distinctions between narrated time and the time of narration" (Primorac, "Iron Butterflies" 102) in order to explore "the self-referential nature of the autobiographical mode" (Uwakweh 75). A much-lauded contribution to post-independence Zimbabwean literature, Dangarembga's continuous alternation between "the point of view of the adult, educated first-person narrator and that of her youthful, inexperienced narrated self" (Primorac, "Iron Butterflies" 102) has been regarded as

a literary strategy [that marked] her attainment of voice in the Zimbabwean male-dominated literary arena. Voicing is self-defining, liberational, and cathartic. It proclaims an individual as a conscious being capable of independent thought and action. Dangarembga illustrates this point in the status of Tambudzai as narrator or 'implied author' of *Nervous Conditions*. The narrator

occupies an interpretive position, a perspective that is necessary for our appreciation of the new insights she acquires about her experience as female in a patriarchal and colonial society. (Uwakweh 75)

Gappah claims that *Nervous Conditions*, "the first novel in English by a black Zimbabwean woman [...], had a profound effect on me. It shifted everything for me" (Gappah, Interview by Bongani Kona n.p.). As Uwakweh shows, Dangarembga's metageneric strategy, which draws attention to both the self-reflexive quality of the memoir and the Bildungsroman's distinguishing feature—narrating the youthful development of a character—assumes a highly political, liberational significance in the context of the first decade of post-independence Zimbabwe. About twenty years later, Gappah adopts this strategy, but she alters the meaning: in a double metaization, the production and (de)construction of memory itself is problematized, which suggests not liberation but disillusionment with the state of, and corruption within, present-day Zimbabwe.

Moreover, in Gappah's novel, the distinction between narrating and experiencing self also clearly responds to what the reader soon learns was encouragement from the activist-journalist: "The story that you have asked me to tell you." Her subsequent description of her father draws attention to her attempt to construct her memory truthfully: "My father is in a safari suit whose colour I can no longer remember. Or perhaps it wasn't a safari suit at all that he wore, and I have only put him in one because it is what all the men wore in those days" (1). The tenses of her retrospective reflection change several times here, from present indicative to present perfect to simple past, thereby stressing both the art of memory (production) and the narrating self's awareness of the possibly flawed credibility of her memory. Gappah, I would argue, "foreground[s the genre] conventions" of the memoir-novel, which relies on maintaining the trustworthiness of the fiction it presents, "by [...] deviating from them" (Niederhoff 11).

Having thus characterized her memories, and her own narration, as potentially untrustworthy, Memory recalls the very first words her adoptive father said to her: "Speak, Mnemosyne" (2). As the text will

reveal later, Lloyd Hendricks is a scholar of classical mythology and literature, and his imperative greeting likens Memory to the Greek titan goddess, daughter of Uranus (the sky) and Gaia (the earth), who became mother of the nine muses (see Irmscher 359). The reference gestures towards the importance of Greek mythology as an imaginative tradition, one of several forms of cultural memory appropriated in Gappah's novel. Moreover, the particular form of address includes an intertextual reference to the title of Vladimir Nabokov's autobiographical narrative, Speak, Memory (1951). The first sentence of his memoir also appears as epigraph in Gappah's novel.14 This chain of pluricultural references invites the reader to consider the story of Memory in an associative context of the Russian-American author's famous memoir-novel Lolita (1955): it complies with the criterion of transtextual, implicit metagenre, which "invokes a genre by referring to a prototypical example of this genre" (Niederhoff 10). In this way, Gappah's readers are encouraged to ponder the nature of Memory's relationship with her adoptive father, and consequently the reason for the "pitiful ugliness" (1) of his death.

# 2.2. (Subverting) The Order of Memory

The opening strategies of metaization in the memoir-novel are representative of the text's engagement with metagenre, and of the genre's inherent ambiguity, which demands that biographical credibility be performed in a convincing manner. Another feature of implicit metagenre can be found in the structure of the novel: the titles of the three parts of *The Book of Memory* are named after the three places Memory inhabited. They begin with the address of her parents' house in Mufakose Township in Harare, where she lived until the age of nine; they continue with the home of her adoptive father in Umwinsidale, an upper-middle-class neighbourhood at the other end of the Zimbabwean capital where she spent the next nine years; and they conclude with Chikurubi prison, where she is held in the present-time of the

story. This structural design suggests a chronological story development, yet the narrative order is not linear; "rememory" subverts the order of memory, as the narrative is continuously disrupted and alternates between Memory's present, analepses to different stages of her childhood and youth, and self-reflexive contemplations on the construction of memory, that is, her process of remembering. Disruptions such as analepses are, of course, established strategies of both novel and memoir with which the genres present (and manipulate the presentation of) story time. Gappah's novel employs them in a way that accentuates their function as genre convention when she names the book's three parts after local places of residence that only occasionally appear as an actual setting. The flexibility of the genre convention becomes a ruse with which the memoir-novel stages its imaginative, and non-linear, construction of the past. Moreover, Memory's first-person narration frequently undermines her own, autobiographical claim that she is faithfully recounting her story: on various occasions, she self-consciously interrupts her endeavours to relate her story in order to reflect on her capacity to (re)create a reliable representation of her past.

That is the thing about memory. Sometimes you come to understand the things you cannot possibly have known; they make sense and you rewrite the memory to make it coherent. (133)

So I reflect on my life, to rework the events that brought me here, to rearrange and reimagine them in an endless cycle of what-ifs. (11)

[A]s it turns out, writing this is not as simple as I had imagined. I had thought that when I sat down to write, it would be to tell a linear story with a proper beginning, an ending and a middle.

I did not realise the extent to which my current reality and random memories would intrude into this narrative. (85)

These passages feature explicit references to various formal elements of the memoir-novel and therefore qualify as instances of explicit metagenre (see Niederhoff 9): the narrator admits her desire to "rewrite the memory to make it coherent," and to "rework," "rearrange and reimagine" her life in the form of "a linear story" that follows the conventional design supposedly demanded by the journalist who initiated the process. A consummate contrarian, the narrating self labels her "current reality and random memories" as inadvertently spoiling her efforts, thus disturbing the suspension of disbelief upon which the memoirnovel, like all fiction, relies. This exposure and disruption of its genre conventions adds an aspect of implicit metagenre as well.

The occasional insertion of what can be read as second-person narration employs the formal convention of point-of-view as an aspect of metagenre. Memory's confession of her life story is rendered as an "overt address" to the US-American activist-journalist Melinda Carter, who never actually appears in the story and who, as one reviewer argued, "adds nothing to the plot, [and] is neither credible nor necessary" (Jaggi n.p.). That observation is correct when Carter is (re)viewed as a character. When read in the context of an analysis of metagenre, however, she serves to subvert the pretended truthfulness of the memoirnovel. Her implied presence appears to show Memory communicating with another person, while the protagonist and narrator is actually having a conversation with herself. Memory approaches her own experiences as if they were those of another in the attempt to make sense of them:

It is always hard to remember the impression that things made on you when you were a child. It is easy to recast what you now know to how you first saw them, and to see them again with an adult's understanding. (69)

[Y]our mind truly is the only thing you can control when you are in prison. Your emotions are the only thing you can call your own. (71)

This homodiegetic second-person narration becomes a self-reflexive confession only because the character Carter is indeed absent, silent, and "adds nothing to the plot" (Jaggi n.p.). Her function is to confuse the reader's understanding of who is addressed in these passages—and what the main agenda of the addressee might be. Does the protagonist long to confess to Carter, or to convince the justice system of her innocence? Or is Memory driven by another longing—for understanding, forgiveness, closure? The instances of second-person narration further

substantiate the difference between experiencing and narrating self, a "distancing" towards Memory's "actions, [...] perceptions and impressions" (Fludernik 288). In This Mournable Body (2018), Dangarembga's sequel to Nervous Conditions, second-person narration is the main narrative perspective, where it arguably "tell[s] a forbidden truth, taking the difficult story away from the 'I' in order to give it more authority" (Coundouriotis 449) and to lament "the permanent secondariness to which one is assigned after liberation" (447). Moreover, as a "situated expression" (Giltrow 196) in a memoir novel, these brief instances of effective second-person narrative betray an "awareness of the rules [that govern this] particular text type" (Niederhoff 3). The strategy is an example of metagenre in the sense that it makes a self-reflexive observation on the genre of the memoir-novel by delineating the process and struggle to represent events and experiences truthfully. Overall, The Book of Memory transforms genre performance into reflection on genre. Through metaization, aspects of the story draw attention to both their conventional and newly acquired function: title, headings, and point of view not only place protagonist and leitmotif centre-stage, but also invite reflections on the memoir-novel and its construction of (fictional) memory. As a character, Carter is merely a silent addressee; as a strategy of metagenre, the address announces a concealed, second ambition behind the protagonist's confession: that Memory is searching for a truth that had been misconstrued by her memories, while also seeking forgiveness for what she can remember.

# 2.3. Naming, Satire, and the Metaization of Cultural Narratives

The implicit and explicit examples of metagenre in *The Book of Memory* analysed so far either refer to the particular genre of the text itself, the memoir-novel, or to one of the two genres that inspire it. In the following, I would like to discuss aptronyms as instances of metagenre that differ from these (the memoir and the novel), insofar as they represent a typical element of other literary and social text genres of both British

and Shona cultural traditions.<sup>16</sup> In established genres of British literature, such as the comedy of manners and the social realist novel, aptronyms are used "as a kind of label" that denotes "the nature and character of a person and/or their occupation. This is how names were originally acquired or bestowed" (Cuddon 51). Telling names often signify comic or moral types, especially of static, one-dimensional characters, and reflect a shared cultural knowledge that is communicated "with the aid of various symbolic media" that contribute to producing a (national or otherwise collective) group "identity as 'we'" (Assmann 175). Therefore, they must have a familiar and repetitive quality, for only then can they reflect on (and also mock and satirize) common cultural notions (as well as their corruption).

In The Book of Memory, aptronyms that can be understood as implicit metageneric references to British literary conventions are the first names of the female criminals that Memory meets in prison. Their names combine comic and moral significance in that they comment on the crimes for which these women have been convicted. For example, Memory's fellow inmate Verity serves time because she successfully applied for millions from a programme of the International Olympic Committee that is supposed to "fund athletes from small, poor nations" (23); Verity embezzled the money and spent it on her own, luxurious lifestyle. Her name reflects ironically on the fraud she committed, and also mocks the gullibility of those who fell for her scheme. Monalisa, another prisoner, carries the name of Leonardo DaVinci's painting (1503), which is famous for the mystery that surrounds the unknown woman portrayed in an idealized style, and whose subtle smile seems to gently mock those fascinated with the portrait. These motifs are evoked in the name of Memory's fellow inmate, who was convicted because "[s]he defrauded a European embassy of more than half a million euros" by pretending she had founded organisations to support girls:

"Girl Children," she says, "are the easiest con in the world."
[For t]here is apparently no easier way to raise money from donors than to present a child, female and barefoot, with a plea for money to ward off all the dreadful things that could happen to it [...]. All that the embassy required of

grant recipients was that they produce quarterly reports of how the money was spent, and these she provided, complete with glowing pictures of Girl Children smiling for the cameras. (24)

The character name Monalisa serves several subversive functions: it satirizes idealizations of femininity and the romanticization of poverty, and it mocks donor-organizations' fascination with concerns such as "empowerment and awareness-raising" (24), goals whose successful implementation (or the failure to do so) are difficult to verify, since they are conveyed "in contemporary jargon devised to obscure rather than illumine" (James 117). Consequently, they present "an easy fraud for Monalisa to pull" (24): by presenting glossy images of smiling girls, Monalisa succeeds. After her release from prison, she becomes a consultant for European-funded aid projects (265), another opportunity, or so the text suggests, to turn European romanticizations into hard cash.

The aptronyms Verity and Monalisa hark back to established British (literary) traditions and genres such as the comedy of manners. Moreover, their ironic use in the novel comments on another text form and cultural genre, which becomes implicitly subverted: progressive metanarratives such as the belief in the overall positive impact of developmental aid. Gappah views critically the work of international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs):

I felt almost guilty about that because they [aid workers] are such an easy target—all these people who mean well but get it so awfully wrong! I am very cynical about the way Zimbabwe has become a project—it sometimes feels like the situation exists just so certain people can keep their jobs. Some of the wealthiest people in Zimbabwe work for NGOs—they earn more than doctors or teachers [...]. One of the most abused job descriptions is that of "human rights defender"—we need to stop and ask, what is being defended, and what is not? [...] The internationalisation of the crisis [in Zimbabwe] has distorted the ills of our society. (Gappah, "I want to write" n.p.)

The fraud schemes that are satirized in the telling names of Memory's fellow prison inmates represent an ontological shift and transposition in the sense that extratextual ideologies (and their social and economic

manifestations) are invested with a rhetorical element typical of comic genres.

The challenge of progressive metanarratives features also in NoViolet Bulawayo's We Need New Names (2013), which "shows how pain and poverty are mobilized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) not just to help the victims, but also to guarantee luxurious lifestyles for some of the workers of such organizations" (Isaac Ndlovu 117). In Gappah's novel, this critique defines the context of the only instance where the text explicitly "name[s the memoir] genre" (Niederhoff 8) rather than implicitly referring to one of its genre conventions. In the self-reflexive fashion that distinguishes the memoir-novel, but otherwise unrelated to the story, the protagonist mentions "the memoir of an American writer who always looks as though she is weighed down by both the thickness of her dreadlocks and the ponderousness of her prose" and whose work is referred to as an example of "the power of contrition" and the "human need for validation" (194). The "American writer" referred to here is not described (or identified) further in the text; her "memoir" appears to be driven by the sentimental, activist desire to have one's own virtue affirmed that informs the condescension towards those labelled deserving. The text mocks this conviction as an actually self-serving (and self-flattering) motivation behind progressive metanarratives.

Significantly enhancing the British tradition of aptronyms that label characters in accordance with their comic and/or the moral function of satirizing social hypocrisies, the novel also features several telling names that are inspired by Shona naming practices, yet another shared cultural knowledge the novel draws on to appeal to a broader audience. Shona names and naming conventions signify social, historical, and cultural attitudes in Zimbabwean society: they can denominate a person's social status and position within the family hierarchy, a (re)discovery of ancestral roots, or societal prejudice, for example towards marginalized groups such as "albinos" (cf. Makuyana 4). As Charles Pfukwa has shown, the (originally oral) Shona tradition has as-

sumed more diversified functions in written forms such as contemporary auto/biographical writing in which, for example, fighters' guerrilla names adopted during the Second Chimurenga (1966-1979)<sup>19</sup> serve as "historical metaphors of the Self" (171). As such, they transcend both individual "self-authorization" identified with "western thought" and their traditional Shona function to "tell of the fortunes or the misfortunes of [a] family" when they become "a form of memory that memorialise[s] certain [historical] events" to serve as "allegor[ies] of the [story of the] nation" (Pfukwa 172). The significance of names and naming are a prominent motif in contemporary Zimbabwean literature as well, where authors equally employ them to highlight various aspects of Shona history and identity (cf. Chiwome 181).<sup>20</sup>

In an interview, Gappah has commented on the social and cultural significance of naming conventions in present-day Zimbabwe that have influenced her writing:

They are real. My character, Memory, has a sister called Moreblessing, a brother called Gift. These are the kinds of names that Zimbabweans like—names that have positive qualities. Like Praise is a very popular name, Loveness is a very popular name. It's a confusion between happiness and love—so you have happiness, surely you must have Loveness.

But they can also be negative names in the sense that you're trying to send out a negative message. You could have names like Hatred, you could have names that mean something like Suffering or Poverty. So names are not just names; names have real meaning, and they tend to tell the world about the circumstances of your parents at the time that you were born. (Gappah, "Sentenced to Death" n.p.)

In contrast to the ironic aptronyms of minor characters like Verity and Monalisa, which can be understood as metageneric gestures towards British literary genres, and the inter- and transtextual reference of the protagonist's name to Nabokov, Greek mythology, and the text's genre, Memory's name is also steeped in Shona naming practice: it indeed signifies the "circumstances of [her] parents at the time [she was] born" (s.a.). Her name and those of her siblings—Moreblessing, Gift, and Joy—reflect their parents' traditions in Shona culture, the meaning of

its naming practices in particular—and, not least, they are also intelligible in a global Anglophone context.

Only at the very end of the novel does Memory's sister Joy disclose the events that are commemorated in the protagonist's name. Their parents were haunted by memories that had traumatized their mother to the extent that she killed one of her children and attempted to drown Memory as well. Memory's mother was forced to marry a much older stranger at the age of thirteen in order to counteract the evil impact of a ngozi spirit that was threatening her family's prosperity.<sup>21</sup> Cosmological beliefs are another text genre of Shona culture that is implicitly located in the name of the protagonist. Through the name of Memory's mother, Moira, this narrative tradition is connected with Greek mythology, which features in the novel through many and recurrent intertextual references. Moira's name refers to the Greek goddesses of fate, yet ironically and tragically, Memory's mother is perhaps the character least in charge of her destiny: her attempts to regain control result only in further suffering. That she gave her daughter a name that communicates this ongoing, overwhelming, and eventually fatal, presence of the past in her life, and that of her family, fundamentally questions the narrative control of the protagonist of the memoir-novel to tell her own story. After all, and after the context of her name has been revealed, it can no longer be imagined as only her story, or as only hers to tell.

In other words, Memory's name is de-individualized and so undermines the key genre convention and understanding of the memoirnovel that a subjective truth exists, and that this truth can be recreated and confessed. Mamadou Ngom has identified a "collective edge" (45) to memory in Gappah's novel in which "the individual intertwines with the collective. Even though the act of remembering is purely individual, [...] it is enacted in a social context with groups acting as cues. Remembering is not an isolated act. Instead, it is group-induced" (38). As the story unfolds, Memory learns about the evil spirits of Shona cosmology, but not as a child from her parents. When she attends a lecture given by her adoptive father, who, as a "professor of classical literature,

specialis[es] in filtering Greek tragedies through the African experience" (156), he elaborates on spiritual beliefs shared by several cultures:

"In Shona mythology, you can propitiate a *ngozi* spirit in the same way that the Greeks poured libations before the Oracle at Delphi. A *ngozi* can be appeased with live animals and with a young girl to carry the children the murdered victim was unable to have." [...]

"Oedipus was pursued by *ngozi*. [...] When we talk of fate, when we talk of a fatalistic vision of human experience, what we mean is that the most important forces that shape human lives are out of human control." (220)

In its examination of both Shona and Greek spiritual beliefs, Gappah's novel displays a form of metagenre that Lena Linne describes as an "other-reflexive quality" (59). The meaningful inclusion of other, and ontologically different, social and cultural text genres is a characteristic feature of *The Book of Memory*, as my discussion of the text's critique of progressive metanarratives has shown. Such references do not, however, treat the genres equally in the same way in which, for example, Homeric epics are considered in their contemporary rewritings (see Linne 60). Gappah employs individual elements of cultural narrative genres (contemporary myths, spiritual beliefs) to further destabilize the genre of her text: as the body of memories recreated by Memory grows, her claim to know her story becomes increasingly qualified. Her life and experiences, as recalled by her, are revealed to be the product of the hidden stories and secrets of her family, and of her own projections.

# 2.4. Becoming Explicit: Genre Conventions as Motifs

A final strategy of explicit metaization in *The Book of Memory* that I would like to discuss is the transformation of generic conventions into central motifs that has already been observed as an implicit form in the novel's use of aptronyms. Major characteristics of the memoir-novel genre, such as the claim to present the protagonist's memories truthfully and the confessional motivation and style, become repeatedly

problematized topics and concerns in Gappah's work that are addressed in a self-reflexive manner. In other words, the novel establishes selected memories, as well as Memory's reflections on how to represent them truthfully, as recurrent themes and ideas that are shown to have shaped the protagonist's understanding of herself as much as her engagement with her environment. One of these pivotal memories is her belief that Lloyd Hendricks had bought her from her parents. The recollection, as argued above, introduces the story and emplots Memory as a potential victim of either her parents or Lloyd Hendricks. The protagonist returns to what appears to be the memory of the experiencing self at several occasions over the course of her confessional narrative, for example here, at the end of part two:

[Lloyd] took something from his pocket. It was a large wad of green bills [...]. He handed the money to my father, but it was my mother who reached out to take it. She took the money without counting it and stuffed it into her bra. (133)

This memory is the foundation upon which Memory builds her confession, connecting it with several other memories in order to reinforce and thus make sense of her own story. As the autodiegetic narrating self reveals, however, she has to resort to imaginative construction because

Lloyd rarely talked openly about how I came to live with him. When he spoke of it at all, it was always in euphemisms. He spoke of "taking me in", of "giving me a home", the good-hearted rich man taking in the poor black child, the cheerful Cheeryble giving room and board to an ungrateful Dickensian orphan. (5)

Such intertextual references highlight Memory's translation of memories into meaningful, guiding motifs, and further illustrate her appropriation of genre conventions for the imaginative recreation of her personal story. As the novel unfolds, it becomes clear that her memories are truthful insofar as they show the child's actual perception and her

youthful attempt to make sense of her parents' actions; but they are unreliable as well because the adult Memory comes to know that Lloyd did not buy but did indeed adopt her, and that the money he gave her parents was meant to support her sister's school education. It is only the process of narratively reconstructing her story for the activist-journalist, which forces her to go through her recollections, that has her realize that

I wanted to go back, to see where it was I made that fatal mistake. My mind keeps going back to that memory of seeing Lloyd hand over the bills, a false memory on which I have built the foundation of my life, or, to put it more accurately, a true memory from which I have made false assumptions. My utter conviction that my parents sold me rested only on that exchange of money.

I understand now why Lloyd adopted me. He was as different as I was. (261)

Memory here refers to Lloyd's homosexuality that had to be kept a secret, and of which she herself learns only shortly before his death. She confesses to not having been able to "make the imaginative leap that would have made me see how trapped he was, that could have made me see the lie he was constantly forced to live" (196). Her lack of compassion for him—furthered by Lloyd's affair with a man she was seeing as well—leads to her betrayal: she reports (what she calls) his "sodomy" to the police. Since she remains anonymous, and there is no evidence, Lloyd is released without further prosecution but dies later in an auto-erotic act.

So this is what was in my mind then. He had been in this very police station all those years ago [...] I had not killed him, but I had been cold and cruel to him. I had rejected him. I thought then about Lloyd, about why he had died the way he had. Was it because of me he had rejected all human touch? Was it the fear of discovery? (231)

The genre convention of the confessional motivation is staged here as a motif. There are, in fact, two confessions: the legal one Memory signs under threat at the police station and in which she declares herself guilty of having murdered Lloyd, and her narrative confession that her actual guilt lies elsewhere—that she has betrayed a man who has shown her only kindness and care. In the words of Bakhtin,

"Memory" in memoirs and autobiographies is of a special sort: it is memory of one's own contemporaneity and of one's own self. It is a de-heroizing memory [...] without pre-existing chronological pattern, bounded only by the termini of a single personal life [...]. (Bakhtin 24n2)

Memory's final recognition once again subverts the genre conventions of the memoir: while she indeed "de-heroizes her memory" when she admits to "[having] been obsessing over the moments, small in themselves, that brought me here" (268), it is precisely the acknowledgment of the boundaries of "[her] own contemporaneity" that allows her to transcend it. Having realized her flawed memory and the fatal mistake that may have contributed to the tragedy of Lloyd's death, Memory seeks refuge and consolation in the spiritual beliefs held by her parents, and learned from her adoptive father: not guilt, but the blame lies with the "ngozi reaching out from the past," because "[a]nything else is too horrible, the idea of a knowing hand directing all of this merely to put me in prison to learn a life-affirming lesson" (268). By calling upon a force beyond her control, Memory allows herself to find consolation, and to admit to herself that "what I had with Lloyd was love. [...] He gave me an understanding that took me outside of myself, that there was a life beyond things; there was an existence that went on long after the self had gone" (269). Only by leaving behind her struggle to make sense of her recollections does Memory manage to find meaning.

### 3. Conclusion

The Book of Memory features many and various instances of explicit and implicit metagenre, and it subverts genre conventions in ways that can be comprehended with the critical tools of a metageneric analysis. The pluriformal, multi-layered significance of "memory" in Gappah's novel

draws attention to the story element and motif of "memory" as a genre convention that is addressed, challenged, and also located in other generic contexts, namely in cultural narratives from Shona cosmology to Greek mythology. The telling name of the protagonist can be understood as both affirming the categorization of The Book of Memory as a memoir-novel—since Memory self-reflects on sharing her memories in novelistic style—but also as challenging the genre's key convention, the performance of autobiographical truthfulness, for Memory is shown to be aware of—and draws attention to—"the unreliability of [her own] memory" (Ngom 53). In addition, the protagonist's name serves as an explicit metageneric comment on Greek mythology, and it invites interand transtextual readings by establishing implicit connections with the work of Vladimir Nabokov. The aptronyms of other, minor characters either connect with British literary traditions such as the comedy of manners, or with Shona naming conventions. Their use provides instances of metagenre when gesturing towards their genre origin(s), which simultaneously obscures monogeneric classification, since telling names in Gappah's novel are arguably steeped in more than one textual tradition.

As a memoir-novel, *The Book of Memory* self-consciously reflects on and foregrounds the contemporaneity of this genre's fictional memory and the terms of the life that is imaginatively created here. Its various strategies of metaization destabilize its genre, which has to provide a convincing pretension of truthfully represented events, experiences, and sentiments. Then again—who would not want to trust a self-avowed fiction?

Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank the participants of 16th International *Connotations* Symposium on "Metagenre" for their insightful questions and comments. In addition, I would like to thank Therese-Marie Meyer, Oliver Bock, Maxi Kinzel, and Andrew Wells for their feedback on an earlier version of this text. I am also and particularly grateful to the two anonymous peer-reviewers, whose attentive reading and insightful comments have been extremely helpful.

<sup>2</sup>According to Niederhoff, one form of "implicit metagenre is transtextual, which means that a text invokes a genre by referring to a prototypical example of this genre. In Jane Austen's *Emma*, for instance, the eponymous character quotes a well-known verse from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [...] [to imply] that matches at Hartfield are made in a harmonious manner under her benign and astute direction. Austen, however, indicates that the course of true love in *Emma* will be as chaotic and circuitous as in Shakespeare's play, and she also acknowledges the debt that her novels owe to the rich tradition of English stage comedy" (10).

<sup>3</sup>The term "transposition" is employed here following the definition of Linda Hutcheon, who describes the adaptation of "an historical event or an actual person's life into a reimagined, fictional form" (17) as defined by an "ontological shift" (16). Clifford Geertz's semiotic understanding of culture that interprets acts of communication as (meaningfully constructed and hence literary) texts arguably has become the dominant approach to understanding culture in contemporary cultural studies (cf. Edgar 82-83; see also the inclusion of non-literary "texts" and selected genres as defined in cultural semiotics below).

<sup>4</sup>A detailed discussion of the typology and an illustration of the different subcategories of explicit and implicit metagenre can be found in Niederhoff 8-13.

<sup>5</sup>The terms "atmosphere" and "context" are used here as introduced by Giltrow (197, 196).

<sup>6</sup>An internationally acclaimed novelist and short-story writer, Petinah Gappah was born in Zambia (\*1971) and raised in Southern Rhodesia / Zimbabwe. Gappah studied law at Cambridge, Graz, and the University of Zimbabwe and worked as an expert on trade law for the World Trade Organization before starting to write. She currently lives in Harare.

<sup>7</sup>For a conceptual outline of the literary-critical understanding of "thick description" in cultural anthropology, see Geertz (esp. 6-10 and 15-18).

<sup>8</sup>See Gappah, "I want to write" n.p. In an interview, Gappah mentioned that Schirach's "mind-blowing book of short stories based on his work as a criminal defence lawyer [...] inspired me to do a series of stories about the causes and consequences of crime" (Gappah, Interview by Bongani Kona n.p.).

<sup>9</sup>In the context of the metagenre debate, the historical figure of David Livingstone in *Out of Darkness, Shining Light* provides another case of ontological transposition and transtextuality: his fictional presence in Gappah's novel can be defined as a "prototypical example" (Niederhoff 10) of the genres of both colonialist and post-colonialist narratives on nineteenth-century exploration and Victorian imperialism.

<sup>10</sup>Celebrated by reviewers such as Tinashe Mushakavanhu as an "instant Zimbabwean classic," *Glory* adapts motifs from George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), "using characters who are horses, pigs, dogs, cows, cats, chickens, crocodiles, birds and butterflies" (n.p.); the political satire was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 2022.

<sup>11</sup>Rosemary Chikafa-Chipiro reads the painful "indifference to violence and abuse [and ...] the aloofness in the narration and spectatorship of rape and its trauma" in *This Mournable Body* as drawing attention to a historical "conflation of the immediate post-independent period and the contemporary moment" (446).

<sup>12</sup>The metaphorical classification as "cousin genres" aims to highlight that memoir-novel and memoir are kin but differ in kind. Like a memoir-novel, a memoir features first-person narration with the claim to autobiographical status, as well as a confessional motivation and style. Unlike the memoir-novel, it actually is autobiographical. To further extend the metaphor, a sibling genre of the memoir-novel would be the epistolary novel: both novel genres are defined by the fictional pretension and performance of autobiographical narration.

<sup>13</sup>For a detailed discussion of self-reflexivity in literary forms of life-writing, see Nünning.

<sup>14</sup>"The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness" (Nabokov 19).

<sup>15</sup>Monika Fludernik argues that a "true and proper instance of second-person narrative" requires a "you [... that is] no longer anchored to a virtual narratee, to a generalized 'you' that might appeal to the reader as an identificationary option: it exclusively refers to the protagonist" (283). *The Book of Memory* is, therefore, not a "second-person narrative" by definition but features, as this article aims to show, instances of second-person narration that qualify as a strategy of metagenre.

<sup>16</sup>In the context of this discussion, non-literary "texts" and selected genres (such as cultural naming practices) will be included as defined in cultural semiotics, which "regard as 'text' any ordered set of signs for which or through which people in a culture construct meaning, regardless of whether that set of signs manifests itself in day-to-day human relations, religious rituals, [...] songs, novels, motion pictures, scholarly articles, and so on [...]. Texts, regardless of the particular symbols through which they are expressed or through which writers discover their meaning, are woven out of the materials of multiple symbol systems" (Witte 269). Such texts and their "genres" are essential for "an understanding of writing" overall since they are social systems of "meaning-making [without which] a comprehensive or a culturally viable understanding of 'writing' or 'text'" cannot be achieved (240).

<sup>17</sup>In a recent essay, Gappah identifies with a declaration made by Ousmane Sembène (1923-2007), one of the founding figures of Francophone Senegalese literature and path-breaking film maker, who argued that "Africa is my audience, the west and the rest are markets" ("We are daring to invent the future," n.p.).

<sup>18</sup>Examples of the considerable variety of meanings that names can assume in contemporary Zimbabwean novels include Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, in which the names of several major characters denote their position and status within

the extended patriarchal family; Nevanji Madanhire's *If the Wind Blew* (1996), whose "female protagonist Isis discovers the origins of her first name in African mythology which initiates a re-invention—or re-self-determination—of her identity" (Berndt 66-67); and Tendai Huchu's *The Maestro, the Magistrate and the Mathematician* (2014), where the eponymous "maestro" is actually David, a white Zimbabwean man living in Edinburgh, who works in a supermarket and whose precarious socio-economic status is ironically reflected by his nickname.

<sup>19</sup>From 1966 to 1979, the Second Chimurenga or Zimbabwean war of liberation was fought between the Rhodesian Front Government and the Zimbabwean nationalist forces ZANLA and ZIPRA. The outbreak of the war followed the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by Prime Minister Ian Smith's white minority Rhodesian Front Government in 1965, "to pre-empt a possible move by the British who had been relinquishing control in neighboring colonies in favor of the indigenous blacks" (Chikuhwa 19).

<sup>20</sup>In fact, the longing for a name that would signify a character's, or an aspect of the nation's, identity has inspired several novel titles; examples include Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1994), Vivienne Ndlovu's *For Want of a Totem* (1997), and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013).

<sup>21</sup>In Shona cosmology, a *ngozi* is a concept that combines social, spiritual and legal norms; it is described as an "avenging spirit" that afflicts people as the result of a serious crime; for example, "to kill a fellow human being or commit suicide is to commit 'ngozi.' Once 'ngozi' is committed, it has to be recompensed in order for restorative justice to occur between individuals, families, and the community in general" (Musanga 778). For a detailed discussion of the *ngozi* in the context of cultural and collective memory, see Ngom (50n3).

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# Now Tell Me What Else It Means: Gender, Genre, and Canonicity in Contemporary Fiction

FRANCESCA PIERINI

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If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to editors@connotations.de.

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### **Abstract**

This article analyses three different texts—a short story, a novel, and a book chapter—that each focuses on a young female protagonist who strives for a modicum of emancipation and agency: A. S. Byatt's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1998), Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999), and Jennifer Donnelly's book chapter "Anne of Cleves," from the young adult historical fictional work *Fatal Throne: The Wives of Henry VIII Tell All* (2018).

It specifically looks at the texts' critique of the relations of power inscribed within the practice of the artistic profession. As the texts under scrutiny focus on the unbalanced gender relationships underlying the artistic process, they all mobilize pictorial perspective as the most accomplished (male) expression of a worldview in which women are "made," celebrated, and manipulated, in function of a specific artistic and/or political design.

"We read well, and with pleasure, what we already know how to read."
(Annette Kolodny, "Dancing through the Minefield"12)

### Introduction

A. S. Byatt's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1998) and Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999) have been mostly read as instances of ekphrastic narratives that, in quintessentially postmodern fashion, shift the reader's attention from the work of art they draw inspiration from, to fictional interpretations of its context of creation and of artistic intention (see, for example, Bremm 40; Cibelli 583; White 213). The reader experiences the creation of the painting along with the protagonist of the story—which is also the main subject of the work of art at the centre of the narrative.<sup>1</sup>

The third text this article examines is Jennifer Donnelly's book chapter "Anne of Cleves" from the young adult historical fictional work *Fatal Throne: The Wives of Henry VIII Tell All* (2018). Donnelly's account of Anne's marriage to Henry VIII, told by the queen herself on her deathbed, reflects upon the authority of artists as figures possessing the prerogative to depict but also intervene with reality.

If the first two texts focus on celebrated works of art of the Western tradition, the third retells, for a young readership, one of the most popular pages of English history. What makes these specific three texts relevant to considerations on gender, genre, and canonicity, is their critique of the unbalanced relationships that have sustained, over the centuries, the artistic profession, making evident the male privileges and prerogatives it entailed. The three authors in question not only make their heroines "return the gaze"; they appropriate the artist's perspective, each time reducing the painters of these canonical works of art to mere characters in their narratives. It will be argued that their strategy is not merely one of telling the other side of the story, with a focus on female humiliation and existential frustration behind the creation of these works; more poignantly, by inscribing the works of art along with

their creators into their own narrative perspectives, the authors question canonical work at the same time as they celebrate it, bringing to light motif of subjugation, control, and exploitation latent within it.

### The Short Story

A. S. Byatt's short story "Christ in the House of Martha and Mary," from the collection *Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice* (1998), creates an imagined context for the painting *Kitchen Scene with Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1618) by Diego Velázquez:



Fig. 1. Diego Velázquez, *Kitchen Scene with Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1618). Oil on canvas. 60.0 x 103.5. National Gallery, London. Reproduced with permission.

https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/diego-velazquez-christ-in-the-house-of-martha-and-mary

In the foreground Velázquez paints an everyday kitchen scene. A maid pounds garlic in a mortar, and other ingredients lie scattered on the table: eggs, a shrivelled red pepper, fish—a traditional symbol associated with Christ—and an earthenware jug probably containing olive oil. An older woman points towards the girl, as if

giving her instructions or telling her off for working too hard, or she may be drawing our attention to the figures in the background.

Byatt imagines a busy kitchen in which Dolores, a young and talented cook, works under the supervision of Concepción, an older woman. A young painter—a fictional Velázquez—is also at work in the same kitchen, observing (and occasionally eating) the dishes the women prepare, portraying what he sees.

Dolores is a woman of "stalwart build and [...] solid arms" (Byatt 219) who feels that beauty, wealth, and time for leisure are a constellation of privileges that belong to a social caste she will never be part of. The narrative begins with Dolores trying to conceal the anger and pain brought about by such awareness, and by her status of servitude that does not allow her to have any time for herself.

There is an added dimension to the painting—a text within the text—an open frame on the right upper end of it that depicts the biblical episode of "Christ in the House of Martha and Mary" as described by Luke in the *New Testament*. The biblical episode, as well as the kitchen scene foregrounded in the painting, suggest different elaborations on the notion of manual vs. intellectual labour. Behind the biblical scene, another door opens, suggesting an infinitely recurring sequence of possible instantiations of the dichotomy.

The painting, therefore, employs the device of *mise en abyme*, here understood as "any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it" (Dällenbach 8). Byatt's story relies on this strategy too. As the narrative focuses on a (pictorial) text that "interrupts itself" to open up different narrative levels, over the course of a conversation with Dolores, the painter will disrupt the linearity of his reasoning in order to tell the story of Martha and Mary.

In the same way as Velázquez opens a window onto the biblical story after which the painting is named, so that "in splitting levels of reality across the canvas, the artist (therefore the viewer) is able to transcend time and space and move from the material to the spiritual in one image" (Boyd 72), Byatt's Velázquez deviates from the linearity of his con-

versation with Dolores to open up a corresponding "space" for the biblical episode to be recounted within the main narrative. In Byatt's short story, intertextuality works as reciprocal commentary—from the Bible's discourse to Velázquez's art—ultimately comprehending, within its hermeneutic circle, Byatt's writing itself.

Byatt rejects the traditional interpretation of the biblical episode, according to which contemplative life is superior to active life. As June Sturrock points out, she elaborates the dichotomy into complementary terms: two different kinds of active life (the contemplative and the physical), opposed to a passive life (see Sturrock 474). The passage below articulates—through the words of her fictional Velázquez—Byatt's interpretation of the biblical episode in response to Dolores's frustration at seeing her skills unappreciated and her creations carelessly consumed:

The divide is not between the servants and the served, between the leisured and the workers, but between those who are interested in the world and its multiplicity of forms and forces, and those who merely subsist, worrying or yawning [...]. The world is full of light and life, and the true crime is not to be interested in it [...] The Church teaches that Mary is the contemplative life, which is higher than Martha's way, which is the active way. But any painter must question, which is which? And a cook also contemplates mysteries. (226-27)

Through the words of the painter, Byatt argues for the spiritual importance of creative work, which begins with the capacity to observe (contemplate), and continues with an imaginative and personal elaboration of reality. In creative work—painting as well as cooking—contemplation and action are reconciled and made complementary to one another. Velázquez tells Dolores, "the world is full of light and life, and the true crime is not to be interested in it. You have a way in. Take it. It may incidentally be a way out, too, as all skills are" (226).

One could argue, however, that it is not the possession of skills that creates a chance for emancipation but the social recognition that goes with them. Dolores might possess extraordinary talents, but, being a busy servant, she executes them without being able to reflect upon

them. The possibilities that come with her talents must be explained to her by someone who, by virtue of his gender, profession, and the social status that these circumstances imply, has had the time to reflect, someone who has been enabled to use his mental faculties: intellectual, imaginative, creative...

In other words, Dolores is a cook, whereas the painter enjoys a social status that usually goes hand in hand with a *scholastic disposition*—defined by Bourdieu as "time liberated from practical occupations and preoccupations" (*Pascalian Meditations* 13)—without which one, quite simply, does not have the possibility to elaborate upon reality, creating a meaningful relationship with oneself and the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup> Scholastic disposition, Bourdieu explains, is "the precondition for scholastic exercises and activities removed from immediate necessity, such as sport, play, the production and contemplation of art and all forms of gratuitous speculation with no other end than themselves" (13).

In a book chapter dedicated to Byatt's and Chevalier's texts—among other *Künstlerromane* published at the end of the last century—Roberta White observes that Byatt's is "one of the several stories and novels in which traditional domestic work of women—cooking, cleaning, spinning, weaving, and sewing—unexpectedly opens a door to the world of art in one way or another" (White 213). It should be emphasized, however, that the narrative focus is not on introducing the female protagonist to such a world but on exploring the contradictions at play in the encounter between female cooks/domestic workers and artists. While both sets of professions require competence and dedication, the former realm in general relies on dull labour, repetition, and daily consumption (physicality). The latter, socially respected, is intended for (intellectual) contemplation.

White further argues that Byatt's and Chevalier's "protagonists are to a greater or lesser degree transformed by discovering art," adding that "they move from dark spaces into the light and they come to see with renewed vision" (214). This reading, however, seems to trace a movement towards understanding and self-realization. In truth, in both nar-

ratives, the two components (understanding and self-realization) remain severed from one another. Both protagonists come to better understand their skills and potentialities, but, at the same time, they also learn that the (low) position they occupy in society means that they must contrive ways to confront the fact that such skills will not be cultivated or fulfilled. Consequently, although White's interpretation, according to which both narratives make evident the principle that "there is not a strict dividing line between the domestic arts and serious art" (214), is entirely plausible, it does not take into consideration the fact that such boundary, however arbitrary, is constitutive of both realms, and, as a necessary precondition for the very existence of a (artistic and literary) canon, is the conceptual axis around which Byatt's, and, as we will shortly see, Chevalier's narrative, pivot. In other words, as both narratives bring into focus the arbitrary—but unsurmountable boundaries dividing high art from domestic work, authority/subjection, male artist/female servant, it is important to clarify how they resolve them. Byatt's does so through a rehabilitating gesture (manual and intellectual labour are both creative) that White takes up: "at least the painter, by granting her [Dolores] such recognition, offers a challenge to the hierarchic thinking that keeps her at the bottom of the scale of human esteem both in the world she inhabits and in her own mind. He treats her as a colleague who works towards mastery of her own craft as a cook [...]" (White 215).

Yet it could be argued, that the painter's gesture of legitimising Dolores's work as creative, however genuinely intended, remains condescending precisely because, rather than "offering a challenge to hierarchic thinking," it confirms its validity through reintegrating Dolores's work within a taxonomy of values that remains in place. This is how Bourdieu describes the gesture of rehabilitation:

Just as some celebrations of femininity simply reinforce male domination, so this ultimately very comfortable way of respecting the 'people', which under the guise of exalting the working class, helps to enclose it in what it is by converting privation into a choice or an elective accomplishment, provides all the profits of a show of subversive, paradoxical generosity, while leaving things as they are, with one side in possession of its truly cultivated culture (or language), which is capable of absorbing its own distinguished subversion, and the other with its culture or language devoid of any social value and subject to abrupt devaluations. (*Pascalian Meditations* 76)

This is to say: however much Dolores's work is valued by the painter, and however much she comes to see her own work as valuable, the social hierarchy in which they work remains unchallenged. The social capital associated with painting is higher than the one associated with cooking. Therefore, the violence at work in the painter's discourse is the bracketing out of the social, and the narrow emphasis on the individual experience of the cook.

The educated creator, with time at his disposal to elaborate a vision of the world, inserts Dolores within it, and by his skills, but also authority, is able to transform her ordinariness into art, as he does with the fish and the other foods. Moreover, the primacy of his prestige and talent over those of Dolores is reiterated at the very same moment as he makes the gesture of including her. White observes: "The painter works with the visual, but, as he reminds Dolores, she works with several other senses as well: taste, smell, and touch" (216). Perhaps unintentionally, the fictional Velázquez offers Dolores admission to the *club des artistes* while reclaiming, only for himself, its most important sphere. It should be reiterated that, however subtly hidden, the value and accessibility of scholastic disposition are very much at the centre of Byatt's and—as we are about to see—Chevalier's narratives. Read from this perspective, Chevalier's novel makes the precise point that skills and talent alone are not sufficient to emancipate oneself.

### The Novel

Griet is a reserved and perceptive young girl, with a vivid intuition for aesthetic form, the arrangement of objects, and colours. Just like Dolores, she creates artefacts with food, arranging vegetables in beautiful compositions that last the time of a soup preparation. When her

father, a tile artist living in Delft, loses his sight, Griet has to work to support her family. It is decided that she will serve as maid in Johannes Vermeer's household, an environment saturated with tensions.

Griet manages to navigate the household's conflicts because her approach to life has been, since childhood, strongly grounded in reality: "I always stopped the game, too inclined to see things as they were to be able to think up things that were not" (13). Griet makes her attentiveness and pragmatic nature work to her advantage, keeping her thoughts to herself but consistently studying the new environment, the characters that inhabit it, and the interactions between them.

Nevertheless, as a female of low social status, Griet immediately becomes the object of other people's designs on her: a servant of lower status to Tanneke, an older maid raised within the household, a sexual object to Vermeer's patron Pieter van Ruijven, and a prospective bride to Pieter, the son of a local butcher. Griet performs all her actions within a rigid web of external pressures; the reader perceives her as encased—framed—within other people's expectations of her long before Vermeer decides to portray her.

For a short time, Griet becomes apprenticed to Vermeer, learning to mix colours and prepare all the painter needs in order to create his art. She learns techniques that require the employment and development of her best skills—attention, precision, a keen practical and aesthetic sense—at the same time as she contributes to create something that, unlike laundry, cleaning, and cooking, will not need to be repeated the next day.

Momentarily infatuated with the possibilities her closeness to the painter might entail—knowledge, the pleasures of growth, and self-expression—Griet takes small steps towards overcoming her social circumstances. The narrative does not make explicit Griet's degree of awareness regarding her actions and intentions. Indeed, the opacity of human behaviour constitutes a key theme in the narrative, affiliating the novel to the coming-of-age genre, which frequently entails, for the protagonist, the recognition of reality as it is beyond its idealizations. As Franco Moretti maintains, such an act—recognizing reality as it is—

symbolizes consent, a figurative harmonious blending of the protagonist's values and aspirations with the larger social order in place (see Moretti 24).

Griet will learn that purity (of intentions, thoughts, and actions) is impossible to obtain, in the world of human relations as well as in art. Vermeer teaches this lesson to her:

"Look out the window."

I looked out. It was a breezy day, with clouds disappearing behind the New Church Tower.

"What colour are those clouds?"

"Why, white, sir."

He raised his eyebrow slightly. "Are they?"

I glanced at them. "And grey. Perhaps it will snow."

"Come Griet, you can do better than that. Think of your vegetables."

"My vegetables, sir?"

He moved his head slightly. I was annoying him again. My jaw tightened.

"Think of how you separated the whites. Your turnips and your onions—are they the same white?"

Suddenly I understood. "No. The turnip has green in it, the onion yellow."

"Exactly. Now, what colours do you see in the clouds?"

"There is some blue in them," I said after studying them for a few minutes.

"And—yellow as well. And there is some green!" I became so excited I actually pointed. I had been looking at clouds all my life, but I felt as if I saw them for the first time at that moment. (114)

Griet learns to recognize the colours that compose her idealized notion of purity. When the moment will come for Vermeer to choose—to protect his life and privilege or shield Griet from scandal and ruin—Griet, by looking attentively at the painter's face, will be able to tell apart from one another Vermeer's complex feelings for her, truly seeing the extent of his attachment beyond that impression of flawless goodness exemplified by the painter's hands; Griet often compares them to Pieter's, permanently stained with animal blood.

All characters in the novel are distinguished by complex motives: Vermeer takes a sincere interest in Griet, he is possibly attracted to her, but he also uses her, as a maid, an apprentice, and a muse. Pieter wants to marry Griet, but he also wants to be perceived as a rescuer, both by

her and her family. Griet's mother loves her daughter while she pressures her to marry Pieter, so that her family might be relieved of their poverty. Griet, in turn, sincerely admires the painter, his detached attitude and sensitivity, but she also desires a degree of deliverance from her hard conditions. Rather than a measure of utilitarianism inherent in all human actions, Chevalier's point seems to be the importance of material circumstances that always characterize, and necessarily "pollute," human interactions.

The interactions between the realms of the high and low, painting and cleaning, male and female, ethereal and domestic, intellectual and sensual, the enduring and the ephemeral, are narrated as symbiotic and unequal. Vermeer embodies the first term of each dichotomy, and while he feeds on the second terms to sustain his art, he also relies on socially established exclusionary practices implemented for the sake of self-preservation, and the preservation of his work.

Once Griet understands that Vermeer is ready to sacrifice her to protect his work and the apparatus that sustains it, pragmatic as she is, she opts for safety, a little wealth, and some social status. She marries Pieter. She knows that a part of herself will have to remain forever consigned to a world of untested possibilities in order to survive in the real one.

This is indeed a costly choice for Griet, one she will never verbalize but nonetheless reclaim. When, after many years of living and working as Pieter's wife, she gets summoned back to Vermeer's house following the death of the painter, she finds that Vermeer—in spite of dire financial circumstances—bequeathed to her the pearls worn in the portrait.

Griet's gesture of immediately selling them and settling, with the proceeds of the sale, Vermeer's debt to Pieter—contracted over years of buying meat on credit—might come across as excessively resolute and cold. It could be read, however, as a rejection of condescending guilt. Griet does not feel obliged to accept and/or show appreciation for the painter's remorseful gesture towards her. The pearls represent an apology for not having made a substantial effort to offer Griet a real possibility of advancement. Griet was briefly cheated (by herself as much as

Vermeer) into believing that her skills could emancipate her from her circumstances, but the painter—like Velázquez in Byatt's narrative—was never truly prepared to make space for her except on his canvas, as an object of his aesthetic vision.

Likewise, Griet cannot make space for the artist now that she has chosen another life, a life that daily stains her hands and clothes with blood. By settling Vermeer's debt, Griet rescinds in one gesture the last ties of obligation possibly connecting her to the painter as well as to Pieter. She reclaims as her own the choice of not having succumbed to her ambitions.

Unlike Dolores, she does not adapt herself to the painter's vision but creates one of her own. Seen from this perspective, giving up the pearls is Griet's own gesture of self-preservation, as the pearls would have been a painful reminder of lost prospects, of who she could have been if she had lived in a world that permitted her self-expression and individual growth.<sup>6</sup>

Byatt's short story and Chevalier's novel share, inscribed in the encounter between a maid/cook and an artist, a meditation on pictorial perspective as "the most accomplished realization of the scholastic vision" (Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* 1). Bourdieu argues that pictorial perspective "presupposes a single, fixed point of view—and therefore the adoption of the posture of a motionless spectator installed at a point—and also the use of a frame that cuts out, encloses and abstracts the spectacle with a rigorous, immobile boundary" (21-22).

The fixed position of the painter has just been remarked upon in relation to the first narrative: his role is not questioned, nor is his prerogative to create a perspective on the world. He selects, arranges, and creates on canvas. A painter's authority over a cook, or a maid, is granted by gender, education (scholastic disposition), status, and wealth, a constellation of privileges—of personal possibilities of self-realization visà-vis skills and material conditions—that needs to be preserved.

Girl with a Pearl Earring is very much about the boundary that separates Vermeer's position from the mundane world of everyday rela-

tions and preoccupations represented by the women in his family. Vermeer supports himself and his household by creating and selling the manufactured goods of his skills and scholastic vision. Griet's coming-of-age consists of her gradual understanding of the artistic process as not only reliant on the individual genius of the creator, but also on the upkeep of that very limit separating it from the rest of the world, not admitting intruders.

The novel, therefore, conveys a celebration of the artistic process—Chevalier describes Vermeer's painting techniques with a wealth of detail—as well as a critique of the unbalanced relations between genders that have traditionally sustained it. The narrative functions as (1) a "supplement to the painting" (Cibelli 590)—it significantly contributed to its popularisation for the larger public—as well as (2) a sociohistorical commentary on it.

In a way, one could argue that Chevalier "returns the favour" of using Vermeer the way (she imagines) the painter used Griet. The novel is written in symbiotic relation with the work of art, borrowing the painting's artistic and historical authority, appropriating its beauty. At the same time, after reading the novel, the portrait is returned to our imaginaries as more familiar than it used to be, but also tainted by the sad story of thwarted self-realization it tells.

Diverging from a conception of ekphrasis as essentially mimetic, or as a literary device merely intended to voice pictorial concerns, Grant Scott sees it as "a means of [...] demonstrating dominance and power" (303). Seen from this perspective, Chevalier's claim over Vermeer's vision consists in assimilating his art to her own—narrative—vision.

According to Chevalier's standpoint, Vermeer's painting is not the expression of a self-assured appropriation, a taming of the other. If the portrait must be hidden from Catharina, Vermeer's wife, it is not only because it is proof of the time Vermeer and Griet spent together—Griet posing while wearing Catharina's jewellery; this is also because it clearly reveals an intimate bond between muse and painter, a reciprocal attraction much more than an authoritative arrangement of a female figure on canvas.



Fig. 2. Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Pearl-Earring* (c. 1665). Oil on canvas. 44.5 x 39 cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague. Reproduced with permission. <a href="https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/our-collection/artworks/670-girl-with-a-pearl-earring/#detail-data">https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/our-collection/artworks/670-girl-with-a-pearl-earring/#detail-data</a>

Critics have faulted the novel with remaining conservative in spite of its potential for feminist revendications: "Chevalier does not have the character overturn female stereotypes or transcend her social class. Chevalier discusses Griet's nascent interest in art without making her the equal of Vermeer or Dutch women artists such as Judith Leyster or Rachel Ruysch" (Cibelli 586). But Chevalier's feminist gesture consists, in subtler postmodern fashion, in "artistically appropriating" the painter along with his muse, in consigning to posterity a portrayal of Vermeer created by a female artist (Chevalier, of course) who pays homage to his talent at the same time as she gets him off his pedestal of assumed perfection. In other words, Vermeer's painting might have been intended as the portrayal of a young girl in love. The novel, however, dramatizes a reciprocal rapport in which the painter, for a moment, vacillates from his position of impassive demiurge to come close to endangering his own status and privilege.

Indeed, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* is not the parable of an individual transcending material circumstances to access an ideal world of self-fulfilment. On the contrary, it elaborates precisely upon those material circumstances, positing them at the centre of its narration. The result is a tale of frustrated self-realisation exposing the restricted—social and existential—possibilities available to a young maid in Holland in the seventeenth century.

Surrounding Griet is a significant array of female characters committed to enabling the artist's work—on which their own livelihood depends—while dealing with the frustration of perceiving their lives revolving around an activity they are excluded from. When Griet fully understands that permanent access to the artist's world is denied to her, she sees the necessity to escape the pyramid of bitter unhappiness on which it rests, relegating others to a state of servitude (Tanneke), mortification (Catharina), utilitarian and pointless strategizing (Maria Thins and Cornelia).

Chevalier, unlike Byatt, is not condescending to her protagonist. Griet is not happy with a late apology and recognition (the pearls); she needs to live a life that does not completely oppress her. She creates it for herself, at the cost of sacrificing all her secret aspirations.

### The Book Chapter

Anne of Cleves, the fourth wife of Henry VIII, is about to die of cancer of the womb. She is looked after by a young servant, Alice, who is devoted and caring. Besides her affection towards the Queen, Alice also exhibits a natural instinct for medical remedies. As Anne tells the reader: "I am fond of Alice. She is an honest girl with a nimble mind. Clean. A good worker. Shy, because of the large red birthmark that mars her face. The village boys taunt her about it. Her father worries no man will have her" (Donnelly 204).

Drugged with opioids, Anne encounters, in the course of her agony, the ghosts of men and women that populated her youth and years as Queen.<sup>8</sup> One of these is historical figure and master artist Hans Holbein, who famously painted Anne's betrothal portrait in 1539. Holbein's ghost confesses to Anne that Thomas Cromwell had ordered him to paint the portrait of a beautiful princess, regardless of Anne's actual appearance. Cromwell's scheming and manipulation only caused, in Henry, resentment towards Cromwell and disappointment in Anne. Similarly, Anne never managed to conveniently hide her own displeasure at meeting Henry. Remembering her marriage, she confesses her mistakes to Alice: "I made my face a mirror when it should have been a mask, and what the King saw there terrified him. He hated me for it, and never, ever forgave me" (206).



Fig. 3. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of Anne of Cleves* (c. 1539). Parchment mounted on canvas. 65 x 48 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Reproduced with permission.

"Holbein had posed me looking directly at the viewer in order to hide my long nose and pointed chin. He made my skin paler than it was and left out my smallpox scars" (Donnelly 207). Donnelly aims at assimilating the painting to her own vision of reparation and compensation, after it served as an important means to fabricate a false narrative.

Anne and Henry's marriage, characterized by profound disharmony and lack of physical attraction, did not produce the sons it was meant for. Despite Anne's failure at giving Henry heirs, she was granted, at the end of her marriage to the king, a peaceful and financially secure life at court. She was also the queen who outlived all other queens, as well as Henry.

Anne thinks she owes her life and happiness after her marriage to Henry, to her connections and diplomatic skills, but also to the king's lack of interest in her as a woman. She therefore encourages Alice not to wish for beauty, but for qualities that guarantee a peaceful and fruitful life. She observes: "Plain girls can prosper. We can make our lives our own" (205).

The chapter, therefore, articulates a former queen's sorrowful and poignant reflections on a woman's position at court, as well as within the society of the time. Through her conversations with Alice, Anne recalls her days as queen, her failures at court, and her miserable nights with Henry, reflecting on the possibilities for autonomy and self-determination open to women of different social standing.

Before dying, she once again sees the ghost of Holbein, working on another portrait. Holbein urges Anne to settle a last debt, which Anne only understands when she sees that the painting he is working on is a portrait of Alice, this time unembellished: "The portrait is of a girl. She is wearing the plain clothing of a servant. Her hair is covered by a simple linen cap. There is a birthmark on her face" (245). Anne understands she must do what she can for Alice, not letting this unfortunate mark define the young girl's life and future prospects. She pays the fee on her behalf to study as a doctor's apprentice, thereby offering the girl the possibility to acquire skills, take pride in her work, and live independently:

This girl will not spend her life digging turnips. She can make her own plans, command her own future. She will belong to herself [...] That was the debt to be settled. Maybe one day, Alice will help set a girl free, too. Maybe one day, the world will change so radically that girls will not need freeing. (249-50)

In this story, works of art are treated as a potent weapon at men's disposal, as malleable, superficial, and misleading devices determining their subjects' destinies beyond their true merits and talents.

Laura Sager Eidt's categorization of different types of ekphrasis might help clarify the characteristics of Donnelly's usage of ekphrasis in comparison to the previous two instances. We will see that a less complex usage of ekphrasis is one of the elements that contribute to relegating Donnelly's text to the realm of genre fiction.

Sager Eidt ranks different types of ekphrasis according to their increasing degree of complexity: attributive, depictive, interpretive, and dramatic. Byatt's short story and Chevalier's novel employ the latter type, the most complex as well as appropriating, as they "take [...] the picture out of its frame" (Sager Eidt 57). Donnelly, instead, recurs to interpretive ekphrasis, a "verbal reflection on the picture" (50).

In interpretive ekphrasis, the picture/painting serves as a mere device, "springboard for reflections that go beyond its depicted theme" (51), but the image "remains on the canvas," so to speak, it is not brought to life, and the moment in which the work of art is accomplished does not correspond to any time in the narrative. In Donnelly's book chapter, therefore, ekphrasis is deployed more conventionally than in the other two texts: instead of weaving the entire narrative around the making of a work of art, Donnelly makes her queen reflect on it in retrospect, explaining the unhappiness it caused.

Anne, who could only acquiesce to having her portrait taken, does not return her painter's gaze in resentment/resignation (Dolores), or adoring abandonment (Griet). She makes Holbein take a new, truthful picture of a younger version of herself: bright, talented, not pretty. Sager Eidt explains that:

In the traditional Renaissance profile portrait, the woman is seen from the side, passively looking into emptiness, representing an object of exchange or material wealth. This tradition [...] is countered, in *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, by the active turn of the girl's head and eyes toward the viewer, affirming the female gaze and her power to break that male tradition of looking and objectifying women. (190)

In Donnelly's narrative, Anne returns Henry's gaze by mistake. The king, wishing to surprise her, approaches her for the first time unannounced, without revealing his identity. Anne sees a rude, overweight, unpleasant man. Without hiding her repulsion, she keeps him at a distance. She will pay for this "active turn" of the gaze for the rest of her marriage to Henry.

The chapter makes evident two different levels of appropriation that will be further discussed later. Firstly, it sets up a double opportunistic relationship: Alice relies on Queen Anne (a figure of power and authority) for her livelihood. She takes care of her, but she also learns and improves herself through the connection. Donnelly, on her part, mobilizes the historical figures of Anne of Cleves, Thomas Cromwell, and Hans Holbein to fabricate a credible tale grounded in historical research, availing itself of references to a celebrated work of art representative of the time she sets her story in.

The text accordingly engages in the double gesture of, on the one hand, reiterating the importance and centrality of this specific segment of history, and, on the other, corroding its received meanings. Despite Donnelly's competence in deploying all these elements, this is the text less likely to receive critical attention and being recognized as deserving to survive its time. Generic texts might be canonized within the perimeters of their own categories. If they are considered "good enough," they may enter the literary canon, but at that point they must renounce their affiliations to a particular genre. War and Peace is a canonized text of literary fiction, not a particularly good instance of historical literature.

The main reason why generic fiction is seldom canonized perhaps concerns the fact that it is not as widely taught in universities as literary fiction. Should genre fiction (detective stories, romances, fantasy novels, et cetera) substantially enter the curricula of advanced education, canons would be designed, proposed, and, in time, established. Introducing a new and large corpus of texts worth studying would, *de facto*, expand and fragment the canon, which would thereby necessarily lose some of its authority and/or centrality. Quite possibly, literary fiction,

especially contemporary, would come to be regarded, in time, as one genre among others.

Hence this article aims at shedding light on that part of the process of perpetuation and/or renewal of the literary canon which is mostly based on familiarity, a mechanism Annette Kolodny most effectively explains in the following passage:

The authority of any established canon, after all, is reified by our perception that current work seems to grow, almost inevitably, out of it (even in opposition or rebellion), and is called into question when what we read appears to have little or no relation to what we recognize as coming before. (9)

Considering literary genres as "discursive formations" (Foucault 34) in constant development, which should be examined and questioned, rather than taken at face-value and relegated to the realm of minor literature, the remainder of this article aims to discuss a cluster of concerns that evidently cross literary genres: the history and role of women visà-vis artistic creation and, by extension, the creation of a canon.<sup>10</sup>

## Challenging the Canon from the Margins

The three texts consolidate a cluster of values and (artistic) standards at the same time as they create discursive trajectories—mostly concerned with gender politics—that essentially question them, illustrating some of the difficulties pertaining to the endeavour of challenging the canon from the margins. More specifically, two axes of marginalisation vis-à-vis the canon have been explored:

1. Gender. The analysed texts employ ekphrasis—always a form of intertextuality—to comment on art and the male perspective that informs it, but their goal is also that of being regarded as having some literary value. Therefore, they tend to reproduce established forms of canonical textuality by commenting authoritatively on a work of art, or on past events.

2. Genre. Chevalier's and Donnelly's texts establish themselves by showing familiarity with strategies that pertain to the world of literary fiction (ekphrasis, intertextuality, commentaries on high forms of art...). This challenges their attempt at legitimizing genre in opposition to literary fiction, as they reproduce the literary grid of values genre literature usually wishes to oppose.

This inconsistency epitomizes the difficulty of counter-hegemonic discourses: in order to be successful, they must, at least to a degree, obey the rules set up by the hegemon while they attempt to challenge them. As Bourdieu would put it, the canon predetermines "the space of possibilities" ("The Field of Cultural Production" 315) available to authors who want to challenge it, either from the perspective of gender, and/or genre.

Another one of Bourdieu's notions, the notion of *field*, is particularly resonant at this point. According to Bourdieu, there are two types of inequalities at play in the distribution of symbolic capital within a specific field: those present within a field—male vs. female authors within the field of literary fiction, for instance—and inequalities between fields—the economic vs. cultural field, for example (see Sapiro 164). Players in the dominated field are compelled to adopt the rules and conventions of the dominant field, which has the effect of reinforcing the latter.

Although there is literary capital in every literary genre, the highest form of capital in genre fiction is subordinated to the most average capital in the literary field. Therefore, the struggle this article explores is detectable along two distinct trajectories: the acquisition of capital within the field of literary fiction, and the acquisition of capital of one field (genre) in opposition to the dominant field (literary fiction).

In order to advance its argument, the article has focused on the different ways in which Byatt, Chevalier, and Donnelly use ekphrasis in order to show its functionality within and through the discursive trajectories mobilised by the narratives. Put differently, the article looks at how ekphrasis has been employed in order to make and relate meanings concerning gender difference.

By concentrating on their discursive strategies—only in appearance subordinated to, and/or merely celebratory of, the works of art/historical events they retell—this article aims at bringing to the surface each text's bipartite approach, concerned with paying homage to a given literary, historiographical, and/or artistic tradition, at the same time as it may question its fundamental tenets, shedding light on the contradictions upon which it rests. This article has so far argued that, in all texts under scrutiny:

3. The ekphrastic/intertextual approach becomes a way of continuing the discourse of the canon and a discourse about the canon. As the author—writer, painter, film director—has the "last word" in reframing all the other components according to his/her vision of the world (pictorial or narrative), every reading offers the opportunity to appropriate some of the existing repute of the art at the centre of the narratives, as well as the possibility to amend the aspects of it the authors in question take issue with.

All examined texts convey a critique of the unbalanced relations between genders that have sustained, over the centuries, the most respected professions, disclosing the amount of (mostly female) unhappiness, frustration, and sacrifice, necessary to enable and upkeep their practice.

What makes these texts especially relevant to considerations on what makes a work canonical is that they do not focus on just any respected profession, but specifically on the artistic process. In other words, they spell out an interpretation of the criteria that are supposed to make a work of art canonical as well as an attempt at questioning such criteria. For instance: is Vermeer's portrait canonical because it masterfully depicts a young girl in love? Or is it so because it depicts a reciprocated rapport? Is male control/manipulation/prevarication over his artistic subject matter—including women—a necessary condition to canonical art? Would Holbein's portrait have entered the canon if it had portrayed a young princess with scars on her face?

Within this general framework of unbalanced relations between genders, it is possible to detect a specific opportunistic rapport, concerning the narratives' protagonists vis-à-vis their masters and/or mentors, repeated by the creators of fictional characters vis-à-vis their chosen narrative subjects. Just as the young girls of the stories rely on established figures of authority to learn, and possibly to emancipate themselves from their hard conditions, so do their authors rely on canonical pages of literature and historiography to bring credibility and stature to their works.

All texts hinge on a consideration of the social context, making visible the scarcity of possibilities a woman of the working class had to acquire valued skills that would make her advance in status. The text that makes this very point the most explicit, however, is perhaps Donnelly's, as her historical book chapter centres on the necessity of formal training as a way towards financial autonomy.

Paradoxically, the quality of its writing, competent and meticulous, but necessarily intended to be accessible to a younger readership, relegates her narrative within the boundaries of a genre that does not attract an amount of critical attention comparable to that received by the other two texts. Hence, that first correspondence of opportunistic affinities-maids, cooks, and nurses in relation to artists and established professionals on the one hand, and authors in relation to canonical texts on the other, is further repeated if we consider the axis of genre and the path the three texts sketch leading from literary to generic forms. Byatt's short story is a literary text, Chevalier's novel is positioned on the cusp between the literary and the popular/historical, and Donnelly's is a Young Adult historical fictional chapter. This "trajectory" towards genre allows us to see that common practices of categorizing and gatekeeping, to use a term in high fashion these days, are ironically reminiscent of the strength of those boundaries—put in place to safeguard the artistic process from external pressures and aspirations—these narratives shed light on.

The notion of boundaries between literary genres, in turn, leads us back to considerations on the literary canon. This article suggests that, ultimately, one's familiarity, and ability to "play," with the canon is an important reason for canonicity. Literary canonical texts display in abundance instances of those "primarily male structures of power [...] inscribed (or encoded) within our literary inheritance" (Kolodny 20) that the works of fiction explored here aim at exposing and questioning, not only by re-telling their story, or by telling the proverbial "other side" of it, but by claiming to formulate the last word on the story each time told.

Therefore, the (female) authors of each of these texts not only make their heroines—once framed by authoritative artists—return the gaze, not only do they recast their original creators (Velázquez, Vermeer, Holbein) within the parameters of their own stories, making them subjects of/in their narrative visions; they also place a "shadow" on each work of art at the same time as they competently bring it to the fore, keeping, just like Penelope, the weaving (of the literary canon) alive, along with its corrosion.

### Rewriting the Male Gaze

I read the three authors' different treatments of ekphrasis as an ingenious appropriation of that male logos which is constitutive of the literary canon. I will further elaborate on this notion in light of W. J. T. Mitchell's discussion of the interconnections of genre and gender in G. E. Lessing's *Laokoon* (1766), a text which systematises beliefs the Western tradition has relied upon for a long time, one of the most fundamental of which is that poetry (and, by extension, all literature) is an eminently temporal art, whereas visual art chiefly belongs to the spatial dimension.

There is little doubt, Mitchell argues, regarding the secondary value of the spatial dimension in relation to the temporal. Within the dichotomy, the spatial is "marginal, deviant, or exceptional" (Mitchell 96). This basic hierarchy, Mitchell explains, outlasts later developments and

apparent moments of overturning, such as modernism and its spatial aesthetics.

Whereas Mitchell denies that the distinction between temporal and spatial is in any way an essential criterion to assign intrinsic value to the arts,<sup>11</sup> he sees the battle between the notions of space and time as a "dialectical struggle in which the opposed terms take on different ideological roles and relationships at different moments in history" (98). Mitchell argues that problems arise when these principles play a part in "the formation of value judgements, canons of acceptable works, and formulations of the ideological significance of styles, movements, and genres" (103).

Analysing such principles might help us reconstruct the "political unconscious" (Jameson n.p.) upon which we base our value judgements. If there is, hence, a "natural inequality" (Mitchell 107), separating the two arts, the texts discussed in this article reproduce it by making their narratives tell the stories not of a woman framed by a painter, but of a woman and a painter framed by a storyteller.

Quite significantly, Mitchell argues that Lessing's "most fundamental ideological basis" for his categorization of artistic genres is gender: "The decorum of the arts at bottom has to do with proper sex roles" (109). Such roles are articulated, by Lessing, as follows: "Paintings, like women, are ideally silent, beautiful creatures designed for the gratification of the eye, in contrast to the sublime eloquence proper to the manly art of poetry" (Mitchell 110). The defiant gesture Byatt, Chevalier, and Donnelly make consists in appropriating this (male) logos.

Moreover, if we keep in mind Lessing's argument that "genres are not technical definitions but acts of exclusion and appropriation which tend to reify some 'significant other'" (Mitchell 112), we see that our authors, while debunking the silent woman/eloquent man dichotomy, reify the "significant other" of commercial literature, by abstaining from the characteristics of plot linearity (Byatt), from a traditional usage of ekphrasis (Byatt, Chevalier), and from an overtly optimistic resolution of the plotline (Byatt, Chevalier), which would affiliate their works to its realm. These characteristics, much more detectable in Donnelly's

book chapter, determine its different labelling within the classification of contemporary works of fiction.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The short story discussed here belongs to one of the most respected contemporary authors of Anglophone fiction, known for her erudite and expert use of literary and artistic references. In the narrative a fictional Velázquez explains his pictorial perspective through references to the Bible, thereby voicing Byatt's own elaboration upon the painter's interpretation (as perceived by Byatt) of the biblical episode. Intertextual references are intricate, ending in opacity: Dolores sees herself in the portrait, she laughs, but the reader is left to wonder if her laughter is one of reconciliation, resignation, or both. At any rate, the portrait has "absorbed" Dolores's anger, immortalising it on canvas: "The momentary coincidence between image and woman vanished, as though the rage was still and eternal in the painting and the woman was released into time" (Byatt 230).

Girl with a Pearl Earring also ends in a partial victory. Realistic, incomplete, but more defined than Byatt's short story in its main narrative developments: Griet manages to save herself, to improve her social status and economic condition. In the process, her most ambitious dreams get crumpled. In a way, her rage too is transcended, buried within her once and for all when she sells the pearls.

The novel is a thoughtful and meditative narrative characterized by accuracy in describing psychology and context. It also appeals to a larger readership by positing at its centre, if not a love story, the suggestion of one, articulated along the popular trope of a young, disadvantaged girl being (possibly) rescued from difficult circumstances. It promises, in other words, to be satisfying to the reader interested in performing "the ritual of hope" (Cole 169) inherent in romance reading, as well as the one eager to learn the particularities of Vermeer's artistic process. Chevalier's novel strikes a difficult balance between literary

fiction, the artist novel (*Künstlerroman*), and the historical novel, a literary form that has been for some time in the process of being "lifted out of genre" (Mantel n.p.).<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, Donnelly's book chapter belongs to a collective work that has been categorized, marketed, and perceived as fitting quite exactly within the genre of YA fiction. In this instance, the narrative parable is more auspiciously accomplished, as Donnelly gives Alice, through Queen Anne, the gift of a promising future.

All narratives enclose an external point of view on the protagonist embodied in a work of art; an authoritative pictorial perspective they must reconcile with, renounce, and/or emancipate themselves from in order to come to terms with, or escape, their subjection. Whereas the first two narratives propose an articulation of ekphrasis leading to a "pregnant moment" (Steiner 41)—a still moment in which the artistic endeavour is accomplished at the same time as the acme of narrative development is reached—Donnelly offers a more conventional treatment of it. For Anne, the painting has not been the medium for (self-) recognition, but a mere instrument of betrayal and manipulation.

The path from literary to generic fiction is accomplished through (1) implementation of traditional descriptions of art and (2) a progressively hopeful resolution of plot conflicts. Regardless of their remarkably different approaches and stylistic characteristics, however, the three texts have in common competent historical research, meticulous writing, compelling storytelling. Moreover, they all posit, at the centre of their narrative development, the encounter of one (or two, in Donnelly's case) young girl with a power figure enabled, by scholastic disposition, to formulate a vision of the world.

The authors who created them similarly feed on the conventions of recognized literary forms to occupy and maintain a space within the contemporary taxonomy of genres. Availing themselves of scholarly references (Byatt), the credibility of literary fiction (Byatt, Chevalier), the popularity of the historical romance novel (Chevalier, Donnelly), all authors illustrate the subordinate role women have been relegated to—by a prevailing male perspective—while at the same time working

within the parameters of exclusionary practices similar, in nature, to the ones they indict, and/or question, and/or shed light on.

By expertly dosing literary and/or generic standards, all writers demonstrate their proficient reliance on taxonomic rules, showing that gatekeeping, more than an "evil" top-down procedure programmatically implemented to preserve privilege—something it can certainly be, depending on circumstances—is much more frequently a widespread individual and collective practice implemented for reasons of cultural safety and social distinction.

Asian University for Women Chittagong, Bangladesh

#### **NOTES**

This article is dedicated to my students at the Asian University for Women.

<sup>1</sup>In Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film, Laura Sager Eidt examines different types of ekphrasis, outlining its historical evolution: "the term ekphrasis," Sager Eidt explains, "is generally used to refer to works of poetry and prose that talk about or incorporate visual works of art" (9). It has been defined as a rhetorical figure, a rhetorical exercise, and an intertextual relation. In order to comprehend its current conception, it is important to acknowledge the shift that sees "the real or fictional art object itself [as] the occasion for the poem, which seeks to render that visual object into words" (Sager Eidt 12-13). An important contribution towards the expansion of the meaning of ekphrasis is the work of musicologist Siglind Bruhn, who reads ekphrasis as the "representation in one medium of a real or fictitious text composed in another medium" (559). Not just a literary description of art, but a musical description of poetry, for example, may be considered an instance of ekphrasis which at this point becomes "transmedial" (Bruhn 51) in nature.

<sup>2</sup>Fatal Throne is a co-authored novel: the lives of Henry VIII and his wives are narrated, in seven different chapters, by seven authors: M. T. Anderson as Henry VIII, Candace Fleming as Katherine of Aragon, Stephanie Hemphill as Anne Boleyn, Lisa Ann Sandell as Jane Seymour, Jennifer Donnelly as Anne of Cleves, Linda Sue Park as Catherine Howard, and Deborah Hopkinson as Katherine Parr.

<sup>3</sup>Pierre Bourdieu points out that the scholastic disposition, "arising from a long historical process of collective liberation, is the basis for humanity's rarest conquests" (*Pascalian Meditations* 49). Therefore, the point is not that of morally condemning intellectuals, but of "trying to determine whether and how […] scholastic disposition and the vision of the world that is enabled by it […] affects the thought

that it makes possible, and, consequently, the very form and content of what we think" (49). The point accordingly is not criticising the painter of the story (or Byatt) for what Bourdieu calls "the laudable concern to rehabilitate" (75), but to see how the dichotomies that are being mobilised—unquestioningly, ironically, and/or self-reflexively—have affected our thought and subjectivities.

<sup>4</sup>The privileging of the visual over the other senses—ocularcentrism—has long been acknowledged as a feature of Western epistemology.

<sup>5</sup>"Confused as I felt about him, he was my escape, my reminder that there was another world I could join. Perhaps I was not so different from my parents, who looked on him to save them, to put meat on their table" (Chevalier 160).

<sup>6</sup>When Vermeer catches a glimpse of Griet without her cap, he sees the side of her Griet knows exists but is afraid of: "When it [the hair] was uncovered it seemed to belong to another Griet—a Griet who would stand in an alley alone with a man, who was not so calm and quiet and clean" (Chevalier 138).

<sup>7</sup>Catharina's continuous pregnancies may therefore be seen as a way to reclaim for herself some of her husband's love and attention, whereas Maria Thins is determined to exert on her servants the power she was denied in her interactions with men.

<sup>8</sup>Perhaps Anne's most touching conversation is the one she entertains with Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell, after appearing to her holding his own decapitated head, offers a detailed account of his last days in the service of the king.

<sup>9</sup>Attributive ekphrasis, according to Sager Eidt's categorization, indicates "the smallest degree of involvement with the visual arts" (45), such as a "brief allusion" (45). In depictive ekphrasis, "images are discussed, described, or reflected on more extensively" (47). Interpretive ekphrasis is a verbal reflection on the image" (50). In dramatic ekphrasis, "texts or films have the ability to provoke or produce the actual visual images alluded to in the minds of the readers or viewers while at the same time animating and changing them thereby producing further, perhaps contrasting images" (56). In this last type of ekphrasis, the dramatization of a work of art can "take its characters out of the original context of the picture, and allow them to move beyond the picture's frame" (57). Crucially, dramatic ekphrasis entails a high "degree of interference" (57) with the work of art because "the dramatization of pictures [...] implies a conflict between the original context of the quotation and the new context in which the quotation is inserted" (57).

<sup>10</sup>A brief evaluation of the textual as well as para-textual strategies put in place to discriminate between literary genres in light of the fact that "paratextual features have a huge influence in shaping genre identities and understandings, that marketing plays a fundamental role in literary taxonomies [...]" (McAlister 8) suggests that, instead of presenting the text as an imaginative but historically grounded account, it is marketed as a piece of gossip writing, starting with its subtitle: "the wives of Henry VIII tell all."

<sup>11</sup>At the same time, Mitchell does not mean to deny substantial differences between the two realms: "Nothing I have said can be taken as a claim that the two

arts become indistinguishable, only that the notions of space and time fail to provide a coherent basis for their differentiation" (103).

<sup>12</sup>In the following passage, author Hilary Mantel comments on readers' expectations of historical fiction: "When you choose a novel to tell you about the past, you are putting in brackets the historical accounts—which may or may not agree with each other—and actively requesting a subjective interpretation. You are not buying a replica, or even a faithful photographic reproduction—you are buying a painting with the brush strokes left in. To the historian, the reader says, 'Take this document, object, person—tell me what it means.' To the novelist he says, 'Now tell me what else it means' (Mantel n.p.).

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# Vaughan's Living Waters: A Response to Jonathan Nauman

DONALD R. DICKSON

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#### **Abstract**

This article extends Jonathan Nauman's analysis of how Vaughan used the trope of the classical river poet to establish his poetic pedigree as the Swan of Usk. I try to show how Vaughan transforms this trope in "Regeneration" into biblical pastoralism, then uses sacred watercourses to bring closure to *Silex Scintillans*. The mysterious fountain in "Regeneration"—whose antecedents are in Eden, in the enclosed garden of the Canticles evoked in the poem's coda, and in the restored pastoral paradise of the New Jerusalem—prepares us for a more involved journey in such poems as "The Search" and "Vanity of Spirit," where the poet's failure to read the mysteries in the flowing waters is significant. By contrast, one of the last poems in *Silex*, "The Water-fall," demonstrates just how far the poet has come in his spiritual understanding.

As Jonathan Nauman has recently demonstrated in these pages, Henry Vaughan in his early work emulated the contemporary men of letters he admired and hoped to join—those devotees of Ben Jonson whose work he came to know during his early years at Oxford and London—who were themselves emulating their classical forbears. Nauman ably

shows how the pastoral poem "To the River *Isca*" that opens *Olor Iscanus* (first intended for publication in 1647) reworked tropes familiar to the river poet to establish a classical pedigree for his native land and himself as the swan of the river Usk. Furthermore, when Vaughan began to channel his poetic energy to sacred verse, he transformed this trope in the introductory lyric to *Silex Scintillans*, "Regeneration," toward a biblical pastoralism. Nauman's analysis rightly focuses on the beginnings of these two books to make his point about how Vaughan's "conversion" (as it is usually styled) affected his poetry. I would like to carry the analysis further to show how Vaughan used this form of pastoralism featuring sacred watercourses as a way to bring closure to *Silex Scintillans*.

Nauman draws our attention to the importance of the opening poems in both *Olor* and *Silex* that introduce us to tropes, whose pedigree David Quint has traced from Virgil's *Fourth Georgic* to Sannazaro, Tasso, and Milton. Even in antiquity, springs and rivers were understood to flow from a common source into the abyss in a grand confluence, with a verse in Ecclesiastes (1:7) confirming this science as I have shown in *The Fountain of Living Waters* (see 11-28). With its shockingly anamorphic landscape, "Regeneration"—the first poem in English that follows the Latin verses explaining the typology behind the emblematic title page's *flashing flint stone*—Vaughan draws us into a world quite different from *Olor's* festive celebration of the *genii* attendant upon his river. Absent is what Nauman calls "the literary ennoblement of the Usk valley" (51), and fully present is biblical allegory where the rebellious "Ward," attempting to escape his bondage, quickly perceives his primrose path in "high-spring" to be

Meere stage, and show,
My walke a monstrous, mountain'd thing
Rough-cast with Rocks, and snow (*Works* 1: 57, ll. 10-12)

With the landscape being transformed around him, the pilgrim ascends a mountain hoping his "late paines" will be acknowledged to his credit, only to discover they are far outweighed by the "smoake, and pleasures" of his past (*Works* 1: 57, ll. 22-23). So, he flees eastward into yet

another emblematic tableau. As Jonathan Post noted in his seminal study of Vaughan's *conversion* to his new poetic master George Herbert, this poem contains "perhaps the most astonishing celebration of the early moments of faith in all the religious poetry" (196). The sixth stanza records this remarkable moment:

The unthrift Sunne shot vitall gold
A thousand peeces,
And heaven its azure did unfold
Checqur'd with snowie fleeces,
The aire was all in spice
And every bush
A garland wore; Thus fed my Eyes
But all the Eare lay hush. (Works 1: 58, ll. 41-48)

Yet this extraordinary moment leads him to the central mystery in the scene: the ward follows the sound of the water flowing from a fountain to the cistern into which it collects. Here he observes "divers stones, some bright, and round / Others ill-shap'd, and dull" (*Works* 1: 58, 55-56); similarly, he spies nearby a "banke of flowers" where some sleep and some are awake. The fear that strikes the ward is that his heart may not be a "lively stone" (1 Peter 2:5) or that he may be spiritually asleep. He then prays for the spirit to inspire him "[...] to blow upon [his] garden" so that he may live (*Works* 1: 59, 81-82). Notably, there is no indication that this gesture is heeded, or his prayer answered.

Clearly, Vaughan had Herbert's own allegorical poem "The Pilgrimage" in mind when he penned "Regeneration," though he extends the allegory considerably. Usually when we encounter a natural landscape in *Silex*, we should recognize its biblical analogue. This can be readily seen in his poem "The Search," where his speaker spends all night in a "roving Extasie / To find my Saviour" (*Works* 1: 66, 4-5) that takes him from Bethlehem to Calvary, only to be told that this earthly pursuit is futile:

Search well another world; who studies this, Travels in Clouds, seekes *Manna*, where none is. (*Works* 1: 68, ll. 95-96) The mystery presented in the fountain in this sacred space in "Regeneration"—whose antecedents are Eden with its central watercourse, the enclosed garden of the Canticles with its "well of living waters" evoked in the poem's coda, the restored pastoral paradise of the New Jerusalem—prepares us for a more involved journey whose biblical analogues are not as easily recognizable as in "The Search." The opening poem is only the beginning of a long and troubled path towards salvation, which is heralded by the emblematic title with its emblem of the *flashing flint stone*, the obdurate heart that must be shaped through affliction (see *The Fountain of Living Waters*, 125-30). The difficulties of this journey are chronicled in the poems that follow.

In his Preface to the second part of *Silex*, Vaughan explains that one of his intentions in changing poetic modes from secular to devotional was for the practice of piety: "to give up our thoughts to pious *Themes* and *Contemplations* (if it be done for pieties sake) is a great *step* towards *perfection*; because it will *refine*, and *dispose* to devotion and sanctity" (*Works* 2: 558, ll. 134-37). The progress in this process of the ward introduced in the opening poem can be charted by certain moments alongside of watercourses. In "Vanity of Spirit," an early meditative poem at a spring, Vaughan addresses the presumption that his speaker is a *mystic* capable of probing the hidden secrets of nature.

Quite spent with thoughts I left my Cell, and lay Where a shrill spring tun'd to the early day.

I beg'd here long, and gron'd to know Who gave the Clouds so brave a bow, Who bent the spheres, and circled in Corruption with this glorious Ring, What is his name, and how I might Descry some part of his great light.

I summon'd nature: peirc'd through all her store, Broke up some seales, which none had touch'd before,

> Her wombe, her bosome, and her head Where all her secrets lay a bed I rifled quite, and having past Through all the Creatures, came at last To search my selfe, where I did find Traces, and sounds of a strange kind.

Here of this mighty spring, I found some drills, With Ecchoes beaten from th' eternall hills... (*Works* 1: 80-81, ll. 1-18)

At this "mighty spring" the poet tries to read the mysteries of an ancient monument nearby—perhaps one of the many cromlechs found in Brecknockshire—but "That little light" he had fails him completely.

Weake beames, and fires flash'd to my sight,
Like a young East, or Moone-shine night,
Which shew'd me in a nook cast by
A peece of much antiquity,
With Hyerogliphicks quite dismembred,
And broken letters scarce remembred.
I tooke them up, and (much Joy'd,) went about
T' unite those peeces, hoping to find out
The mystery; but this neer done,
That little light I had was gone:
It griev'd me much. (Works 1: 81, ll. 19-29)

"Vanity of Spirit" is an often-overlooked poem, but, in my judgment, an important marker of his lack of spiritual progress, for he fails to understand anything meaningful in this meditation. The *light* of his reason is insufficient to illuminate the hieroglyphics of this monument or even of himself.

By contrast, one of the last poems in *Silex* 1655, "The Water-fall," demonstrates just how far the poet has come in his spiritual understanding and, as one of the final poems, helps create closure for the volume. Unlike "Regeneration" where the fountain is presented as part of the shockingly anamorphic landscape, or "Vanity of Spirit" where the meditation at the spring was essentially frustrating, the meditative experience at the waterfall is enlightening. As I have argued in "Vaughan's 'The Water-fall' and Protestant Meditation," the poet can now *read* the truths of this powerful watercourse where before they were shrouded in mystery. What guides the speaker through his meditation, and what becomes the real source of his joy, is his understanding that these confluent waters express a more profound circulation: "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place

from whence the rivers come, thither they return again" (Ecclesiastes 1:7). All life streams from its divine source, but ultimately returns if cleansed and reborn. In the water flowing endlessly through the falls, the speaker can fathom the "sublime truths, and wholesome themes" lodged in these "mystical, deep streams":

#### The Water-fall.

With what deep murmurs through times silent stealth Doth thy transparent, cool and watry wealth

Here flowing fall,

And chide, and call,

As if his liquid, loose Retinue staid 5

Lingring, and were of this steep place afraid,

The common pass Where, clear as glass, All must descend

Not to an end:

But quickned by this deep and rocky grave, Rise to a longer course more bright and brave.

Dear stream! dear bank, where often I
Have sate, and pleas'd my pensive eye,
Why, since each drop of thy quick store
Runs thither, whence it flow'd before,
Should poor souls fear a shade or night,
Who came (sure) from a sea of light?
Or since those drops are all sent back
So sure to thee, that none doth lack,
Why should frail flesh doubt any more
That what God takes, hee'l not restore?

O useful Element and clear!

My sacred wash and cleanser here,

My first consigner unto those

25

Fountains of life, where the Lamb goes?

What sublime truths, and wholesome themes,

Lodge in thy mystical, deep streams!

Such as dull man can never finde

Unless that Spirit lead his minde,

Which first upon thy face did move,

And hatch'd all with his quickning love.

As this loud brooks incessant fall
In streaming rings restagnates all,
Which reach by course the bank, and then
Are no more seen, just so pass men.
O my invisible estate,
My glorious liberty, still late!
Thou art the Channel my soul seeks,
Not this with Cataracts and Creeks.

40 (Works 2: 626-27)

The occasion offered by the circulating waters at the falls affirms his hope for salvation through traditional Christian sacraments. The waters flowing incessantly from "this deep and rocky grave" (l. 11) offer an obvious parallel to the sacramental waters of baptism, which plunge one into a watery grave only to restore to eternal life: these waters are the "sacred wash and cleanser here" (l. 24) and also the "consigner unto those / Fountains of life, where the Lamb goes" (l. 25). That is, baptismal waters will make it possible to partake of the waters of paradise restored. Moreover, the poet links the waters of baptism and those of the New Jerusalem with the waters of the deep of Genesis, the material out of which the universe was created. He understands these "mystical, deep streams" (l. 28) were those upon which the "Spirit" first moved and "And hatch'd all with his quickning love" at the Creation. The poet, in other words, understands the waterfall in terms of a pattern of biblical events that links his own life to the course of sacred history that is progressing "through times silent stealth" from creation, to redemption, and inexorably to the new age.

As Nauman has shown, Vaughan turns from a classical trope in *Olor* in which the poet seeks to immortalize his native Usk to biblical tropes in *Silex* as his aspirations matured. The sacred fountain in "Regeneration," as we have seen, is the harbinger of other watercourses that help us chart the progress of the ward whose anxiety and confusion are replaced with hope and belief. While some readers once trekked through the Brecon Beacons across from the Newton or the hills near Llangors Lake for the waterfall that inspired him, Vaughan's landscapes are at

heart biblical. The symbolic landscape of "The Water-fall" expresses typologically the notion of divine circularity in order to establish the metaphoric and emotional closure of *Silex Scintillans*.

Texas A&M University College Station, TX

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# Henry Vaughan's Poetic Identities: A Response to Jonathan Nauman

THOMAS WILLARD

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This response is a contribution to the debate on "Henry Vaughan's Secular and Sacred Inaugurations" (<a href="http://www.connotations.de/debate/henry-vaughan-secular-and-sacred-inaugurations">http://www.connotations.de/debate/henry-vaughan-secular-and-sacred-inaugurations</a>). Further contributions to this debate are welcome; contact <a href="editors@connotations.de">editors@connotations.de</a>.

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#### **Abstract**

Jonathan Nauman suggests that Henry Vaughan twice inaugurated himself as a poet in a new subgenre: first as a Welsh river poet in *Olor Iscanus* (1651) and then as a born-again Christian poet in the first part of *Silex Scintillans* (1650). He argues that Vaughan established the new identity in the first poem of each book, "To the River Isca" in *Olor* and "Regeneration" in *Silex*. He accounts for the reversed order of the two books' publication by suggesting that *Olor* was complete when its dedication was written in 1647 and that the "friend" who prepared it for the press did so without the author's approval. He develops the case that Vaughan eventually found the identity as a river poet untenable in the historical and personal contexts within which he wrote. In doing so, Nauman raises some questions that my response identifies. I also discuss the larger symbolism of the river and the fountain, which may connect readers to the very private mind from which the two signature poems emerged nearly four centuries ago.

Before reviewing this well-written essay and addressing questions it poses for readers,<sup>1</sup> we might notice a change in the way Henry Vaughan signed himself in his first two volumes of secular poems. In his *Poems* of 1646, he was "*Henry Vaughan*, Gent." on the title page; however, in

Olor Iscanus in 1651, he was "Henry Vaughan, Silurist" in the printed title page and "Hen. Vaughan Silurist" in the engraved frontispiece (Works of Henry Vaughan 1: 9, 1: 167 and 1: 165; hereafter HVW). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Vaughan was the first to use the noun "Silurist" in print, with reference to a "native of the district anciently inhabited by the Silures" (to whom we shall return) and specifically as the Vaughan's "distinguishing epithet" (OED, "Silurist"). The change from "gentleman" to "Silurist" was anticipated in the first part of Vaughan's sacred poetry in Silex Scintillans (1650; HVW 1: 55), and it continued in the second part of Silex Scintillans (1655; HVW 2: 553), as well as in dedicatory poems in the edited Thalia Rediviva (1678; HVW 2: 724-27). The same identity appeared in the Latin "Henricus Vaughan Siluris" on his tombstone in the churchyard of St. Bridget's, Llansanfraed, where Vaughan's twin brother Thomas was deacon and priest during England First Civil War (1642-1646).

Many scholars have noted Vaughan's decision after his Poems of 1646 to identify himself no longer with the "Gentlemen" he addressed in the preface (HVW 1: 11). To be sure, he had reason to take pride in his nobility, for it dated back nine generations to the Welsh warrior David Gam, who died at the Battle of Agincourt. Gam's daughter married a Vaughan and raised a family at the medieval Tretower Court, where the father of the Vaughan twins Henry and Thomas was born in the shadow of a Norman castle and was raised as the younger brother of its heir. Vaughan needed evidence of noble birth to be admitted to the Inns of Court under the rules then in effect. He probably studied law there and wrote poetry from 1640 until the First Civil War broke out in 1642. After serving with Thomas in the army of King Charles I in 1645 and then learning of the king's surrender in May 1646, Vaughan no doubt preferred to identify himself with the Welsh tribe of Silures which, as Jonathan Post (see 257) and others have observed, once controlled the area where Vaughan lived and which had defeated an invading Roman legion in 51 C.E.

Nauman does not really address the question whether the "friend" who "published" the 1651 *Olor Iscanus*—"published" in the word's

older sense of making a text public (OED)—did so with or without Vaughan's approval (49 and n 1). He cites the editors' introduction to Olor in the new edition of The Works of Henry Vaughan for evidence of Thomas's "unapproved publication" (see also 60; HVW 1: 149-53). The introduction first considers the long discussion of the friend's identity and his note to the reader, with summaries of relevant essays by Willard ("The Publisher of Olor Iscanus") and Nauman ("Toward a Herbertian Poetic"). The note to the reader recalls Virgil's dying request that his unfinished Aeneid be burned and the countermand by Caesar Augustus. The friend acknowledges that he is no Caesar, but states that he has the law on his side because it is illegal to burn one's own house. Even though Vaughan "condemn'd" the early poems and did not give the publisher his "Approbation" for the new book (HVW 1: 170), the poems well merited printing in the minds of later readers. The editors consider the numerous arguments for different degrees of Vaughan's involvement in the 1651 publication, advanced between 1847 and 2004 and ranging from outright rejection to full involvement with plausible denial.

Nauman sees a clear divide between the poems in *Olor* and those in the first part of *Silex*. He dates it to July 1648, when Vaughan's youngest brother, William, died at home after being sent back from his royalist brigade with either battle wounds or camp fever (usually typhus). This raises a real question. Could not the writing of poems in the two books have overlapped? Vaughan did not stop writing royalist poetry after the death of his brother. He wrote "An Elegie on the death of Mr. *R. Hall*, slain at Pontefract 1648." He did so after learning of Hall's heroic death in October of that same year (*HVW* 1: 193-95, and headnote). Hall had died defending Pontefract Castle in Yorkshire against attack by parliamentary troops, and William had been heading there if he served in the same Welsh brigade as his brothers had done. The editors' note states that further writing of poems in *Olor* continued into 1651 (*HVW* 1: 149). Nor does it seem likely that Vaughan wrote all the six dozen poems in Part 1 of *Silex* during the eighteen months between William's

death and the book's registration. To be sure, he wrote the untitled elegies on William and his own sense of loss and disorientation after the young man's death, which he probably witnessed. However, Vaughan's preface to the completed, two-part *Silex* gives two additional and more important reasons for its composition. First, he stated that he was but one of the "many pious *Converts*" influenced by the "holy *life* and *verse*" of George Herbert (*HVW* 2: 558). Second, and more importantly, Vaughan told of his personal encounter with God during what he thought would be a terminal illness. When he was "prepared for a *message* of *death*," God "*answer[ed]* me with *life*" (*HVW* 2: 559). This was the "*Moriendo, revixi*" ("by dying, I live again") of the opening poem in part 1, "Authoris (de se) Emblema" (*HVW* 1: 53).

After these two blows to his ways of thinking, which could have occurred before or after the death of his brother, Vaughan conceived his own book of poems and verse meditations after the model of Herbert's book, *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*. He later called the sacred poems "Hymns" in the preface to the completed *Silex* (*HVW* 2: 555), and he mingled the private poems with them, as Herbert had done, and with no distinctions made. Vaughan nevertheless had reason to distinguish the public and private aspects of Christian faith. For between 1643 and 1649, a committee of protestant ministers known as the Westminster Assembly created a series of "Standards" which, with the support of Parliament, tried to normalize religious practice throughout England, Scotland, and Wales.

Parliament effectively banned the Anglican Book of Common Prayer from use in churches in 1645, having replaced it with the Westminster Assembly's "Directory of Public Worship" (1644). This Standard called for more extensive and personal preaching of the Gospel, with prayer limited to the preacher's prayers before and after the sermon. It then seemed that spontaneous or "ejaculatory" ("thrown-off") prayer was the proper form of private worship. Though Anglican priests like Jeremy Taylor detested the extempore prayers of preachers mandated in the "Directions" (Taylor, title page), Vaughan made spontaneous poetic

statements resembling those in puritan poetry of the time without becoming puritanical himself (see Smith 267-73).

Nauman fully reproduces the two signature poems. With "To the River Isca," he first quotes Vaughan's recognition of older poets who took inspiration from the banks and streams of their local rivers, poets from Orpheus in Greek mythology to Sir Philip Sidney in the previous century (HVW 1: 173-74, ll. 1-34). Then he quotes and discusses passages from Vaughan's "valediction" (53), including the hope that future poets will take inspiration from the Usk and other rivers (ll. 35-50), the wish that the Usk remain unpolluted (51-70), and a final desire that it become a symbol of "Freedome, safety, Joy and blisse" with no resumption of warfare despite what happens elsewhere (ll. 77-82). Based on this last passage, Nauman dates the poem to the Interregnum between the First and Second Civil Wars, that is, to the period between May 1646 and February 1648. He does not speculate whether Vaughan would have revised the ending if he approved the later publication of Olor. Nor does he consider whether Vaughan might have created longer topographical poems in the manner of the 1643 "Cooper's Hill" by the royalist playwright and poet John Denham, had he not turned to religious poetry.

With "Regeneration," Nauman quotes the entire poem, with ten stanzas of eight lines each, a closing couplet, and a Bible verse. He breaks off quoting the text after the third and sixth stanzas, thus dividing the poem into what seems its beginning, middle, and end. Rightly, I think, he recognizes the whole poem of personal rebirth as an allegorical vision. Though the poem's speaker sets out on a primrose path in "highspring," he soon finds himself amid "Rocks, and snow" (HVW 1: 57-59, Il. 3, 12). And this happens, not because he is climbing a peak in the Brecon Beacons across the Usk from the Vaughans' farmhouse, but because he is moving inward from the external pleasures of the world to his experience of his life as "Meere stage, and show" (l. 10). Nauman ends his quotation of the first three stanzas after the poet has weighed his pleasures and pains on twin scales and has found that the pains are heavier. He sees the next portion of the poem, from the fourth to sixth

stanzas, as a turning point, and he observes that they "much exceed in splendor" (57) the descriptions of the Usk.

When Nauman comes to the "little Fountain" in the poem's "East" and to "The Musick of her teares" that catches the speaker's attention (ll. 27, 49, 52), he wonders about the crying (see 58). He does not discuss the dark and light stones in the fountain's cistern (stanza 8), which may be akin to the sleeping and wakeful flowers in stanza 9. Instead, he explicates the "rushing wind" (l. 70) that whispers the closing words of stanza 10, and he offers good biblical precedents for the speaker's closing wish, expressed in the final couplet: to die before his death (58–59 with notes 14, 15; HVW 1: 70, 81-82). He concludes that "Regeneration" provides "a warrant and a blessing" (59) for the sacred poems that follow.

Nauman strengthens his treatment of the two signature poems by pairing each of them with what immediately follows: "The Charnelhouse" in *Olor*, and the body-soul dialogues "Death" and "Resurrection and Immortality" in *Silex*. In the interest of brevity, he defers to scholarship cited in the most recent edition of Vaughan's works. He sees "The Charnel-house" as "undermining" the poem on the River Usk (54), whereas "Death" prepares for a reunion of the mortal body and the immortal soul and "Resurrection and Immortality" awaits the "everlasting *Saboth*" after the Last Judgement (55; see *HVW* 1: 61-62, l. 69).

Nauman cites a biblical source for the "Away!" of line 25 in "Regeneration": John 1:51 about the continuance of the Old Testament's visionary tradition in the allusion there to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 (61n13). We may note a significant parallel in the Synoptic Gospels with Jesus's statement that his words will "not pass away" (Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33). I also think of an older scholar than Nauman cites. It may have been Edmund Blunden, the former Great War poet and future Oxford don (see Webb), who first recognized the word "Away!" as being pivotal in the poem. In a book based on essays in a popular journal, Blunden remarked that "these sudden guides [who speak the word "Away"] led him [the poem's speaker] East, to Bethel and the regions of the Old Testament vision—his own poetic field"

(Blunden 20-21).<sup>2</sup> His discussion of "Regeneration" continues in a long paragraph and includes a suggestion that might interest Nauman as a careful scholar of Vaughan's relation to Herbert. When the poem's speaker gets to the "dancing stones" in a cistern connected to the sacred fountain, Blunden asks, "George Herbert's poems?" (21).

Blunden's students at Merton College, Oxford, where he was elected Fellow in 1931, included the Rhodes Scholar Northrop Frye. In later years, Frye regularly included "Regeneration" among the poems assigned for his graduate course on the Principles of Literary Symbolism (Willard, "Frye's Principles"). He made passing reference to Vaughan in many books, but he only devoted a full paragraph to him in one of the last. Here the influence of his old tutor seems quite clear:

A very beautiful English example of a religious poem based on the Song of Songs is Henry Vaughan's "Regeneration," the poem that stands first in his book *Silex Scintillans*. Here the narrator begins by ascending the wrong mountain, at the top of which he sees a scale measuring pleasures and pains. Then he is transported to a garden, "a virgin soil" or "Jacob's bed," where there is a large company of people, some awake and some asleep, awaiting the spirit or wind in the garden. Song of Songs 4:16 is quoted at the end. (*Words with Power* 206)

This was in keeping with Frye's contested approach to "literature as a whole" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 111, 116)—a strategy that some contemporaries considered a grandiose conception without literary periods or genres (see Wellek 257-59). However, his students understood that it also referred to one's own reading experience, including non-canonical material of all sorts. Frye's interest in symbolism could help to explain a question raised by the title of Nauman's essay.

His essay's title, "From Rivers to Fountains," suggests there will be reference to more than the two signature poems. There certainly could be reference to other poems with rivers and fountains (see, e.g., Dickson; and "The Water-fall," ll. 13-28, in *HVW* 2: 626-27). As we have seen, however, Nauman comments on the riverbanks and streams that Vaughan associates with other poets in the poem on the River Usk, and he hints at the "fountain sealed" in the enclosed garden of the Song of

Songs (4:12), while commenting on Vaughan's fountain and cistern as being on virgin soil far from any human architecture. In Frye's term, he reads the poems "centripetally," moving inward from the printed text to imagery in Vaughan's poetic and biblical traditions. Were a previously unknown letter to surface, telling of Vaughan's visits to any of the numerous saints' wells in Wales, there could be cause for "centrifugal" (73) reading.

Meanwhile, the symbolic quality of a fountain or river as an ever-recycling stream of water, life, and even consciousness may give poets and readers the awareness of belonging to something much larger than themselves (see Ronnberg and Martin). Whether that heightened awareness is mystical or natural is theirs to decide. I have known devotees of Vaughan's poetry who, when pressed, have answered one way or the other about the poet's possible experience or their own. I respect the answers equally. I also understand why others cannot decide one way or the other.

Jonathan Nauman has good reason to begin by placing Vaughan with "[l]iterary figures conscious of residing on the margins of society" (48). Both Vaughan twins must have felt profoundly out of sorts in the late 1640s. Henry was probably working on his father's farm, having lost his position as clerk in the Court of Great Sessions for Brecknockshire after the court's chief justice was captured, tried, and forced into exile for fighting in support of the king. Thomas was back in Oxford, having been ejected from his rectory by a parliamentary committee charged to improve preaching of the Gospel in Wales. With no prospect of employment in the professions for which they had trained, both twins chose to work in medical fields, where a good knowledge of Latin was the primary requirement. Henry served as a country doctor, while Thomas worked as a chemist, producing and dispensing medicines outside the city walls of London and occasionally giving lessons in chemistry and alchemy.

Thomas had the easier job of finding a new identity for himself as a writer, for he almost always wrote under the pen name Eugenius Philalethes ("well born lover of truth"). Henry had the harder time as he

moved from being a gentleman poet to the swan (Latin "olor") of the River Usk and the devout Christian of flint, fire, and tears in *Silex Scintillans* (which Blunden translated as "the flashing flint"). Nauman nicely accounts for the efforts Vaughan made in the inaugural poem in *Olor*, but even more effectively he compares that poem with its counterpart in *Silex* (see 55-57). In all likelihood, the question of Vaughan's involvement in the 1651 publication will remain moot until further external evidence surfaces. Whatever such biographical or bibliographical evidence suggests, I think Nauman's analysis of the two signature poems stands on its own merits.

Given my own penchant for the writings of Thomas Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy that both Vaughan twins promoted (Willard, Thomas Vaughan), I am pleased to see that the editors of the new edition of Vaughan's works refer frequently to Thomas and his tradition in their notes on Silex Scintillans. With all due regard for the superior edition of The Works of Thomas Vaughan prepared by the late Alan Rudrum, I suggest that future commentators on those sacred poems check the fifteen references to the word "regeneration" indexed in the earlier edition of Thomas's texts prepared by his first modern editor, Arthur Edward Waite—references to two passages each in five of the eight discourses or essays included there and to five more in the introduction (see Waite 497). (There are many more unindexed references to fountains and rivers in those essays.) Commentators might also find use for a chapter on "Alchemy in the Poetry of Vaughan and Milton" in a book by Alan's colleague and mine Stanton J. Linden (224-59).3 Meanwhile, the case for "To the River Isca" and "Regeneration" as signature poems that create a poetic identity and introduce a whole volume of poetry seems well worth the making and well made too.

The University of Arizona Tucson, AZ

### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Nauman, "From Rivers to Fountains." Unless otherwise noted, all references to Nauman are to this essay.

<sup>2</sup>The reference to Bethel is to Hosea 12:2-5 and the prophet's retelling of Jacob's encounter with an angel there as told in Genesis 32:22-32. The place is called Bethel in Hosea (v. 4), but Peniel (King James Version) or Phanuel (Vulgate) in Genesis (32:30), which probably took its final Hebrew form later than Hosea. Also see the note on "Regeneration," l. 27, in *HVW*, which begins by recalling that Jacob journeyed south from Bethel to the site of his vision (Genesis 35).

<sup>3</sup>In Linden, see especially 228-29 for discussion of "Resurrection and Immortality."

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# Medieval Jane Austen: A Response to Fritz Kemmler

ROGER E. MOORE

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#### **Abstract**

In this essay, I respond to Fritz Kemmler's provocative suggestion that Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is indebted to medieval Christian traditions of moral instruction, particularly the seven deadly sins and their corresponding virtues. A growing number of scholars have recently begun to acknowledge Austen's engagement with the medieval past, and I interpret Kemmler's work as an important contribution to this scholarly trend. My response to Kemmler is two-fold. First, I propose that we identify specific survivals of the medieval paradigm of sin and virtue in the eighteenth century and suggest Samuel Johnson, one of Austen's favorite writers, as someone who extends and develops it. Second, I maintain that acknowledging Austen's acquaintance with medieval moral traditions may help us understand the religious dynamics of her other novels, particularly *Sense and Sensibility*, where a conversion from pride to humility is central to the work.

Once upon a time, scholars maintained that Jane Austen does not engage religion in her works. This view is understandable. Austen's novels are not openly didactic, like those of the Evangelical writer Hannah

More, which she disliked.<sup>2</sup> As a good eighteenth-century Anglican, she also had a horror of religious enthusiasm. Memories of the chaos unleashed in England in the seventeenth century by those who claimed divine inspiration loomed large over Austen's age; a fear of seeming too warm in one's spiritual devotions or too certain of the rightness of one's own spiritual impulses was bred deeply into her cultural DNA. Consequently, Austen's novels do not openly address Biblical themes and are in fact notable for the scarcity of Biblical allusions in comparison with works by contemporary authors. But reticence about religion does not imply its absence or insignificance. A host of recent studies have demonstrated Austen's deep engagement with religion and have thereby broadened our understanding of the novels.<sup>3</sup> Fritz Kemmler's essay, "'Pride' in Byte and 'Prejudice' in Bits: A Medievalist's Perspective on Jane Austen's Novel," is a worthy contribution to this scholarly trend.

In this essay, Kemmler argues that Austen's treatment of "pride and prejudice" in her novel of 1813 owes something to medieval Christian traditions of "moral instruction and spiritual guidance" illustrated in the seven deadly sins and their corresponding virtues or "remedies" (47). Kemmler employs the latest modern technology to recover this medieval context. He uses a computer program to generate a word list for Pride and Prejudice that allows him not only to determine how many times the words "pride" and "prejudice" (in various forms) appear in the novel, but also in what contexts and in relation to which characters. His list is sensitive to Austen's reliance on free indirect discourse; it takes into account when words appear in direct speech of the characters or in general narration. Analysis of the list, according to Kemmler, reveals that Austen's use of "pride," "prejudice," and related ethical terms mirrors that of medieval moral treatises like Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Parson's Tale," Thomas Chobham's Summa Confessorum, and Robert Mannyng's Handling Synne. In these manuals, pride is the root of all other sins, and humility is its remedy. Deliberately and clearly, Kemmler demonstrates Austen's fidelity to medieval tradition in dissecting a range of prideful behaviors and, in Elizabeth Bennet and Mr.

Darcy, depicting the development of proper repentance and humility. Kemmler implies that the authors of the medieval treatises would consider Austen a kindred spirit, her moral universe similar to their own.

Kemmler makes an excellent case for a medieval Jane Austen, for an author who finds inspiration in the venerable traditions of the past. Many scholars today want to rescue Austen from the past, to see her as a revolutionary who would be more at home in our world than in her own. One has to look no further than Helena Kelly's *Jane Austen: The Secret Radical* (2016) for the most recent statement of this position, one that has been made numerous times since Claudia Johnson did so in her influential *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988). Kemmler maintains that Jane Austen, the daughter and sister of Anglican clergymen, was conversant with Christian moral philosophy as it was developed in the Middle Ages and extended by Renaissance theologians and humanists. By ignoring or minimizing the medieval context of her work, he suggests, we risk misunderstanding it.

There is much to be said for reading Austen in a medieval perspective. She almost certainly knew Chaucer, for example. A copy of the 1602 edition of Chaucer's works was in her brother's library at Godmersham Park; she may have known that volume but could also have encountered The Canterbury Tales and other works in new editions of Chaucer that were published in 1721 and 1775 as well as anthologies of English poetry that appeared frequently in the later decades of the eighteenth century.4 Jocelyn Harris has demonstrated the influence of "The Wife of Bath's Tale" on Persuasion, and Ellen E. Martin suggests that the Wife's ripping of pages from her husband's "book of wykked wyves" was in Austen's mind when she included a similar book desecration in her dramatization of Samuel Richardson's novel Sir Charles Grandison. Austen seems to have known Boethius's The Consolation of Philosophy, probably through Chaucer's translation of it; Ethan K. Smilie has argued that Boethius animates the exploration of loss and sorrow in Persuasion. I have recently suggested that Austen draws on medieval ecclesiastical satire in depicting numerous worldly clergymen.<sup>5</sup>

Turning scholarly attention to Austen's relationship with medieval literature and religion seems to be a productive, rewarding endeavor.

I would like to address one question that arises from Kemmler's essay and point to an aspect of Sense and Sensibility that assumes new richness in light of Kemmler's assertions. First, how did Jane Austen encounter the "mediaeval tradition of moral instruction and spiritual guidance" (60)? Kemmler acknowledges that "the eighteenth-century context for 'pride and prejudice' has been studied in some depth, whereas the mediaeval context has been largely neglected" (40). In drawing a distinction between eighteenth-century and medieval contexts, he seems to minimize the overlap. Certainly, there is an eighteenth-century strand of moral speculation that depends for inspiration on Aristotle rather than Christianity. Gilbert Ryle, who argued that "Jane Austen's moral system was a secular, Aristotelian ethic-cum-aesthetic," for instance, indicates the powerful influence of this tradition (118). But there were many eighteenth-century writers who subscribed to a traditional Christian understanding of sin and virtue, who were as alive to the insidiousness of pride, and to its corresponding remedy, as the medieval writers whom Kemmler mentions.

To understand the influence of the medieval moral paradigm on Jane Austen's novels, we must consider those in the eighteenth century who extend and develop this paradigm. We should turn, for instance, to one of Austen's favorite authors, Samuel Johnson.<sup>6</sup> Few in the eighteenth century were as well-versed in the history of Christian moral speculation as Johnson. He owned volumes of Augustine and Aquinas as well as works by Christian humanists like Erasmus, and his writings resonate with their concerns.<sup>7</sup> Johnson examines pride and its consequences everywhere in his works, from *The Vanity of Human Wishes* to *Rasselas* to the essays of *The Rambler* and *The Idler*, but reading Kemmler's essay made me think especially of his sermons. While not a clergyman himself, Johnson wrote sermons for others; by his own account, he wrote forty, twenty-eight of which have definitively been proven to be his (Hagstrum xxi, xix). The Biblical text for his Sixth Sermon is Proverbs 11:2: "When pride cometh, then cometh shame, but with the lowly is

wisdom." Johnson explores the nature of pride, the various motivations for it, and its cure in humility in a manner resembling "The Parson's Tale" and other medieval sources. Johnson's sermon, for instance, acknowledges the priority and pervasiveness of pride. "Pride is a corruption that seems almost originally ingrafted in our nature," he declares, and it appears everywhere and in everyone: "pride is the native of every country, infects every climate, and corrupts every nation. It ranges equally through the gardens of the east, and the desarts [sic] of the south, and reigns no less in the cavern of the savage, than in the palace of the epicure" (66). He defines pride as "an immoderate degree of self-esteem, or an over-value set upon a man by himself [...]" (67) and, with characteristic Johnsonian sensitivity to the human capacity for self-delusion, explores how even its seemingly laudable forms, pride of knowledge and pride of virtue, involve negative consequences. Declaring that "every argument against any vice is equally an argument in favour of the contrary virtue," the work ends with an exhortation to the "amiableness and excellence of humility," and points the auditor to the example of Christ, whose life "was one continued exercise of humility" (73).

Johnson wrote this sermon for his friend Dr. John Taylor, prebendary of St. Margaret's, Westminster, and, along with twenty-seven others, it was published in 1788 in *Sermons for Different Subjects, Left for Publication by John Taylor, LL. D.* (see Hagstrum xx). Johnson's name appears nowhere in the volume, but Johnson's friends and the general public quickly recognized the works as his (Hagstrum xxvii). Jane Austen may have read this sermon and known it was composed by Johnson; its insight into how pride of virtue "is generally accompanied by great uncharitableness, and severe censures of others," for example, seems perfectly descriptive of *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr. Collins, whose confidence in his own superiority leads him to advise Mr. Bennet to disown his daughter for eloping with Mr. Wickham (72). But whether she read the sermon or not is less important than the fact that Johnson's work is a survival, however attenuated, of the "sin and virtue" paradigm in the eighteenth century; it gives us a meaningful foundation for assessing

how Austen knew the paradigm and came to pair particular sins and virtues in her novels.

Kemmler's analysis of the language of sin and virtue in Pride and Prejudice offers a pattern for reading Austen's other novels. Sense and Sensibility, as Laura Mooneyham White correctly observes, contains "the most sustained language of religious feeling" (61) of any of the novels, so it seems ripe for analysis a la Kemmler. Austen presents Marianne Dashwood's devotion to the cult of sensibility as a species of religious enthusiasm or spiritual pride. Marianne believes that her exalted perceptions and elevated feelings separate her from the common herd; her usual response to the company of unenlightened souls is simply to walk out of the room! Her disappointment over the failed romance with Willoughby leads her to illness and the brink of death. This physical sickness prompts a spiritual conversion; "contrition," "amendment," and "atonement" appear throughout the final pages of the novel as she and her sister Elinor discuss her change of heart. Marianne awakens from her prideful dreams, acknowledges the damage that her "hardened" heart has done to others, and resolves to lead a life "regulated [...] and checked by religion, by reason, by constant employment" (347). "I shall now live solely for my family," she tells her sister Elinor, and vows that

If I do mix in other society it will only be to shew that my spirit is **humbled**, my heart amended, and that I can practice the civilities, the lesser duties of life, with gentleness and forbearance. (347; added emphasis)

Among the devotional practices that Marianne mentions as a product of her repentance is a distinctly medieval one: pilgrimage (see White 120).

"When [...] I have recovered my strength," said she, "we will take long walks together every day. We will walk to the farm at the edge of the Down, and see how the children go on; we will walk to Sir John's new plantations at Barton-Cross, and the Abbeyland; and we will often go to the old ruins of the Priory, and try to trace its foundations as far as we are told they once reached." (343)

Marianne is of course drawn to the ruined abbey in part for its picturesque qualities, but, in the context of her conversion, we should not underestimate the spiritual significance of her impulse. As with so many medieval pilgrims, Marianne hopes a visit to a sacred place—whose "foundations" have not been effaced—will provide spiritual and physical healing and signify her renewed connection to God. Austen's association of conversion and pilgrimage is unusual. Does it indicate some dim awareness of past forms of moral and spiritual transformation, of penitential practices that Chaucer, Chobham, and Mannyng would have recognized as efficacious? Kemmler's provocative suggestion that Jane Austen is an heir of the medieval moral tradition encourages us to look with fresh eyes at *Sense and Sensibility* and the other novels, to be open to considering previously unacknowledged continuities between her art and the medieval past.

Vanderbilt University Nashville, TN

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Laurence Lerner, for instance, maintained that "Jane Austen the novelist did not believe in God because God is totally absent from her work" (23). G. K. Chesterton considered Austen "supremely irreligious" and characterized her as an author whose "very virtues glitter with the cold sunlight of the great secular epoch between mediaeval and modern mysticism" (444).

<sup>2</sup>Austen told her sister Cassandra that she was prepared to dislike More's famous *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809): "You have by no means raised my curiosity after Caleb [sic]; My disinclination for it before was affected, but now it is real; I do not like the Evangelicals" (Austen, *Letters* 177).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Giffin; and White.

<sup>4</sup>See Urry; and Tyrwhitt. For specifics concerning the Chaucer volume, see the *Reading with Austen* (<a href="https://www.readingwithausten.com/">https://www.readingwithausten.com/</a>) website.

<sup>5</sup>See my article, "Wolves in Sheep's Clothing: Jane Austen's Clergymen and their Literary Ancestors," forthcoming in *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*.

<sup>6</sup>Austen referred to "my dear Dr. Johnson" in one of her letters (Austen 126), and her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh remarked that "[a]mongst her favourite writers, Johnson in prose, Crabbe in verse, and Cowper in both, stood high" (71).

<sup>7</sup>See Greene's catalog of Johnson's library. Johnson also knew Chaucer well and owned a copy of the 1721 edition of his works. Chaucer provided one direct source for Johnson's knowledge of the seven deadly sins (see Greene 48).

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### Intertextual Stevenson: A Brief Introduction

LENA LINNE AND BURKHARD NIEDERHOFF

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#### **Abstract**

The writings of Robert Louis Stevenson have been extensively adapted and rewritten, in particular *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. However, Stevenson also imitated and transformed the works of others, as he admits very frankly in his essays and prefaces. He describes his literary apprenticeship as an exercise in imitation and pastiche, and he points out the sources that he used in such works as *Treasure Island* and *The Master of Ballantrae*. The pervasive intertextuality of Stevenson's writings may be related to his aestheticism, the view that a literary text is based on other literary texts and structural principles much more than on reality and experience.

In 1887 Robert Louis Stevenson wrote an autobiographical essay titled "A College Magazine," in which he mockingly recalls his efforts as coeditor of the *Edinburgh University Magazine*, a short-lived monthly that expired after its fourth number. He also describes his apprenticeship as a writer, making no secret of the fact that it was primarily an exercise in imitation:

Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful; but at least in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction and the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire and to Obermann. I remember one of these monkey tricks, which was called *The Vanity of Morals* [...] written (which is my reason for recalling it, ghostlike, from the ashes) no less than three times: first in the manner of Hazlitt, second in the manner of Ruskin, who had cast on me a passing spell, and third, in a laborious pasticcio of Sir Thomas Browne. (29: 29)<sup>1</sup>

Stevenson is well aware of the intertextual origin of his own writing. He also points out that the "sedulous ap[ing]" of other writers is the way to become original, because originality requires mastery of the entire field of expression, including all of its different registers and styles:

Before he can tell what cadences he truly prefers, the student should have tried all that are possible; before he can choose and preserve a fitting key of words, he should long have practised the literary scales; and it is only after years of such gymnastics that he can sit down at last, legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously bidding for his choice, and he himself knowing what he wants to do and (within the narrow limit of a man's ability) able to do it. (29: 30-31)

In "A College Magazine," Stevenson focusses on the intertextuality of style. Elsewhere, he acknowledges the intertextuality of other elements of his works. In "My First Book," another autobiographical essay, he recounts how *Treasure Island* came into being, and again makes no secret of his debts to other writers, this time focussing on setting, character and motifs:

I am now upon a painful chapter. No doubt the parrot once belonged to Robinson Crusoe. No doubt the skeleton is conveyed from Poe. I think little of these, they are trifles and details: and no man can hope to have a monopoly of skeletons or make a corner in talking birds. The stockade, I am told, is from *Masterman Ready*. It may be, I care not a jot. [...] It is my debt to Washington Irving that exercises my conscience, and justly so, for I believe plagiarism was

rarely carried farther. I chanced to pick up the *Tales of a Traveller* some years ago, with a view to an anthology of prose narrative, and the book flew up and struck me; Billy Bones, his chest, the company in the parlour, the whole inner spirit and a good deal of the material detail of my first chapters—all were there, all were the property of Washington Irving. (2: xxvii)<sup>2</sup>

Stevenson composed a similar essay about *The Master of Ballantrae*, focussing on the sources of this novel, and he contemplated writing a series of such essays as prefaces to his novels for the first collected edition of his works, the so-called *Edinburgh Edition*.<sup>3</sup>

Stevenson's emphasis on the intertextual dimension of literature is related to the position that he took in the literary debates of his time. He lived in the heyday of realism when many of his fellow writers believed that they had to present faithful pictures of ordinary experience and everyday reality. Stevenson, by contrast, rejects the mimetic view of literature and the obligation to represent reality. He insists on the autonomy of literature, subscribing to an aestheticism not unlike that of Walter Pater or Oscar Wilde. A paradigmatic instance of the opposition between realist and aestheticist views of literature in the late nineteenth century is provided by Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" and Stevenson's "A Humble Remonstrance," a response to James's essay. While James argues that "[t]he only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life" (25), Stevenson claims that life and literature are worlds apart from each other. Instead of representing life, the writer should create a structural pattern based on formal principles and a rigorous selection of motifs; the literary text is a "figmentary abstraction" (29: 135), not unlike a "proposition of geometry" (29: 136). A similar instance of the opposition between realism and aestheticism can be found in the review essay that James wrote when a volume of Stevenson's letters was posthumously published in 1899. James is intrigued by Stevenson's references to literature, in particular the remarks on the books he was writing or planning to write. Characteristically, what James finds lacking in these remarks is the subject, i.e. the slice of life to be represented:

I remember no instance of his expressing a subject, as one may say, *as* a subject—hinting at what novelists mainly know, one would imagine, as the determinant thing in it, the idea out of which it springs. The form, the envelope, is there with him, headforemost, *as* the idea; titles, names, that is, chapters, sequences, orders, while we are still asking ourselves how it was that he primarily put to his own mind what it was all to be about. ("Robert Louis Stevenson" 12)

The passage indicates the difference between James's realist imagination and the formalist imagination of Stevenson. Because of his antimietic stance, Stevenson emphasises the elements of literature that are not bound up with a commitment to experience and reality. These include, to borrow James's terms, "[t]he form, the envelope [...] chapters, sequences, orders," but also the literary canon, the previous texts that any new text is derived from.

In "A College Magazine" and "My First Book," Stevenson focuses on the debts he owes to previous writers; however, there are also the debts that later writers owe to him. As is well known, Stevenson is the author of two texts that have become modern myths: *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Both have been adapted for the screen many times, and the latter has also inspired a number of rewritings, including Emma Tennant's *Two Women of London* (1989), Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990) and David Edgar's play *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1991). Some of Stevenson's lesser-known works have also been rewritten by others. Arthur Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, is based on one of the tales in *More New Arabian Nights: The Dynamiter*, which was co-authored by Stevenson and his wife Fanny. Doyle also expressed his great admiration for Stevenson by following the latter's "The Pavilion on the Links" very closely in *The Mystery of Cloomber*.

"Intertextual Stevenson" is evidently a rich (and under-explored) field, which is why it was chosen as the topic of a conference held at Ruhr University Bochum in June 2024, organised by the writers of this introduction. The conference topic was understood very broadly by the participants. "Text" was not limited to strings of words; there were papers on illustration and film. "Intertextual" was likewise not defined in

a restrictive manner. Using the terminology proposed by Gérard Genette, it included intertextuality in the narrow sense (the selective use of another text, as in allusion and quotation), hypotextuality (a rewriting of an entire text, as in parody), architextuality (the affiliation of a text with a genre and thus with many other texts of the same sort) and metatextuality (the explicit reference of one text to another). Some participants pointed out Stevenson's "autotextuality," his tendency to echo and rewrite his own works; others explored his "interdiscoursivity," a recourse not to specific texts or genres but to more generally defined discourses (this concept can be related to "A College Magazine" and the way Stevenson imagines mature writers knowing their "literary scales" or discourses, with "legions of words" and "dozens of turns of phrase" at their disposition). A selection of articles based on the papers given at the conference will now be published in *Connotations*.

Ruhr-Universität Bochum

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>References are to the so-called Tusitala Edition edited by Stevenson's wife Fanny and his stepson Lloyd Osbourne, with volume and page numbers.

<sup>2</sup>Relevant passages from the sources indicated here are printed in an appendix of Peter Hunt's edition of *Treasure Island* (195-202).

<sup>3</sup>This project was not carried out, perhaps because of the opposition of Stevenson's friend and mentor Sidney Colvin, who was also the editor of the *Edinburgh Edition*; see *Letters* 8: 226-27. For the various drafts and versions of the essay on *The Master of Ballantrae*, see the appendix of Adrian Poole's edition of the novel (221-28).

<sup>4</sup>A general filmography of Stevenson adaptations (not limited to *Treasure Island* and *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*) is available on the Stevenson website initiated by Richard Dury and now hosted by Edinburgh Napier University (<a href="https://robert-louis-stevenson.org/richard-dury-archive-film/">https://robert-louis-stevenson.org/richard-dury-archive-film/</a>). For a booklength study of literary rewritings of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, see Dierkes.

<sup>5</sup>For an analysis of Doyle's rewritings of Stevenson's texts, see the two articles by Brian Wall and Sarah Ames, and by Anton Kurenbach and Burkhard Niederhoff.

<sup>6</sup>Genette uses *transtextuality* as a generic term for the relations between texts, and discerns the four types summarised here as well as paratextuality: the relation between a text and the texts that are adjacent to it, such as titles, prefaces, notes and blurbs (see 7-48).

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## Familiar Studies: Stevenson's Multiple Voices

RICHARD DURY

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This article is the first entry in a debate on "Familiar Studies: Stevenson's Multiple Voices" (<a href="http://www.connotations.de/debate/familiar-studies-stevensons-multiple-voices">http://www.connotations.de/debate/familiar-studies-stevensons-multiple-voices</a>). If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to <a href="editors@connotations.de">editors@connotations.de</a>.

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#### **Abstract**

Stevenson's ten essays collected in Familiar Studies (1882) differ stylistically from other contemporary studies of history, literary criticism, and literary history. They lack the single, authoritative, and impersonal voice that readers would expect of such methodical examinations of a restricted topic. The adjective in the title, on which Stevenson insisted, shows they are a hybrid combination of formal study and Stevenson's familiar (or personal) essays. These essays are clearly organized and based on documentary evidence (three of them have scholarly footnotes), yet are written in an informal style with traces of the writer's distinct personality: he allows himself essayistic digressions and uses language that draws attention to itself and typically uses extended meanings of words that involve the reader in an intuitive search for meaning. This style of variety, surprise, and foregrounding of the writer can be seen not only in all of Stevenson's works but also in his letters and conversations. His "discontinuity of discourse," even in these formal studies, can be seen as a way of reflecting a reality that is constantly changing, in opposition to the fixed beliefs of his authoritarian father. It is also a performance designed to give pleasure to the reader.

Stevenson's *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, published in 1882, is a collection of ten studies in history, literary criticism, and literary history, originally published in periodicals between 1874 and 1881.<sup>1</sup> They differ notably from similar studies produced in this period, and in what

follows, I will attempt to identify some of their distinctive stylistic qualities, in particular those they share with the familiar essay, evoked by Stevenson in the title that he chose for the volume.

Despite their subject matter, the essays in *Familiar Studies* do not conform to what the reader expects of typical critical and historical discourse; in particular, they are not characterized by a single authoritative, impersonal voice with a formal and serious tone. Instead, they combine the scope of the study (a methodical examination of a restricted topic) with the style of Stevenson's own multi-voiced, polyphonic familiar essays. They are, as the title declares (on which Stevenson insisted), not "studies" but "familiar studies."<sup>2</sup>

The adjective "familiar" here corresponds to the OED definition "unceremonious, as among close friends; free, casual, informal" (I. 1. A). We can see it as derived from one of the meanings of Latin familiaris: "intimate," "friendly." Applied to a text genre, its meaning is close to "personal," and indeed in the early eighteenth century we find collections of Familiar Letters, which now would be called "personal letters." 4 The meanings of the two adjectives in the case of the essay are also very close, and no strong distinction can be made between a "familiar" and a "personal essay," except that the latter is "defined by the personality of the writer, which takes precedence over subject" (Werner 655) and "tends to put the writer's [...] idiosyncratic angle more at center stage" (Lopate xxiv). A "familiar essay," by contrast, will have an informal style (often humorous), a conversational tone, and contain traces of the author's personality, without being dominated by it. We can see evidence of such qualities in these Familiar Studies, where Stevenson's style mimics that of "an intimate, private, and often judgemental, conversation among confidantes" (Clydesdale 263), and yet lacks the dominant focus on the essayist's experiences and thoughts that we find in the "personal essay."

What we do not find in Stevenson's *Studies* is the familiar essay's casual procedure by association of ideas. These studies have a clear organization: either announced at paragraph beginnings (in "Hugo"), or by numbered sections ("Whitman," "Thoreau," "Charles of Orleans") or

subtitles ("Burns," "Villon," "Pepys").<sup>5</sup> Within this structure, however, Stevenson (like Montaigne before him) allows himself digressions, essayistic passages of personal thought, as, to take one example, in the essay on Knox, when he develops his thoughts on the special relationship between men and women, a relationship which includes

not love only, but all those other ways in which man and woman mutually make each other happy—by sympathy, by admiration, by the atmosphere they bear about them—down to the mere impersonal pleasure of passing happy faces in the street. For, through all this gradation, the difference of sex makes itself pleasurably felt. Down to the most lukewarm courtesies of life, there is a special chivalry due and a special pleasure received, when the two sexes are brought ever so lightly into contact. (Stevenson, *Familiar Studies* 224)

Stevenson's idea of the familiar essay would have been influenced, not only by the example of Montaigne, but also by Hazlitt's essay "On Familiar Style," defined as "to write as any one would speak in common conversation" who is able to "discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity"; avoiding "pedantic and oratorical flourishes," "the solemnity of the pulpit," and "the tone of stage declamation" (Hazlitt 338). Hazlitt also recommends the avoidance of "[a]ll provincial or bye-phrases" that the author "invents for his own sole use and convenience" (340). In this final aspect, Stevenson differs—indeed, his unusual and unexpected word-choices are one of the distinctive marks of his style (see Dury 57-71).

Stevenson's combination of elements of a familiar style with the subject matter of critical and historical writing can be seen in his earliest book reviews—short studies that would also be expected to be formal and impersonal. In June 1874, he received an offer to contribute to a weekly broadsheet specializing in such reviews, the *Academy*. True to its name, it aimed to be intellectually rigorous and authoritative and, to this end, its founder and editor, Charles Appleton, an Oxford don, recruited eminent contributors from Oxford and the Savile Club (see Dawson, Introduction).

When Appleton read Stevenson's first submission together with his earlier published works, he was, as Colvin writes, "a little disturbed" in his "academic conscience" (Colvin, *The Letters* 175). This was not the

kind of writing of academic formality typical of his journal. He asked for advice from their mutual friend Sidney Colvin, and when he was passing through Edinburgh in mid-July 1874 and was invited to dinner at the Stevensons' holiday home just outside the city in Swanston, he took the opportunity to discuss the matter directly with Stevenson himself. His intention was to persuade Stevenson to adapt his style, but Stevenson remained unpersuaded. Despite this, Appleton was clearly anxious to recruit him and finally conceded, telling him that, after all, his articles would be acceptable if they were signed and therefore presented as personal. Stevenson knew that, except for a few editorial items, *all* contributions to the *Academy* were signed, and he was amused by this casuistic solution, which he called an argument of "tranquil dishonesty."

Appleton most probably thought Stevenson's style was not formal and neutral enough for serious writing. The work on which he based this opinion would have been (apart from the submitted first book review for the *Academy*) "Lord Lytton's *Fables in Song*" (published the month before in the *Fortnightly Review*), and the *Cornhill* proofs for "Victor Hugo's Romances" (about to be published, and later to be included in *Familiar Studies*).

Appleton was doubtless troubled by passages such as the following in "Lord Lytton's *Fables in Song*": "[T]here lay [...] at the bottom of this primitive sort of fable, a humanity, a tenderness of rough truths" (139). Here, one finds an unexpected choice of preposition: "the tenderness of rough truths," must, from the context, mean "tenderness *concerning*," a tenderness *adopted when dealing with* rough truths. With this strange use of "of" we get a momentary idea of a voice that is archaic or influenced by another language or dialect—an effect we repeatedly find in Stevenson's prose in his odd uses of prepositions and definite articles.

Taking examples from *Familiar Studies* (here with added italics), in "Samuel Pepys" he writes, "His familiar spirit of delight was not the same *with* Shelley's" (189), where we normally expect "the same *as*," but "the same *with*" might conceivably be archaic or dialectal. In "Yoshida-Torajiri," we read that Yoshida's hair "was not tied more than

once in the two months" (113). The unusual use of the article ("in the two months" rather than "every two months") could be Scots, or French, or archaic—one cannot quite place it. Content words, too, often stand out when they are used in slightly different ways from normal. In the essay on "Walt Whitman," for example, he writes "you may flatter the portrait" (62), where we normally only flatter a person. In the same essay, he writes that "to show beauty in common things is the work of the rarest tact" (75), and in the essay on Burns he says the poet "used language with absolute tact" (50). As with "flatter," the reader is called into play, is required to make an intuitive search for meaning, to be involved in a heightened way in the act of interpretation. The word "tact" is familiar in the context of interpersonal relations: "skill or judgement in dealing with men or negotiating difficult or delicate situations" (OED I. 2.), but is here being used with application to an unusual semantic class (not people but language), and could be understood as "artistic judgment" or "skill in choice and ordering." Stevenson's stylistic practice of giving new extended meanings to words in this way reminds us of Wittgenstein's dictum: "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Philosophical Investigations §43), except that here Stevenson is indulging in creating new uses that are ad hoc and (like a ball thrown in an unusual way in the game of catch) playfully involve the reader in stretching a little in order to "get" the meaning.

Another cause for Appleton's concern was probably Stevenson's unexpected metaphors and comparisons. The passage from "Lord Lytton's *Fables in Song*" continues:

Moreover, there lay, perhaps, at the bottom of this primitive sort of fable, a humanity, a tenderness of rough truths; so that at the end of some story, in which vice or folly had met with its destined punishment, the fabulist might be able to assure his auditors, as we have often to assure tearful children on the like occasions, that they may dry their eyes, for none of it was true. (139)

In this sentence, there is an unexpected shift from abstract moral categories to a homely comparison with assuring tearful children. In "Victor Hugo's Romances," later collected in *Familiar Studies*, Stevenson makes the following comparison:

Men who are in any way typical of a stage of progress may be compared more justly to the hand upon the dial of the clock, which continues to advance as it indicates, than to the stationary milestone, which is only the measure of what is past. (Stevenson, *Familiar Studies* 1)

Such bold and thought-provoking comparisons, reminding us briefly of the metaphysical poets and the prose writers of the same period, create a moment of heightened attention for the reader as the slightly complicated (but not opaque) comparison is understood, in the presence of a writer who does not proceed smoothly and conventionally but is involved too in a process of intense thought.

Stevenson in his early book reviews and essays, then, adopts a style of unexpected elements: not a single neutral voice or tone but one of constant surprises, where the reader cannot be guided by the expectations associated with the genre. To get an idea of how different Stevenson's style of writing must have seemed, let us compare the two opening sentences of his first review with those of the reviews preceding and following it in the same issue of the *Academy* (8 August 1874). The review placed before Stevenson's begins as follows:

Joseph Williamson was the son of a Cumberland clergyman. While yet a boy, he acted as secretary to the county member, who commended him to the tuition of Dr. Busby, of Westminster fame. (*Academy* 141)

Here we have a simple impersonal summary of the early life of the subject, together with a reference to Dr Busby, presented as part of shared cultural knowledge of writer and reader.

The review that follows begins:

Both these translations are very useful additions to our knowledge of Central Asian affairs. The first on our list is written by a Russian, and reveals the spirit in which Russia's advance towards our Indian frontiers is viewed by the writer, who stands, it would seem, in the light of an apologist before a section of his fellow-countrymen, and therefore the excuses and extenuation for her policy which he urges will be studied with interest by us. (143)

In this instance, we have a measured appreciation and an overview in a series of Chinese-box subordinate clauses. Now let's hear how Stevenson opened his review of *The Ballads and Songs of Scotland*:

This book with the tempting title is a prize essay reprinted for some occult reason. Probably there never was published anything with less result, anything that left the reader more entirely where he was. (142)

He then continues to establish the inadequacy of the book in a series of accurate observations. Such a subject, he begins, needs to be treated by the comparative method (which he deftly defines as "a systematic exhibition of identities and differences" [Stevenson, "Ballads and Songs" 214]), but the author knows nothing of any other ballad literature and only offers "a few sporadic references to Tom Thumb or Thor's hammer" (214). He says nothing of how these earlier songs and ballads stand with regard to "the proud, self-reliant, democratic sentiment [...] in Burns" (215), nor to the typical metre of the Scottish tradition. Although he sets out to link traditional poetry and Scottish culture, he "refuses, with singular discretion, to commit himself to any definite opinion on the subject" (215). Modesty is a good thing, "but the same modesty which withholds a man from resolving a question, should certainly keep him back from publishing the fact of his indecision to the world in more than two hundred pages of type" (216). Instead of the expected neutral summary or overview, Stevenson surprises the reader of the journal by entering directly with his bold ironic voice and clear judgment, followed by a perceptive analysis, the voice not of the scholar but of the orator, of the charismatic debater who is nevertheless not second to the scholar in his knowledge of the subject.

A similar unexpected personal voice is found in the ten essays collected in *Familiar Studies* (four of which are review articles, beginning with a brief evaluation of a recent publication). The first reviewers immediately commented on the "familiar" quality of the writing, and not everyone was pleased. George Saintsbury complained in the *Pall Mall Gazette* about Stevenson's "extremely personal attitude," inappropriate in a literary essay, and on how the essays "positively bristle with 'you see,' 'you remember,' 'I say,' 'I fancy,' and the rest of it" (Maixner 95).<sup>7</sup>

Apart from such direct references to the writer and the reader, the "extremely personal attitude" no doubt included the relaxed admission of uncertainty where a conventional scholar would have searched out the reference. In his essay on Burns, he writes:

[Shenstone] has a description, I remember, of a gentleman engaged in sliding or walking on thin ice, which is a little miracle of incompetence. You see my memory fails me, and I positively cannot recollect whether his hero was sliding or walking. (Stevenson, *Familiar Studies* 50)

Stevenson's point is that, unlike Shenstone, Burns, thanks to his forceful, appropriate, and memorable words, leaves "a clear impression," so that a reader's inability to remember the description of Shenstone is relevant to his argument. Here we have moved beyond conventional critical discourse and follow the nonchalant voice of the personal essayist, who gives us his thoughts on his direct experience, not here of life in general but of his *reading* experience.

The endings of three essays in Familiar Studies provide another typical feature of the varying voice of the familiar essayist: we find, not the expected summing up of the study, but a sudden focus on the writer or the reader and on concerns of human existence. This has been called the "vertical drop": "the essayist's moment of 'dropping down' to a deeper level of confession or exposure" (Foster and Porter 254). To take an example from a familiar essay, the witty and debonair "Apology for Idlers" ends with complaints, half humorous, half indignant, about over-busy people who act as if they were important and as if the earth were the centre of the universe. We already feel the beginning of a change of tone, and this is deepened and confirmed in the last sentence: "The ends for which they give away their priceless youth, for all they know, may be chimerical or hurtful; the glory and riches they expect may never come, or may find them indifferent; and they and the world they inhabit are so inconsiderable that the mind freezes at the thought" (60). In Familiar Studies, the essays on Burns, Yoshida, and Knox conclude with a similar "vertical drop"; to give one example, "Yoshida-Torajiri," ends the narrative of Yoshida's heroic sacrifice by unexpectedly involving the subject with both writer and reader:

It is exhilarating to have lived in the same days with these great-hearted gentlemen. Only a few miles from us, to speak by the proportion of the universe, while I was droning over my lessons, Yoshida was goading himself to be wakeful with the stings of the mosquito; and while you were grudging a penny income tax, Kusákabé was stepping to death with a noble sentence on his lips. (Stevenson, *Familiar Studies* 117)

Stevenson's prose style of variety and surprises resembles the style of his letters and conversation. Everyone who met Stevenson remarked on his brilliant, entertaining, and constantly varied way of talking. At their first meeting, Sidney Colvin was struck by the varying discourse styles and "the irresistible sympathetic play and abundance of his talk," and by how

[o]ver wide ranges of life and letters his mind and speech ran like the fingers of a musician over the keyboard of an instrument. Pure poetic eloquence [...], grave argument and criticism, riotous freaks of fancy, flashes of nonsense more illuminating than wisdom, streamed from him inexhaustibly. (Colvin, *Memories* 100, 104)

As he talked, he was constantly moving: his doctor in Bournemouth describes him "pacing up and down his room, gesticulating in his forcible way and talking sometimes in English, sometimes in French, and very occasionally in Latin" (Masson, ed. 212). H. J. Moors in Samoa reports that: "he walked about the room, plying me with questions, one after another, darting up and down, talking on all sorts of subjects, with no continuity whatever in his conversation" (224). This typical style of walking and talking is captured in Sargent's 1885 portrait which shows Stevenson pacing up and down while talking, in an original and restless composition that itself reflects the constant movement of the subject.

As with his familiar essays, Stevenson's "familiar studies" foreground the writer, his reading experience and his process of thinking, which in the case of Stevenson will always involve multiple voices that surprise and entertain the reader in the same way as his shifts in conversation: subjects thrown off "as some chance word or allusion set him thinking, and talking of something else" (Masson, ed. 127), his speech

running, as Colvin said, "like the fingers of a musician over the keyboard of an instrument" (Colvin, *Memories* 100).

In Familiar Studies he inserts essayistic passages, makes personal appearances with "I think" and "I doubt," and creates subtle shifts of assumed context of discourse in his unexpected metaphors and word choices: archaic words, Gallicisms, Scots words, Americanisms, slang words, and colloquialisms; phrases that stand out by their unusual combination of words, and words that are given a new meaning by their context of use.

What might be Stevenson's motivation for employing these various discourses? His "discontinuity of discourse" could be adopted—like that of Roland Barthes—because it "keeps the final meaning from 'taking'" (Barthes 217), from putting down roots, from becoming settled and definitive, and so from resembling the fixed and essentialist beliefs of Stevenson's father<sup>8</sup> and of the various stern fathers confronting a son in his works.<sup>9</sup> By varying his voice and bringing new meanings to words, he also reflects an opposing reality, a reality that is fluid and constantly changing, of phenomena that are in constant flux. And—remembering Stevenson's belief that writing should aim to please<sup>10</sup>—his constant variety, his ability to take stylistic features from different languages, linguistic registers, and literary traditions also charms the reader and produces a fresh polyphonic creation that is "Stevensonian."

Università degli Studi Bergamo

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>The ten essays are "Victor Hugo's Romances," "Some Aspects of Robert Burns," "Walt Whitman," "Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions," "Yoshida-Torajiro," "François Villon, Student, Poet, and Housebreaker," "Charles of Orleans," "Samuel Pepys," "John Knox and his Relations to Women" (this last divided into two essays: "The Controversy about Female Rule" and "Private Life").

<sup>2</sup>Announcing the title to his publisher, Stevenson commented: "I thought the adjective true; and possibly engaging to the reader's idleness" (*Letters* 3: 267), presumably because an idle or curious reader would be attracted to an informal and humorous style. The publishers, however, were not convinced, and wrote to Henley: "We should prefer the title to be 'Studies of Men and Books' without the adjective 'Familiar,' which we think lengthens without strengthening it" (27 December; CW Archive, Letter Books A/15, 168). Yet, Stevenson's wishes prevailed, and the adjective remained.

<sup>3</sup>Clydesdale suggests that "familiar" might also refer to the familiar, domestic events of public figures that are the subject of these essays, and which might attract the idle or curious reader with the promise of what is hidden and scandalous (see 260). That said, the essays on Hugo and Whitman make no reference to domestic events, so they would be excluded from the title according to this interpretation.

<sup>4</sup>For example, Familiar Letters [...] by the Late Earl of Rochester (London: Rich, 1705), and Familiar Letters of Love, Gallantry and Several Occasions (London: Briscoe, 1718).

<sup>5</sup>The short "Yoshida" is undivided, as are the twin essays on Knox, though each has its own title.

<sup>6</sup>"I was amused at the tranquil dishonesty with which he told me that I must put my name to all I write and then all will be well" (*Letters* 2: 33).

<sup>7</sup>E.g. (citing Tusitala vol. 27) "you see" (50, 70, 89, 166, 218, 221, 232); "the reader will remember" (69, 148); "you will remember" (137, 156); "I remember" (50, 176); "I say" (18, 38, 155, 197, 235, 239); and "I fancy" (125, 242).

<sup>8</sup>In early 1873, Stevenson was confronted by his father, a strict Calvinist, and closely questioned about his religious beliefs and suspected agnosticism (Gray 3-4). As Stevenson felt unable to evade the questions, the result was, "the thunderbolt has fallen with a vengeance," and the home became a place of "grim, wretched faces" and "real Hell" (Stevenson, *The Letters* 1: 273-74).

<sup>9</sup>For example, in ch. 3 of *Weir of Hermiston*, the interrogation of the son by the father: "'Archie, you and me has to have a talk.' // [...] 'I have an appointment,' said he.// 'It'll have to be broken, then,' said Hermiston, and led the way into his study. // [...] 'What's this I hear of ye?' he asked. // There was no answer possible to Archie. // 'I'll have to tell ye, then,' pursued Hermiston. 'It seems ye've been skirling against the father that begot ye, and one of his Maijesty's Judges in this land; and that in the public street, and while an order of the Court was being executit. Forbye which, it would appear that ye've been airing your opeenions in a Coallege Debatin' Society'; he paused a moment: and then, with extraordinary bitterness, added: 'Ye damned eediot.'" (Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston* 29).

<sup>10</sup>"[M]any artists forget the end of all art: to please" (Stevenson, "Letter to a Young Gentleman Who Proposes to Embrace a Career of Art" 7).

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### Dickens's Reality Show: Chromophobia in *American Notes*

FRANCESCA ORESTANO

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#### **Abstract**

This article originates from the Dickens Seminar, traditionally a feature of the biennial ESSE—European Society for the Study of English—Conference, which was held in 2022 at the Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany. The Dickens Seminar, jointly chaired by Matthias Bauer, Angelika Zirker (both Tübingen University), and Nathalie Vanfasse (Aix-Marseille University) focused on "Dickens and / in Colour." Hence the notion of chromophobia deployed in this article, a notion applied to a Dickensian text in which colour and its uses play a paramount role of remarkable importance. The text is American Notes: For General Circulation (1842), generally considered a travelogue, an account of Charles Dickens's experiences when travelling across the United States. As a travelogue, American Notes should obey the laws of descriptive realism, but a close analysis of the text suggests that Dickens places a special emphasis on the use of colour which tends to create descriptive effects that bypass the accuracy of realistic description. Colours in the United States are either heightened to a maximum degree of saturation, or diluted to a wholly discoloured state. The transition between colour and non-colour is best described by David Batchelor in his study of chromophobia, a notion which illuminates the discursive meanings embedded in the Dickensian text, helping unveil his strategy of conveying disappointment and disgust for things American.

In his study of chromophobia, David Batchelor maintains that in our Western culture colour has been the object of a long-standing and persistent prejudice, inasmuch as generations of artists, philosophers, art historians, and cultural theorists have systematically denied its importance and ignored its role and complexity. The loathing of colour, he argues, is the expression of a fear of contamination, of corruption, that leads to a purging of colour—from statues for instance, but also in literary discourse—a discolouration that is usually accomplished in two ways.

In the first, colour is made out to be the property of some 'foreign' body—usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological. In the second, colour is relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic. More specifically: in one, colour is regarded as alien and therefore dangerous; in the other, it is perceived merely as a secondary quality of experience, and thus unworthy of serious consideration. Colour is dangerous, or it is trivial, or it is both. (Batchelor 22-23)

In what follows, I should like to suggest that there exists a connexion between the element of chromophobia and the work of Charles Dickens, and, specifically, with his *American Notes: For General Circulation* (1842). The case of *American Notes*, as a travelogue, as a report on the condition of the United States in the 1840s, as well as the record of Dickens's personal reaction to what he saw along his journey, indicates an attitude, a syndrome, and finally a possible diagnosis of the writer's discursive choices as far as colour representation is concerned. In particular, we may wonder if Dickens's sceptical and critical attitude to the colours he witnessed is a straightforward example of the chromophobia described by Batchelor or is indicative of a more nuanced stance.

American Notes is a text that Dickens composed, a posteriori, and on his return to England, using the letters he had been sending to John Forster and a few other friends during his 1842 visit to the United States. In those letters, mainly descriptive of his encounters with intellectuals, authors, and many eminent Americans, and dwelling on his campaign to obtain International Copyright, the writer's disappointment with the country—initially the democracy of his imagination—seemed to simmer and increase daily. Dickens resented the personal slanders from the major newspapers that, while pirating his works, strongly opposed his plea for International Copyright. Such feelings would no doubt impress their mark on the com-

position of the travel book, whose very title resentfully alludes to the unchartered freedom of circulation that not only notes—banknotes—but also literary texts usually underwent in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

After examining the letters from Boston, Worcester, New York, as contained in the 1842-1843 volume of the Pilgrim Edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, I found no references to the colours mentioned in the travel book; notwithstanding the fact that Dickens's "letters to John Forster still remain the fullest record—intended, as they were, to be used as the basis for *American Notes*," and, in addition to this, that, "when Forster came to write the *Life*, he quoted from them extensively, but saying he had made it his rule not to repeat passages that had already appeared in *American Notes*" (*Letters* 3: "Preface" vii). Having ascertained that neither the published *Letters*, nor the text of Forster's *Life*, contain any reference or hint to the colours of the American scene present in *American Notes*, one wonders about the difference and would like to consult the original manuscript letters, but the editors of the *Letters* remind us:

It was probably after using them for the *Life* that John Forster had the letters bound, with a lock fitted to the binding. The volume, with title, "Letters from America" in gilt lettering, is in the Forster Collection at the Victorian & Albert Museum, but the letters are missing—presumably cut out and destroyed by Forster's executors. (*Letters* 3: viiin2)

We do not know then if Dickens's suggestive references to colours were part of the impressions conveyed in his letters or were added in the process of composing *American Notes: For General Circulation*. In any case, Dickens's use and expert handling of colours gives evidence to his careful deliberation.

The first passage to be taken into consideration is Dickens's description of Boston:

When I got into the streets upon this Sunday morning, the air was so clear, the houses were so bright and gay; the signboards were painted in such gaudy colours; the gilded letters were so very golden; the bricks so very red, the stone was so very white, the blinds and area railings were so very green, the knobs and plates upon the street doors so marvellously bright and twinkling; and all so slight and

unsubstantial in appearance—that every thoroughfare in the city looked exactly like a scene in a pantomime. (AN 76)

This is indeed a rich palette, teeming with the bright primary colours that Dickens decided to use for the description of Boston: no subtle hues, no half tones, everything is there to strike the eye of the reader. The effect is made even more forceful by the impressive sequence of repetitions and parallel constructions ("so very [...] so very"), hammering a uniform rhythm so that the reader is repeatedly alerted to the unusual colours of the things perceived. In the passage on Boston, colours are artfully applied so as to make every aspect of the city, including the very air, look pure, untainted, pristine, brand new, and exceedingly beautiful. At the same time, however, one feels that the attitude of the writer contains a degree of incredulity and disbelief, in that the colours look too vivid, too perfect, too saturated, to be real. Eventually, the effect of these vivid colours will be jeopardized by a creeping notion of theatricality, instigated by their very unnatural saturation, and by the reference to the scene of a pantomime. This hint, placed by the writer at the end of his description, turns the travelogue account, a genre that should conventionally obey the laws of realism, into the script of a staged theatrical. The words chosen by Dickens, "unsubstantial" and "pantomime," are not without weight:

As I walked along [...] I never turned a corner suddenly without looking for a clown and pantaloons, who, I had no doubt, were hiding in a doorway or behind some pillar close at hand. As to Harlequin and Columbine, I discovered immediately that they lodged (they are always looking after lodgings in a pantomime) at a very small clockmaker's one story's high, near the hotel [...]. (*AN* 76)

Featuring clowns and pantaloons, Harlequin and Columbine,<sup>2</sup> pantomime was a great favourite with the Victorian public of all social classes. As a mixture of harlequinade and extravaganza, in which words, music, action, and spectacle were combined, it enjoyed, as it enjoys today, a distinct popularity, especially at Christmas time (see Richards; Worrall).

Since Menander, since Plautus, and the Italian commedia dell'arte, the genre of the pantomime has staged the most stereotyped and comical con-

struction of character: Pantaloon is the old miser; Harlequin the artful servant, full of tricks and wit; Columbine, the young maid, is prone to flirting. Its nature is essentially subversive, carnivalesque, full of double meanings, allusions, and social satire. Dickens knew the genre well, having edited in 1838, under his *nom-de-plume* "Boz," the *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi*, the celebrated clown whose comical impersonations had marked the apogee of the pantomime. To mention the pantomime in the context of a travelogue turns the cityscape of Boston into a stage. The strategy is reiterated when Dickens visits the suburbs outside Boston. Here the effect of a colourful but artificial, "slight and insubstantial" appearance is made even more evident, eerie, almost uncanny, by the writer's alluding to a lack of realistic proportions:

The suburbs are, if possible, even more unsubstantial-looking than the city. The white wooden houses (so white that it makes one wink to look at them), with their green jalousie blinds, are so sprinkled and dropped about in all directions, without seeming to have any root at all in the ground; and the small churches and chapels are so prim, and bright, and highly varnished; that I almost believed the whole affair could be taken up piecemeal like a child's toy, and crammed into a little box. (AN 76)

Since the Renaissance, and the implementation of the mathematical rules of perspective, the discourse of proportion had been the staple of realistic description: here the relative size of the suburban buildings undergoes a dramatic shrinking to a toy box dimension—building bricks, in clay or wood, being a popular toy for children during the Victorian age (see Hewitt). The houses look as if weightless, and their bright "prim" aspect does not dispel the shades of suspicion contained in the adjective "varnished"—"varnishing" being the action of surface coating with varnish something often unpleasant, so as to achieve cosmetic improvement; and "varnished" being a keyword in Dickens, especially when we consider the office of Mrs General who, in *Little Dorrit*, has to coat every statement of her young pupils with appropriate varnishing.<sup>3</sup>

Proceeding in his journey, and describing the towns and cities of New England, Dickens resorts to the same rhetoric and a similar handling of the intensity of colours:

[In Worcester] every house is the whitest of the white; every Venetian blind the greenest of the green; every fine day's sky the bluest of the blue. [...] There was the usual aspect of newness on every object, of course. All the buildings looked as if they had been built and painted that morning, and could be taken down on Monday with very little trouble. In the keen evening air, every sharp outline looked a hundred times sharper than ever. The clean cardboard colonnades had no more perspective than a Chinese bridge on a tea-cup, and appeared equally well calculated for use. (*AN* 119-20)

Here the hint to a staged show, which could easily vanish in thin air, is made more explicit by comparing the houses to painted screens that might readily be taken down any moment. The comparison with a Chinese teacup not only implicitly takes up the blue colour of the sky but also, by singling out its tiny painted bridge, serves to emphasize that the scene, lacking perspective, lacks the substantial quality of reality.<sup>4</sup>

Dickens used Chinese references whenever he wanted to build an unfavourable comparison with England, England being all substance, and China a flimsy useless exotic dream (see Orestano "The Chinaman in London"; Orestano, "East is East"); he did so, and with a heavy unsparing hand, on the occasion of the Opium Wars, and again in 1851, in an article written for the Great Exhibition, in which he discussed in very depreciative terms the items on show at the Chinese pavilion (see Dickens and Horne). Further on in *American Notes*, the same effect of suggesting a lack of substance is obtained by comparing the walls and colonnades of a big hotel to a house made of cards (see *AN* 114).

One could well maintain that this descriptive strategy of colour heightening has its reason in the representation of the American scene of the 1840s: in the New World, everything, when compared with the Old World, had to look prim, free of decay, coated in the pristine colours that were the visible consequence of the extreme newness of whatever was there to be seen. Such was an almost commonplace and conventional attitude, one that often occurred in travelogues written by early-nineteenth-century English commentators on all things American (see Orestano, "Charles Dickens"). Yet, there is more to it, inasmuch as the newly-built features emphasized by many descriptions in the first chapters of *American Notes* are also connected to the idea of varnishing, to the feeling of visiting a stage, where everything can disappear in a wink—where everything looks deceitfully

polished and new. In order to support the notion of the deceptive reality encountered by the writer, and emphasized with the discursive strategy of colour heightening, one should not just look backward, to the genre of the pantomime, but also to a recent movie that operates along similar lines. The Truman Show, a 1998 American satirical science-fiction psychological dramedy film, directed by Peter Weir, is a satire on reality shows in which the protagonist, at first pathetically credulous, then incredulous, has been brought up since his birth and early infancy in the perfect happy world devised for the television show he lives in. Painted with saturated colours, this fictional world is pristine, new, immaculately kept under the panoptical surveillance of the director of Truman's life show, until the suspension of disbelief he has been trained to entertain fails to brighten his days. Eventually Truman plans his escape from the perfectly coloured, realistically contrived television set he has been living in. In a dramatic final sequence, the protagonist succeeds in gaining his freedom. Once more, looking backwards from this recent perspective, one may argue that American Notes invites us to question a reality that, while apparently innocent and comedic, is illusionary, even alien and potentially dangerous.

After the first positive accents Dickens adopts for his description of New England, the following chapters reveal a dissolution of colours, indeed a discolouration that ends up in the grey, brown, and black hues of decomposition. In contrast with the first vivid notes of saturated colours, the natural scenery Dickens sees from the train has no colours, except the tints of what is rotten and mouldering away: "each pool of stagnant water has its crust of vegetable rottenness; on every side there are the boughs, and trunks, and stumps of trees, in every possible stage of decomposition and neglect" (AN 113). The writer is implementing a trajectory of discolouration, his drab palette only briefly interrupted by the fleeting glimpse of a distant town with its "clean white houses"—a vision quickly cancelled by the speed of the train that re-establishes "the same dark screen: the stunted trees, the stumps, the logs, the stagnant water—all so like the last that you seem to have been transported back again by magic" (AN 113). In Dickens's agenda, to mention magic suggests an eerie condition, a possible nightmarish encounter with frightening ghosts or goblins.

Between the first chapters with their initial colourful strategy, and the final palette of decay and blackness, the writer adds a turning point, welding the description of New York to what he has said about Boston:

The beautiful metropolis of America is by no means so clean a city as Boston, but many of its streets have the same characteristics; except that the houses are not quite so-fresh coloured, the signboards are not quite so gaudy, the gilded letters not quite so golden, the bricks not quite so red, the stone not quite so white, the blinds and area railings not quite so green, the knobs and plates upon the street doors not quite so bright and twinkling. (AN 127)

The author adopts the same turn of phrase, punctuated with repetitions, but in order to suggest a radical difference between Boston and New York, while recalling the previous statements. This stylistic trick alerts Dickens's readers to the writer's manipulation of colours, and, with it, to the meaning that such strategy has to confer to the travelogue.

Dickens's colour strategy in *American Notes*, the heightened colour palette which represents a lack of substance, followed by a kind of uniform discolouration, suggests that the geographical and chronological representation of the American journey contains a hidden authorial plot that, although not explicitly visible, transcends the conventional realistic agenda of the travelogue. His first impressions are offered in seemingly unbiased fashion, and thus he avoids the charge of being prejudiced from the start against the country he is describing. But, at the same time, he manages to instil suspicion and disbelief: the quality of the American scene, its valuable assets, may after all be a matter of mere varnish. To add another more recent perspective, it may be a Disneyland, with primary colours that are never seen in reality.

The descent into a colourless reality is even more striking when contrasted with the colourful aspects of New England. During the journey to Pittsburgh, rotten trunks in the water have a blackened and charred aspect (see *AN* 199); on the way to Cincinnati, the trees that have fallen in the river look like "grizzly skeletons" with threatening "bleached arms" (*AN* 205). The hateful Mississippi has the colour of "liquid mud" (*AN* 216); its filthy waters roll like "black masses" (*AN* 230), and the enchantment of sunset, recorded as gorgeous, colouring the firmament with gold and red, is just a

quick passing scene: everything soon looks drearier than before, as darkness falls (AN 217). On the way to the prairie, around the track all is "stagnant, slimy, rotten, filthy water" (AN 222): the prairie itself is disappointing, lonely, wild, colourless, if not for the sky above (AN 225-26).

As remarked by John S. Whitley and Arnold Goldman: "Though Dickens begins *American Notes* with a eupeptic and common-sense cheerfulness, there are signs of his apprehensions even from the start. The comedy is exorcism" (28). Although not focussing specifically on the element of chromophobia, the editors of *American Notes* agree upon the lingering sense of deception that marks the inception of the travelogue.

Another aspect that supports the analysis of the peculiar colour strategy adopted in *American Notes* is the emphasis on colour that characterizes Dickens's perception of the Italian landscape—a perception soon to be formalized in the openly subjective *Pictures from Italy* (1846). In his selection of Dickens's letters from Italy, David Paroissien (6) points to a letter to Daniel Maclise, of 22 July 1844, where the intensity of colour impressions is paramount:

But such green—green as flutters in the vineyard down below the window, that I never saw; nor yet such lilac and such purple as float between me, and the distant hills; [...] such awful, solemn, impenetrable blue, as in that same Sea. It has such an absorbing, silent, deep, profound effect; that I can't help thinking it suggested the idea of Styx. It looks as if a draught of it—Only so much as you could scoop up, on the beach, in the hollow of your hand—would wash out everything else, and make a great blue blank of your intellect. (*Letters* 4: 159

Dickens, as one realizes, was neither chromophobic nor colour blind, but when writing about the American scene his strategic use of colour, obtained by way of replenishment and excess, at first, and then by the uniform palette of discolouration and decay, is entirely staged and intentional. Dickens's colour choices in *American Notes* are also indicative of the psychological nuances that affect his would-be realistic representations.

In his article on "'The prismatic hues of memory' (*DC* 769): Visual Story-Telling and Chromatic Showmanship in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*," Georges Letissier tackles the element of colour from the perspective of visual memory, focusing on the colour red and on the agency of colours

within the verbal text. I agree with Letissier's statement that, in *David Copperfield*, "[t]o all intents and purposes, this chromatic verbal display sticks in the narrator's mind thereafter and affords an opportunity for literary showmanship" (Letissier 20). The performative role of colour is so relevant that Letissier suggests the coinage of the term "chromotope," a concept that, while putting colour on the foreground of signification, also indicates that colours in Dickens "do not work mimetically as indexes of what the Victorian or pre-Victorian world looked like colourwise" (34).

According to the two strategies indicated by Batchelor, the chromophobic impulse identifies colour either with the superficial, the inessential, the cosmetic, or with the alien, and dangerous—or both. Indeed, both conditions apply to what the writer encounters in the United States, eventually experienced as an alien, dangerous country, where words (one is tempted to say politically correct words) varnish the most unpleasant aspects of society. Dickens's critique of the overly colourful shares the chromophobic rejection of what is perceived as insubstantial, with the additional complication that the lack of colour does not offer a genuine alternative, as the reality it reveals is marked by a state of corruption. Such attitude will be given greater emphasis in The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-1844), a novel in which the American episodes expose the self-promoting braggadocio of many Americana citizens, as well as the deceitful, fraudulent plans of the so-called Eden Project—a scam for credulous buyers whose final destination is ague-ridden Eden (the Cairo of American Notes). Colour, once again, either suggests the trivial, or the dangerous, or both.

In conclusion, Dickens's strategic juxtaposition of the colourful and the colourless in *American Notes* may be said to deliberately leave behind the realism expected of the travelogue genre. It will be appropriate therefore to evoke yet another more recent point of reference. Eileen Williams-Wanquet, in "Towards Defining 'Postrealism' in British Literature," sets her critical focus on the blurring of the boundaries between postmodern experiment and realism, adding that such manipulation of old forms actually establishes postrealism as a new genre which, according to Malcolm Bradbury, appears as "a familiar feature of quite a lot of our writing, seeking its new relation both with the fracturing spirit of modernism and with the

ways of nineteenth-century vraisemblance" (quoted by Williams-Wanquet 389).

Out of the already-established tradition of nineteenth-century realism, postrealism alludes to the intricacies of representation, interrogates the role of the perceiving subject, questions the truth of representation: while obeying a chronologico-geographical agenda, sanctioned by the traveller's authority, it suggests that there are byways out of the avenue of the real which operate in subtle contrast against the conventionally established rules of the realistic account.

Colours, in this context, become an important tool, never used by Dickens as fixed signifiers but always evoked with a surplus of intention and effect, which suggests that the author is intentionally bypassing realism, to use description within a different strategy of signification. *American Notes*, as far as the colour strategy is considered, could well be likened to a reality show: to the exploration of simulated reality, a genre-blending of comedy and satire, a take on metafiction, and, in sum, yet another Dickensian text that poses more than a challenge to contemporary readers.

Università degli Studi di Milano

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>On *American Notes* and the circulation of money, see Vanfasse, "Dickens's *American Notes*," and Vanfasse, *La plume et la route*.

<sup>2</sup>See e.g. <a href="https://www.alamy.com/front-cover-for-the-history-and-mystery-of-the-pantomime-with-some-curiosities-and-droll-anecdotes-concerning-clown-and-panta-loon-harlequin-and-columbine-1863-image401808484.html">https://www.alamy.com/front-cover-for-the-history-and-mystery-of-the-pantomime-with-some-curiosities-and-droll-anecdotes-concerning-clown-and-panta-loon-harlequin-and-columbine-1863-image401808484.html</a>

<sup>3</sup>See e.g. the end of chapter II.2: "Mrs General was not to be told of anything shocking. Accidents, miseries, and offences, were never to be mentioned before her. Passion was to go to sleep in the presence of Mrs General, and blood was to change to milk and water. The little that was left in the world, when all these deductions were made, it was Mrs General's province to varnish. In that formation process of hers, she dipped the smallest of brushes into the largest of pots, and varnished the surface of every object that came under consideration. The more cracked it was, the more Mrs General varnished it. There was varnish in Mrs General's voice, varnish in Mrs General's touch, an atmosphere of varnish round Mrs General's figure. Mrs General's dreams ought to have been varnished—if she had any—lying asleep in the arms of the good Saint Bernard, with the feathery snow falling on his house-top."

<sup>4</sup>See e.g. this Royal Staffordshire Willow Pattern Tea Cup, <a href="https://de.pinter-est.com/pin/pair-of-meakin-royal-staffordshire-willow-pattern-tea-cups-with-sau-cers-177399672791994103/">https://de.pinter-est.com/pin/pair-of-meakin-royal-staffordshire-willow-pattern-tea-cups-with-sau-cers-177399672791994103/</a>

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# Chance, Choice, Evolutionary Canonicity, and the Anthologist's Dilemma: A Response to William E. Engel

BARBARA M. BENEDICT

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#### **Abstract**

This response takes issue with Professor Engels's contention that literary anthologists choose texts that perforce provide readers with a literary canon. By examining the British literary miscellanies of the long eighteenth century, I argue instead that the notion of a canon of literary works of consistent quality does not usefully apply to collections of works before the nineteenth century or after the twentieth. Rather, early-modern literary collections supply readers with topicality, variety, and novelty in the form of ephemeral miscellanies, while twenty-first century collections feature texts by new and marginalized authors. In both cases, too, serendipity and various conditions of production and readership complicate the anthologists' power of choice and limit the texts available for a canon.

In "Literary Anthologies: A Case Study for Metacognitively Approaching Canonicity," William E. Engel examines the process of conscious choice that editors make when they compile a literary anthology, and argues that this process inevitably constructs and "promote[s] what amounts to a canon" (19). While his comprehensive essay traces the development of the form from Tudor England through to eighteenth-century Britain, with references to Classical Rome and beyond, his main

purpose is to expose and examine the "deliberations" (23, 25) that he and his fellow-editors made when compiling their volumes, *The Memory Arts in Renaissance England* and *The Death Arts in Renaissance England*. Engel rightly emphasizes the pedagogical purpose of early anthologies which aimed at educating readers in how to read poetry through providing them with what to read—selected and vetted works—and which constituted simultaneously "a taste-making exercise and a concerted effort to elevate the aesthetic sensibilities of the general reader" (20).

While Professor Engel and his editorial team have clearly produced an innovative, thoughtful, and forward-looking pair of anthologies, I would like here to expand specifically on two points raised by his article: the idea of a canon and the process of choice. His and his editorial team's intention to make the process of anthologists' decisions transparent is laudable because it enables readers to evaluate the inclusions, exclusions, omissions, and their implications more clearly, and thus to exercise more control over the development of their own literary tastes. Such was the asserted intention of early-modern anthologists also. Just as laudable is Engel's team's parallel intention of producing an anthology that preserves both the pleasure of reading and the pedagogical impulse of the "academic antholog[y]" (23). I remain skeptical that enough of an audience exists in the twenty-first century to provide publishers with an incentive to produce anthologies-for-pleasure, especially those that concentrate on poetry: novels appear to have conquered the field. Nonetheless, the enterprise recapitulates the procedures and policies of many anthologies over the centuries and fits into the anthological tradition, and I do not mean to question this ambitious agenda. Rather, my comments here address the implications of Professor Engel's argument for my particular period: the long eighteenth century, from the Restoration to the Regency.

Professor Engel's contention is that the anthologies, by their replication of textual choices, perforce construct a literary "canon," irrespective of the overt intentions of the anthologists. I find two assumptions here that need nuance. First, a secular literary canon is a latter-day concept and represents a nineteenth- and twentieth-century Eurocentric idea of the necessity, function, and effects of a literary education. While books on reading and appreciating poetry certainly proliferated in the Renaissance and seventeenth century, as Professor Engel observes, there is no compelling evidence that readers desired a mediated "canon" of literature in the late seventeenth or in the eighteenth century until the 1770s. Rather, readers wanted—or editors claimed they did variety and novelty, and publishing booksellers supplied this by means of occasional, topical, ephemeral, and chance-driven miscellanies. Miscellanies are the antecedents and rivals of the anthology. Whereas the anthology purports to present an authoritative body of works, the miscellany promises only a fresh selection, written by a plenitude of hands—some more educated and talented than others—and culled fortuitously from unplumbed, unusual sources: perhaps from friends of the editor, or discovered scratched on a windowpane, or rescued from a fugitive existence in a periodical, a newspaper, or even a broadside. The whole point was freshness.

A literary canon, by contrast, constitutes a definitive collection of vetted texts of guaranteed worth and essential to the education of a cultured consumer. In his 1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson defines the word as, "A rule; a law," and "The books of the Holy Scripture; or the great rule," and he derives his examples almost exclusively from religious contexts, although he does quote Isaac Watts's 1725 "Logick: Or, The Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry after Truth, With a Variety of Rules to guard against *Error*, in the affairs of Religion and Human Life, as well as in the Sciences." The *Oxford English Dictionary* solidifies this implication. It defines "canon" similarly as, "A rule, law, or decree of the Church" (1. a.), but includes the more general definition of, "a standard of judgment or authority; a test, criterion, means of discrimination" (2. b.), and, as the fourth definition, "The collection or list of books of the Bible accepted by the Christian Church as genuine and inspired [...] any set of sacred books; also those writings,

of a secular author accepted as authentic" (4). This early religious context is important because it reveals the absolutist foundational concept of the term. Equally significant are the criteria of authenticity and inspiration.

The significance of these definitions for the question of the literary anthology lies in the emphasis on "authenticity." By extension, this definition implies that a canon of secular works perforce must include only works that are authentic in the sense that they were genuinely written by whomever is claiming them, and also that they must be authentically excellent. This presents two problems. First, as Professor Engel recognizes, only those works produced by writers accepted into the mainstream literary culture could achieve such an imprimatur: usually white men of a class that knew or had access to the means of publication through patronage or connections. Obviously, this omits a vast amount of literary material produced by writers marginalized by class, gender, geography, race, ideology, and a number of other factors. As a result (and as I explore below), as readership and access to literature grew, readers from marginalized groups demanded their own canonical anthologies—or anthologized canons—which empties out the authoritative and perhaps the authentic nature of "a" canon.

Correlatively, the *OED*'s definition implies that the works must be, in some way, *uniform* in their "genuineness" and "inspiration," in other words, in their conception and authenticity. These concepts encompass not merely or not necessarily the overt political content, but rather the understanding of the content as conceptually coherent in a certain way, a way defined, refined, and mediated by the anthologist. Michel Foucault addresses this problematic feature of editing in his essay, "What Is an Author?" Here, Foucault cites Saint Jerome to propose that the way authenticity is determined lies in four criteria: equivalent or consistent quality in comparison to other productions by the same author; doctrinal or conceptual consistency; stylistic consistency; and historical accuracy (which anachronistic comments would nullify). Consistency is the key, and since anthologists necessarily include texts by many

hands, they must provide this consistency. They do so just as Professor Engels does, by prefaces that set out their criteria.

Characteristically, early editorial declarations of aesthetic standards remain vague. The publishing bookseller and anthologist Robert Dodsley, for example, writes in his *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes, By Several Hands*, an expanded version of his two-volume edition of 1751, that

The intent of the following Volumes is to preserve to the Public those poetical performances, which seemed to merit a longer remembrance than what would probably be secured to them by the Manner in which they were originally published. [...] It is impossible to furnish out an entertainment of this nature, where every part shall be relished by every guest: it will be sufficient if nothing is set before him but what has been approved by those of the most acknowledged taste. (1-2)

While defending his choices by arguing that they merit a quasi-canonical status, "longer remembrance," Dodsley preserves the obscurity which encases most anthologists' values. With typically imprecise explanatory rhetoric, Dodsley declares a consistent aesthetic guaranteed by unnamed experts. Yet he acknowledges that the unpredictable and idiosyncratic tastes of his readers may dispute these experts' judgement. This problem—the potential rambunctiousness of autodidactic readers—preoccupies early anthologists and underscores the fragility of any text's claim to canonical status. At the same time, the inclusion of any text in a period-specific anthology impresses on it conformity with the editorial assertions, so that the reader is advised, if not indoctrinated, as it were, into accepting that the texts conform to these unexplained criteria of authenticity and inspiration, regardless of what s/he might think. This aspect of a canon, its necessary consistency, problematizes the anthology's aim to provide "variety," which has been a feature of the form from its inception. Thus, within the anthology's very claims of authority lie the echoing strains of readers yearning to disagree.

The collections of the long eighteenth century provide a good illustration of the problems both with the concept of "a" canon and with the role of the anthology as a canon-consolidator. The reasons for concentrating on this period involve more than my specific expertise. This was the period when multiple social and economic conditions combined to make the anthology an important and ubiquitous form in literary culture just as reading literature itself was becoming, for the first time in history, a popular pursuit. The conditions that facilitated the rise of the anthology include an inexpensive printing press that enabled new classes of readers to gain access to literary material and so enter literary culture, including women, urban workers, and rural audiences; a new Royalist political regime, shakily founded on the collapse of the Puritanical precedent and thus reluctant to impose the kinds of censorship that marked Oliver Cromwell's previous Commonwealth; and the rise of congers, groups of publishing booksellers who collaborated to fix the prices and availability of printed matter and thus controlled both the distribution and copyright permissions of literary works. These congers bought dated material, like Chaucer's tales, seventeenth-century poetry by Abraham Cowley, Andrew Marvell, and John Donne, amongst others, and Shakespeare's plays, made newly popular by Samuel Johnson's 1765 "Preface to Shakespeare," which debunked previous critics' insistence on the Aristotelian unities of plot, time, and space and instead endorsed Shakespeare's mixed mode of tragi-comedy.

Congers also bought new material, helping to establish fresh aesthetic tastes. This problematizes the idea of choice further since, rather than choosing works on purely aesthetic grounds (if that were possible), publishing bookseller-editors were compelled to use texts whose copyright their conger owned, texts that no-one else had published, and texts that their members had themselves often commissioned. Their choices thus bowed to serendipity and economics. Moreover, to wring as much worth out of their stock as possible, they re-contextualized it by publishing literary fragments and short works in novel, lightweight collections, like *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations* (1712), in which the first, two-canto edition of Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock* appeared,

before, delighted by its popularity, Pope expanded it, and his publisher, Bernard Lintott, produced it in a lavish, illustrated five-canto edition. Publishing booksellers also issued compendious, authoritative compilations, like Dodsley's A Collection of Poems, for which he solicited fresh verse from up-and-coming poets like Edward Young and Oliver Goldsmith, along with better-known ones like Pope, Samuel Johnson, Mark Akenside, and William Shenstone. As a publishing-bookseller, Dodsley himself sold the volumes in a handsome edition smacking of consistent quality, authenticity, and poetic inspiration; Dodsley, indeed, was familiar with anthologies, having already published several anthological series, including a twelve-volume Select Collection of Old Plays (1744). Accordingly, congers monopolized the copyrights and therefore the publication of a vast amount of literature. The congers' business enterprise and the conditions of the early eighteenth century, in turn, gave rise to a vigorous, rivalrous, chaotic, and hungry surge of new writers to compete with those from the traditional writing-classes, the aristocracy, clergy, and gentry.

The early anthology was really just a collection of literary pieces, but it was the form designed par excellence to cobble together works to appeal to reading audiences from the disparate groups of early eighteenth-century Britain and to produce these in reading forms accessible and available to them. Readers could find the material both in physical locations such as coffeehouses, bookstalls, and bookshops, and in printed locations in the form of periodicals and, later in the century, magazines (often shared and thus inexpensive to consume), pamphlets, and extemporaneous collections of remaindered or ephemeral works, bound and sold cheaply by booksellers. All these supplied readers with an expanding, ubiquitous, and visible trove of reading material. These conditions also promoted competition between congers and stimulated the growth of new kinds of literature—notably collections of poetry, old and new, of plays, sermons, histories, ballads, and songs (newly revived since the death of the Commonwealth and the opening of the theaters, and popular with the musically adept Samuel Pepys), translations, particularly of Classical Roman verse, and multiple other genres.

Indeed, some collections print various versions of a minor genre like the pastoral together, or alternative translations of the same Latin poem, one after the other, so that readers could compare them—a practice that enfranchises the reader at the expense of the value of consistency as s/he ponders which is the better translation and hence brings into question the authority of the anthologist. All of these kinds of literary material appeared in competing collections: big and small, long and short, ambitious and frivolous, aimed at women or men or both, the young, the educated, the serious, and the superficial.

However, the anthology also fed and fed on new literary genres that, importantly, include the novel. Early novels themselves resemble miscellanies: like contemporary collections of poetry, they aimed to appeal to a wide swath of readers by shifting tones from the humorous and ironic to the sentimental and sermonic; by claiming factual bases and fictional license; and by an episodic structure that welcomed generic variety. Indeed, eighteenth-century novels often interpolate other literary forms within (sometimes overwhelmingly) the main narrative: mini-narratives, parables, and tales, letters, songs, poetry, dramatic scenes, and comic dialogues. And virtually all early novels promise "novelty": narrative freshness and variety. These techniques enable not only the concentrated and prolonged reading that hefty texts demand, but also the dip-and-skip reading encouraged by the anthology. The full title of Daniel Defoe's 1721 Moll Flanders, for example, indicates its range: "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c. Who was born in Newgate, and during a Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother) Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent, Written from her own Memorandums." Such a titular catalogue promises readers "continu'd Variety" in the forms of a Newgate biography of repentant criminality; an urban georgic on avoiding theft; a scandalous tale of incest and sexual adventure; and a travelogue to North America. Like anthologies, these novels combined many sorts of literary material beneath the rubric of a single story.

Since the discrete interpolated genres within an eighteenth-century novel facilitate extraction and can stand as literary forms on their own, many eighteenth-century novels became fodder for the ever-ravenous anthological miscellany. So ripe are these novels for anthological cannibalism, indeed, that they furnished the contents for a specific set of anthological collections: booksellers' editions of selected excerpts (or "extracts"). Of the dozens of these miscellanies published, those termed "Beauties" stand out as exemplary of the form. These little books promised readers the best passages of prose and verse from the most revered historical and modern sources: there were Beauties of Shakespeare, Fielding, Johnson, Goldsmith, Sterne, Hester Piozzi, and many more. So uniform in length, format, and presentation are the excerpts included in these Beauties that some juxtapose both prose and verse by their author without any distinction—although each Beauty-editor publishes different selections. The anthological form subsumes the content and the promise of beauty guarantees consistent quality.

This multiplication of collections each proposing a uniformly excellent, stylistically consistent, and conceptually coherent body of works introduces a related complication inhering to the question of a periodspecific canon. In the eighteenth century (and afterwards, especially in the late twentieth century), there are many collections with different agendas, contents, purposes, and readerships, some overlapping and some distinctly not. Moreover, particularly in the period of rapidly exploding publication and readership, the late seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries in Britain, the entire enterprise of these very enterprising writers and booksellers lay in multiplying their product, forging niches, inventing new ways of reading and thinking about literature. All these anthological forms thus explode the notion of "a" single canon. Obviously, there would be neither purpose nor profit in producing identical replicas of an anthology containing an immutable canon of familiar works: the form depends upon variety and novelty, as the popular, definitional, and persistent metaphor of the garland implies. Professor Engel's examination of the garland metaphor proves this well.

However, another metaphor, similarly ubiquitous, suggests the correlative, if apparently contradictory, impulse governing the anthology: it is the metaphor of the miscellany—the feast of varied and extemporaneous dishes, fresh, new, as-yet-unsampled, and picked to appeal to varied (and perhaps jaded) tastes. This splintering of the anthology undermines the autonomy and authority of *a* literary canon—a single, dominant collection of curated, excellent (according to some criterion or criteria) literary pieces. Instead, miscellanies, collections of literary works, whole or in fragments, abound, each tailored to the taste of a particular moment. In fact, there are no real anthologies in the eighteenth century as nineteenth-century critics would understand them, until the last third of the century at least.

Thus, because of the volatility of readership and literary production during the long eighteenth century, the concept of a printed literary canon before the nineteenth century at the earliest seems to me shaky, and indeed brings into question the idea of an earlier manuscript canon. More generally, as Professor Engel recognizes, canonical claims are fated to fall. While canonicity seems to imply, by definition, the persistence of a defined body of literary works through time and space, history and geography, canons stimulate their own demise as new audiences, writers, and publishing media arise. Likewise, these new forces problematize the notion of choice because they presuppose a breadth of knowledge, infinity of resources, lack of restraining conditions, and accessibility of literary material that does not, indeed cannot, exist. In fact, I do not think I am overstating the situation by suggesting that there is no literary canon anymore, and little chance of one in the future. Instead, there appears to have developed a principle of evolutionary anti-canonicity that encompasses genre as well as aesthetic, social, ideological, and geographical grounds. New canons arise to push old canons into the dustbin of history. Who now knows that Alexander Pope wrote The Rape of the Lock? Who has read it? Indeed, who even knows who Pope was? Or what a mock-heroic poem is? But entire college courses are now offered on Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye. Such shifts in taste have sped up with new technology and canons now fall in the

blink of an eye. This Professor Engel well knows. As he writes, his anthology is "'a selection and not the final say'" (26), because anthologies exist in an evolving conversation with tradition and innovation, which itself is part of an important conversation about history and meaning. Professor Engel's article appears to me to add a wise and elegant voice to the discussion.

Trinity College Hartford, CT

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>For the conditions and rise of book production and sales, see J. H. Plumb, "Commercialization and Society," 270; John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, 125-97; John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 67-83; J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction*, 149; Jan Fergus, "Provincial servants' reading in the eighteenth century, esp. 217-21. In *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies*, I argue that literary collections burgeoned from the Restoration to the Regency and provided a key means to bridge popular and high culture, esp. 30, 73, 155-56, 215.

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## "Scott's Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht" and Intertextual Transmission

LESLEY GRAHAM

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#### **Abstract**

This article takes as its point of departure a short note by Robert Louis Stevenson written as an introduction to his grandfather Robert Stevenson's account of a trip taken in 1814 to inspect various Scottish lighthouses in the company of Walter Scott. The note, published in Scribner's Magazine in 1893, is entitled "Scott's Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht." Stevenson uses various source documents related to the trip in the lighthouse yacht written at different times. Together these documents form a complex intertextual network reflecting various points of view and purposes. They include the central document, Robert Louis Stevenson's introduction to his grandfather's account of the trip that focuses on Walter Scott; Scott's written account of the trip which had appeared in J. G. Lockhart's biography in 1837; and a wide variety of related texts. We are clearly dealing with an organic ensemble constructed not only to illuminate and memorialize the record of the Stevenson family of lighthouse builders but also to preserve the account of the state of early nineteenth-century Scotland described in the texts, thus ensuring that knowledge of the past lives and achievements of the family and of contemporary Scottish society would be preserved and transmitted.

#### Introduction

In the summer of 1814, during the recess of the Court of Session in Edinburgh, and three weeks after the publication of his first novel, *Waverley*, Walter Scott set off on a six-week vacation. He had been invited by the Commissioners of the Northern Lights Board to join them on their annual survey of lighthouses, potential sites for lighthouses and shipping lanes. Also aboard, overseeing the voyage, was Robert Stevenson, the Board's engineer, designer of the Bell Rock Lighthouse, and future grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson. The Lighthouse Yacht sailed around the coast of Scotland from Leith to Greenock by way of Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides and Northern Ireland. The party set off on 29 July; and the trip ended on 8 September.

During the voyage, Scott filled five notebooks with his observations. Excerpts were published in the *Edinburgh Annual Review* in 1814, in the notes to the long poem "Lord of the Isles" in 1815, and eight years after the voyage Scott used some of the material in his novel *The Pirate*. A more extensive excerpt from the notebooks appeared in *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, *Bart*. (ed. J. G. Lockhart) under Scott's original, playful title, "Vacation 1814: Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht to Nova Zembla, and the Lord Knows Where." Two modern editions were published in the twentieth century, one under the title "Northern Lights," the other "The Voyage of the Pharos." The manuscript of Scott's diary which had been missing since the end of the nineteenth century resurfaced in 2022 and is now in the hands of the Abbotsford Trust.

Robert Stevenson did not finish writing up his reminiscences of Scott until 1850, a time when he was perhaps feeling particularly nostalgic since, according to his grandson, he bitterly regretted no longer being able to take the annual cruise in the Lighthouse Yacht due to ill health. He sent the manuscript to his daughter Jane (referred to as Mrs. Warden in the introductory note) on 28 June and died just twelve days later. The trip had taken place thirty-six years earlier, and it was not until forty-two years after his death, a full seventy-eight years after the voyage, that it fell to Stevenson to finally have his memories published, in part at least.

This article presents a brief history of the voyage and the composition of Scott and Robert Stevenson's accounts of it as well as his grandson's introductory note. It examines the authors' motivations, notably the desire to perpetuate the reputation of the Stevenson family, and to pass on ethnographic knowledge of early nineteenth-century Scotland.

#### The Pitch and Publication

Seventy-six years after the voyage, in August 1891, Robert Louis Stevenson<sup>2</sup> wrote to Edward Burlingame, the editor of Scribner's Magazine, "I find among my grandfather's papers his own reminiscences of his voyage round the north with Sir Walter, eighty years ago, labuntur anni! They are not remarkably good, but he was not a bad observer, and several touches seem to me speaking (Letters 7: 150). Stevenson was writing from Samoa where he had settled in 1890. His grandfather's papers were in his possession for the purposes of work that he had begun on a projected family history. Stevenson's working title—Memoirs of a Scottish Family—emphasized the essential Scottishness of the family and his own urge to commemorate that aspect of their lives and times (Letters 7: 120). This is the work referred to in the letter to Burlingame by the phrase, "I give you the first offer of this, according to your request; for though it may forestall one of the interests of my biography, the thing seems to me particularly suited for prior appearance in a magazine" although it could be contended that, rather than spoiling the scoop, the Scribner's article would act as a teaser for the planned book. In the end, the biography would remain unfinished and was not to be published until two years after Stevenson's death and then only in part as Records of a Family of Engineers edited by Sidney Colvin.<sup>3</sup>

Stevenson pitches the piece to Burlingame by promoting his grandfather's powers of observation as well as the enlightening details in his account, offering to cut out any anecdotes that have no bearing on Walter Scott, and to introduce "the old gentleman" who, although he was elderly when he eventually got round to writing about the voyage, was not, in fact, so very old when it took place (he was forty-two; Walter

Scott being just a year his senior). The offer must have left Burlingame eager to publish the account and the introductory note but unsure about just who they were celebrating: Robert Stevenson, Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson himself, or, as I propose here, something that went beyond these three giants of Scottish culture—the record of a disappearing Scotland worthy of preserving and transmitting to future generations? In much the same way as the lighthouses Scott and Robert Stevenson had surveyed guided vessels around the physical contours of Scotland, Stevenson set out to guide readers around the coast of Scotland, highlighting certain ethnographic specificities associated with these isolated areas.

The accounts of this tour of inspection clearly involve the scrutiny of authors and their texts as well as physical sites. Stevenson is here presenting texts by his grandfather and Scott, with a view to transmitting information about both while securing his own place in hereditary trees, both familial and professional. Scott, for his part, was watching the people he met in a rapidly-changing part of his native country as he searched out traces of ancient peoples, while also observing Robert Stevenson, the professional man of talent, unpolished, not "rounded, smoothed and ground down" (492), and drawing on his knowledge. Robert Stevenson, meanwhile, was observing Scott—not yet all that famous perhaps, but beyond famous by the time he came to write up his notes about him for posterity—and he was also reading charts, observing the sea, the people who lived by it, surveying the rocks that might form the base for a lighthouse, and sites for other engineering works. All were engaged in the work of inspection.

In 1893, Scott's popularity as an author had not yet waned in America, and anything written by Stevenson was bankable. Accordingly, in October 1893 *Scribner's Magazine* featured Robert Stevenson's "Reminiscences of Sir Walter Scott, Baronet," preceded by Stevenson's short introductory note entitled "Scott's Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht." It is notable that both titles centre on Scott rather than on the engineer who organised and led the voyage, thus reflecting the enduring appeal of the author of the Waverley novels. Stevenson capitalises on that ap-

peal when he ends the introduction to his grandfather's account by encouraging his readers to go back to Scott's own account of the trip as found in Lockhart's biography: "one of the most delightful passages in one of the most delightful of books" (494).

On submitting the piece, Stevenson worried that he had perhaps been a little egotistic in the introductory note (*Letters* 7: 340). He feared, no doubt, that readers might believe he was claiming bragging rights not only with regard to the significance of the engineering exploits of his family and of his grandfather in particular, but also in connection with the family's direct links with Walter Scott, whilst at the same time consolidating his own proxy association with Scott, positioning himself by implication as a legitimate link in the lineage of celebrated Scottish authors.<sup>4</sup>

### A Family of Lighthouse Engineers

As William Gray observes, although Stevenson relished the opportunity this biographical project offered to delve into the Stevenson family history specifically, he was equally enthusiastic about the chance it represented to explore his wider Scottish ancestry "with which he, like so many another expatriate Scots, seems to have become obsessed. From Samoa he badgered his friends and family back in Scotland to follow up his hunches and leads about the complex history of the Stevenson family" (157).

Stevenson was justifiably proud of his family's engineering legacy and in particular that of his grandfather who contributed to the development of the first revolving beams in Scottish lighthouses. His father and uncle continued improving the optical systems of lighthouse lamps, and Stevenson himself presented a paper,—"On a New Form of Intermittent Light and Lighthouses,"—to the Royal Scottish Society of Arts in 1871. Graham Balfour, having consulted Stevenson's cousin David A. Stevenson, then head of the family engineering firm, notes that "the proposed light has never been constructed in consequence of several mechanical difficulties" (1: 85n2).

Stevenson had begun collecting his grandfather's letters with other source documents for the projected family history as early as 1888. For the Scottish writer in distant Samoa, the biographical impulse was, in part at least, an exercise in ancestor-pleasing as he acknowledges in the *Scribner's* note:

I believe it would have pleased the old man to know that another of his descendants, on whose face he never looked but who shares with him in his love of Sir Walter, of the sea, and of wild islands, should prepare them at last for publication in an isle beyond the farthest cruising of the lighthouse tender. (494)

Stevenson had abandoned any thought of following in his forebear's footsteps early in his university studies and switched to a law course. Nevertheless, when he learned he had been awarded one of the society's annual silver awards, he boasted to his mother, "No one can say that I give up engineering because I can't succeed in it, as I leave the profession with flying colours." 5

Many years later, in his father's obituary, published as "Thomas Stevenson," he expressed his pride in his family's continuing celebrity through the conceit of a rather coy anecdote according to which a friend meets a Peruvian in South America who asks if he knows the author Mr. Stevenson; "My friend supposed the reference was the writer of tales; but the Peruvian had never heard of Dr. Jekyll; what he had in his eye, what was esteemed in Peru, were the volumes of the engineer" (84).6

There was never any possibility of direct transmission of engineering knowledge to Stevenson from his grandfather, the latter having died just four months before Stevenson's birth in 1850. Stevenson did, however, harbour a heightened sense of the transmission of inherited characteristics and claimed that "it was that old gentleman's blood that brought me to Samoa" (*Letters* 7: 340), referring undoubtedly to the possibility of a hereditary taste for adventure and a predilection for island atmospheres. Stevenson's taste for and familiarity with the coastal areas described by his grandfather was developed early when, as a boy,

he spent several months accompanying his father on professional inspection tours of Scotland's ports and lighthouses. He was later posted to places like Arbroath and Wick to oversee harbour works. Kenneth White remarks that, "in the course of these early travels, Stevenson was piling up all kinds of information concerning topology, geology, tides. He was also gathering in a hoard of vivid, vivifying impressions" (81). Julia Ditter posits that Stevenson advocates for an "anarchipelagic" view of Scotland, emphasizing a connection that is more rooted in natural elements than intellectual constructs and highlighting how Scotland's coastal features both depend on and challenge the permanence of the country's outer edges (see Ditter 10). Coastal regions serve as transitional spaces, bridging land and sea while defying full categorization as either. These dynamic high-energy coastlines become sites for exploring profound questions about identity and place.

## Stevenson's Introductory Note

Stevenson begins the introductory note in *Scribner's* by citing Scott's reference to Robert Stevenson in a letter written as he was preparing for his trip on the lighthouse yacht, in which Scott emphasizes the engineer's interesting personality:

[...] we have the celebrated engineer, Stevenson, along with us. I delight in these professional men of talent; they always give you some new lights by the peculiarity of their habits and studies, so different from the people who are rounded, and smoothed, and ground down for conversation, and who can say all that every other person says, and—nothing more. (492)

Scott's high expectations of the good company and conversation that he would enjoy in Robert Stevenson were fully met—the engineer had, after all, led an interesting and romantic life, had overseen the heroic construction of the Bell Rock Lighthouse finished just two years earlier, as his grandson points out in this introduction. Stevenson notes that, at the time of the voyage, Scott was not yet generally known to be the author of *Waverley*, but he was already a well-known poet, and Robert

Stevenson appreciated his poems in a dutiful sort of way, although he would later come to love the Waverley novels even more. Beyond the affinity with Scott, Stevenson is keen to vaunt his grandfather's knowledge of and familiarity with the people living on the coast of Scotland, and the fact that he had been a pioneer among these "secluded and barbarous populations" (492) since boyhood—and hence had unrivalled knowledge of the storied islands and the people that lived there. He shared his trove of facts and impressions with Scott who, as Stevenson points out, undoubtedly later wove them into the Waverley novel that resulted from this trip, *The Pirate* (published seven years after the voyage, in 1821, dated 1822). Stevenson affirms that his grandfather's "memory was rich in strange incidents and traits of manners, some of which have been preserved by Sir Walter in substance, while many others were doubtless boiled down into the general impression of 'The Pirate'" (492).<sup>7</sup>

Stevenson's introductory note also recounts how it took his grandfather just four years to build the Bell Rock but almost 14 years to publish an account of the feat in *An Account of the Bell Rock Light-House* (1824), by which time his admiration for Scott appears to have grown into something approaching reverence. When the proof sheets were finally ready, he hesitated over the wording of the dedication addressed to George IV and sent it to Scott, who recommended just one revision. He suggested that Robert Stevenson change the word "situate" to "situated," a change that Stevenson's grandfather agreed to, although, claims Stevenson, "he knew better in his heart" (493) and adhered elsewhere to the more elegant "situate." This detail is no doubt recounted by Stevenson with the aim not so much of endorsing his grandfather's literary skills but more to emphasize his Scots *bona fides* ("situate" being the Scots variant of "situated")—and perhaps also to poke a little fun at Scott.

Stevenson praises his grandfather's writing style, claiming that his account of the building of the Bell Rock has been described as "the romance of stone and lime," "the *Robinson Crusoe* of engineering" (494), although the exact source of these endorsements, repeated in *Records of* 

a Family of Engineers (98), is unclear. He admits, however, that this account does not show his grandfather in his best light, because, by the time he came to write it, his faculties were failing, and he clearly hoped that someone else would finish the task. But Stevenson deliberately decided to "leave it, with a few suppressions, as it stood," believing the notes to be "worth while (for the love of Sir Walter)" (494). Even with Stevenson's editing, Robert Stevenson's account is indeed choppy and disjointed, being essentially a cursory inventory of all of the anecdotes and little phrases that he could recollect as an old man related to an encounter with Walter Scott that had taken place many years earlier. It is, however, as Stevenson believed, still a valuable account not only because it offers insight into the intersecting lives and interests of two eminent Scots, but also because it is the nexus of a noteworthy network of texts that together throw light on the dynamics of their respective relationships to Scottish life past and the present.

## A "surprising medley" of Texts

For Stevenson, being the keeper and transmitter of family and national history evidently came with a sense of great accountability: "I have a strange feeling of responsibility as if I had my ancestors' souls in my charge, and might miscarry with them" (*Letters* 8: 144), he wrote regarding the time-consuming process of bricolage involved in creating what would be the basis for *Records of a Family of Engineers*.

An inventory of the writings related to the 1814 trip in the lighthouse yacht brings into focus a complex network of texts written at different times exposing various points of view and purposes. At the core of the network lies Robert Stevenson's account of the voyage on the Lighthouse Yacht with Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson's introductory note to those reminiscences; Scott's own written account of the vacation which had appeared in Lockhart's biography; Scott's novel *The Pirate* and his poem "The Lord of the Isles," both of which were inspired by the trip; and the other texts that are mentioned in the introduction—notably Robert Stevenson's *Account of The Bell Rock*, which Stevenson

would recycle and adapt for the text that is foreshadowed in this contribution to Scribner's, namely the third chapter of Records of a Family of Engineers. To this already rich network we can add "Pharos Loquitur," the poem that Scott left in the Visitor's Book at the Bell Rock Lighthouse during the tour of inspection and which is reprinted in Robert Stevenson's reminiscences, as well as other related texts such as David Stevenson's biography of his father, Life of Robert Stevenson, Civil Engineer (1878), and his brother Alan Stevenson's Biographical Sketches of the Late Robert Stevenson (1861). Both biographies mention the voyage with Walter Scott, quoting in particular Scott's account of landing on the glassy rocks of Skerryvore. The correspondence of all three men also clearly constitutes a relevant component of this textual array which forms an organic ensemble of material carefully constructed to illuminate and promote the record of the Stevenson family but also the national story, ensuring that knowledge of the past lives and disappearing practices described in the texts would be saved and sent out in new directions.

The texts throw light on each other in various ways. Scott described the work process he adopted in transforming his impressions of the scenery as one of reduction, announcing to a correspondent that his "principal employment" in the autumn of 1814 would be "reducing the knowledge I have acquired of the localities of the Islands into scenery and stage-room for the 'Lord of the Isles'" (Scott, Letters 3: 498). Stevenson's task in wrangling with his grandfather's texts involved a similar re-focusing and refraction. He used his grandfather's words for the account of the construction of the Bell Rock Lighthouse in the projected family biography, but recognizing that readers of a biographical work might not be quite so interested in exhaustive technical detail, he eliminated two thirds of what he called the "superfluous canvas" (Records 99). It seems that Stevenson ultimately felt a little stranded in the task of organising and adapting this unwieldy network and providing the necessary focus. "The excess of materials weighs upon me," he wrote to Henry James in June 1893. "You see, I have to do the Building of the Bell Rock by cutting down and packing my grandsire's book, which I rather hope I have done, but do not know. [...] You know, the stuff is

really excellent narrative: only, perhaps there's too much of it! There is the rub" (*Letters* 7: 107-08).

The sense of the marshalling of so much written material is transmitted to the reader of *Records* through Stevenson's overt reference in the pages of the biography to his fear of being submerged by the mass of his grandfather's texts and the difficulty of the process of adaptation: "Such volumes as have reached me contain a surprising medley: the whole details of his employment in the Northern Lights and his general practice; the whole biography of an enthusiastic engineer." He continues,

much can only be described as an attempt to impart that which cannot be imparted in words. Of such are his repeated and heroic descriptions of reefs; monuments of misdirected literary energy, which leave upon the mind of the reader no effect but that of a multiplicity of words and the suggested vignette of a lusty old gentleman scrambling among tangle. (*Records* 87)

Stevenson's task was to redirect the focus of that literary energy, to untangle the mass of material and spotlight whatever seemed the most worthy of preservation.

# Passing Time

The question arises as to why was Stevenson so keen to straighten out and set down "Scott's Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht" and to offer the piece to *Scribner's* American readership ahead of the completion of his family biography. Perhaps the answer is in the words from Horace referring to fleeting years slipping by cited by Stevenson in his letter to Burlingame: *labuntur anni!*<sup>8</sup> Stevenson's father, Thomas Stevenson, also a lighthouse engineer, had died four years earlier in 1887, and this had heightened his awareness that time was passing; that his own health was precarious and that the family biography project was taking more time than he had anticipated.<sup>9</sup>

The Latin quotation in the letter echoes that used by Walter Scott as the final words in his journal (as presented by Lockhart). He writes, *sed fugit interea fugit irreparabile tempus*, <sup>10</sup> a phrase from Virgil meaning "but

time meanwhile is flying, flying beyond recall." Walter Scott, like Stevenson, was keenly aware of the passing of time not only from a personal but also from a cultural point of view. Scotland was changing rapidly, and the need to preserve traces of what still existed in 1814 and what he had learned about Scotland's past felt increasingly urgent as he made clear in his journal. Penny Fielding points out that Scott "finds that the things and the cultural performances that he seeks to collect are vexingly unavailable, just on the cusp of living memory" (10). The sense of impending loss is heightened by the setting of the voyage—the coastal landscapes where everything and everyone seems to be on the precipice of sliding away and being lost.

The early nineteenth century was indeed a period of significant social transformation in northern Scotland. Scott experienced these changes first-hand during his trip around the coast in the Lighthouse Yacht, having been alerted beforehand by Lord Selkirk's Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland (1805), a work praised in Waverley (see Leask 226). These sweeping changes stirred in Scott an imperious desire to document and preserve the traditions and ways of the past. However, while he was vocal about the damage caused by tourists whom he criticizes for destroying stalactites and erasing ancient inscriptions, Scott's journal reveals a contradiction in his attitude since he unashamedly recounts the indulgence of his passion for collecting historical artifacts. In the cave of Eigg, for example, he did not hesitate to carry off a skull as a keepsake. Moreover, Scott's poetry through crowdpulling texts like "The Lady of the Lake" and "The Lord of the Isles" had been laying down the conditions for a continued tourist boom in the Highlands, the very thing that he condemned. Stevenson would later declare himself dismayed at the presence of tourists in the Highlands but relieved that they had not yet made their way to the most difficult-to-access lighthouses, and, in his opinion, they probably never would:

To go round the lights, even to-day, is to visit past centuries. The tide of tourists that flows yearly in Scotland, vulgarising all where it approaches, is still defined by certain barriers. It will be long ere there is a hotel at Sumburgh or a hydropathic at Cape Wrath; it will be long ere any char-a-banc, laden with

tourists, shall drive up to Barra Head or Monach, [...] except for the towers, sounding and shining all night with fog-bells and the radiance of the light-room, glittering by day with the trivial brightness of white paint, these island and moorland stations seem inaccessible to the civilisation of to-day, and even to the end of my grandfather's career the isolation was far greater. (*Records* 42-43)

The consequence of this isolation was, according to Stevenson, that when his grandfather started visiting the islands of the Scottish archipelago: "the barbarism was deep, the people sunk in superstition, the circumstances of their life perhaps unique in history" (43). It is primarily this uniqueness of setting and circumstance to which his grandfather had privileged access that Stevenson seeks to record through the propagation of his grandfather's text.

#### Modes of Illumination

The transmission of light from lighthouses was something that Stevenson had thought about seriously and scientifically, as is shown by the early paper on a new form of intermittent light in which he describes in great detail the recurrent occultations and revelations integral to Robert Stevenson's original design, and suggests an improvement involving mirrors. In the original design, the light is always present, in the suggested enhancement it comes and goes, in both cases the transmission is, as the title of the paper indicates, intermittent. Various commentators have noted Stevenson's use of the effects of light in his writing. Kenneth Simpson, for example, writes that: "The legacy of his family's preoccupation with illumination is evident [...] Just as his uncle Alan had adapted the work of the French brothers Fresnel on lighthouse lenses for use in Scotland, just as his father had studied Atlantic storms and North Sea swells to identify wave frequencies, so Stevenson was keenly attuned to the movement of light" (236-37). In 1892, he was also acutely attuned the urgent need to adapt and transmit the record he now possessed of the knowledge and achievements of his family and increasingly to the work that would be involved in preparing it for publication.

This transmission of light by lighthouses thus mirrors the communication of knowledge about the land, the sea, tradition, people and practices through the vigilance of its keepers. Scott and the Stevensons, all keenly aware of time slipping away, by writing about their travels around the coast of Scotland were attempting to transmit that knowledge in a similar way through a co-ordinated array of textual beams that would be perceivable across space and time; a way of warning about the imminent loss of first-hand knowledge and experience. All three of these men were essentially textual lighthouse keepers: stand-out beacons of transmittable knowledge occupied with the pressing task of preserving something of times that were fast disappearing from human memory. They were the self-appointed custodians of knowledge acquired through direct contact with the living Scottish world, preserving it against the dangers of fragmentation by the storms of time.

Scotland—Dunstaffnage Castle, for example—falling into ruin. He was, however, able to bring about action for the preservation of certain sites. Robert Stevenson, who shared his concerns, mentions their visit to the Abbey of Arbroath (or rather "Aberbrothock, vulgarly called Arbroath" (*Memoirs* 3: 137)), a site that he and Scott had surveyed together several years before the trip on the lighthouse yacht, and the report that Scott prepared for the barons of the Exchequer, which led to "considerable repairs" being made under the engineer's direction: "This is mentioned here as one of the happy results arising from Sir Walter's peregrinations" (496). Robert Stevenson also marvels at Scott's fortunate ability to renovate certain sites textually rather than physically, admiring in particular "the dignity with which he has clothed the dilapidated ruins of Ardtornish in *The Lord of the Isles*" ("Reminiscenses" 500).<sup>11</sup>

## **Throwing Out Lines**

With a view to posthumous publication, Robert Stevenson had intended that his daughter "or one of the misses" write up his reminiscences. Stevenson reports that he left the instruction, "Continue" (494).

This did not happen. His notes were not used until the publication in *Scribner's* and later, as noted above, more extensively when parts of his account of his life and work were recycled by Stevenson in the patchwork of his own and his grandfather's words in the draft of *Records of a Family of Engineers*. Here, for example, Stevenson briefly introduces his grandfather's words to recount a telling anecdote that took place in Orkney, also included in the *Scribner's* piece; "When Sir Walter Scott visited the Stones of Stennis, my grandfather put in his pocket a hundred-foot line, which he unfortunately lost": "Some years afterwards," he writes,

one of my assistants on a visit to the Stones of Stennis took shelter from a storm in a cottage close by the lake; and seeing a box-measuring-line in the bole or sole of the cottage window, he asked the woman where she got this well-known professional appendage. She said: "O sir, ane of the bairns fand it lang syne at the Stanes; and when drawing it out we took fright, and thinking it had belanged to the fairies, we threw it into the bole, and it has layen there ever since. (*Records* 22)

The anecdote itself feels emblematic, not so much because it illustrates, as intended, the fearful superstition of the Orcadians, but more because it evokes the possible persistence of a direct physical link with the past. It also introduces us to the idea of lines being thrown out.

I have suggested that the main purpose of this network of texts by and related to three famous Scots is to ensure the transmission of knowledge, mainly ethnographic, about the state of coastal Scotland in the early nineteenth century. I have styled the writers as the keepers and passers of that knowledge. However, the philosopher-anthropologist Tim Ingold argues in very clear terms that knowledge is not transmitted. He contends that "'transmission' is quite the wrong word to describe the ways in which people come to know what they do" (121). "For inhabitants move through the world rather than across its outer surface. And their knowledge […] is not built up but grows along the paths they take, both on and in the air" (134). This ambulatory practice Ingold calls wayfaring: the wayfarer draws a tale from impressions in

the ground. Less a surveyor than a narrator, "his knowledge is not classificatory but storied, not totalizing and synoptic but open-ended and exploratory" (135). This, I think, is what Stevenson meant when he wrote about the utter impossibility of expressing verbally much of his forebear's knowledge and skill, "it is of the essence of this knowledge, or this knack of mind, to be largely incommunicable" (*Records* 86).

In a comparison that reminds us of Robert Stevenson's apprenticeship as a draughtsman in the offices of the Northern Lighthouse Board, Ingold further suggests: "One could perhaps compare wayfaring to drawing: as the draughtsman traces a line with his pencil, so the wayfarer—walking along—paces a line with his feet" (127). This striking image of pacing a line, in turn, brings us back to Robert Stevenson's abandoned box-measuring-line, a tool that he used to interact with the landscape as he moved across it, physically, engaging with the ground and with the matter of the place; creating lines; materializing imaginary lines; stocking his mind with other lines; throwing out lines between the past and the present and calculating the linear beams of light created by his lighthouses. Perhaps that is the only meaningful way that we can engage with knowledge of Scotland's present and past reality; by being line-creating wayfarers ourselves and engaging directly with the ground, the rocks, the wind, the tangle and the skerries and what Stevenson termed in in the passage cited earlier about his grandfather's efforts to communicate his experience—"that which cannot be imparted in words" (Records 87).

Université de Bordeaux

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Despite the title of this volume, the lighthouse yacht at this time was not called the Pharos but simply "The Lighthouse Yacht." The Pharos of the period was the Pharos II, which had been used as a lightship during the construction of the Bell Rock Light. See <a href="https://www.nlb.org.uk/history/ships/">https://www.nlb.org.uk/history/ships/</a>.

<sup>2</sup>Henceforth Stevenson; Robert Stevenson is referred to as such.

<sup>3</sup>Records of a Family of Engineers includes the first three chapters of Stevenson's manuscript. Chapters 4-6, which remained unrevised, were privately printed in part by J. Christian Bay in 1929.

<sup>4</sup>Stevenson thought of himself as one of the three Robins, i.e. Roberts (Burns, Fergusson, Stevenson), but also as a deserving heir to Scott (*Letters* 7: 110). In early December 1892, in a letter to J. M. Barrie, he claimed Scott's posthumous approbation, declaring that the Shirra would have been proud of them both (*Letters* 7: 447).

<sup>5</sup>He received one of the society's five annual silver medals, value three sovereigns, for the paper on 13 November 1871, his twenty-first birthday ("Notes from his Mother's Diary" 322).

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Stevenson was the author of Lighthouse Illumination: Being a Description of the Holophotal System, and of Azimuthal-Condensing, and Apparent Lights, with Other Improvements (J. Weale, 1859) and The Design and Construction of Harbours (A. C. Black, 1864).

<sup>7</sup>His grandfather's input notwithstanding, in the essay fragment, "Rosa Quo Locorum" (c. 1890), Stevenson admits "I could not finish *The Pirate* when I was a child, I have never finished it yet" ("Random Memories" 198).

<sup>8</sup>"Eheu fugaces [...] labuntur anni" [Alas! the fleeting years slip by] (Horace, *Odes* II.14).

<sup>9</sup>As it turned out, after the publication of the piece, Stevenson had just over a year left to live, and he would, in fact, never manage to complete the family biography.

<sup>10</sup>Virgil's Georgics III.284.

<sup>11</sup>Scott, however, laments his own belatedness and his inaction in preserving an element of intangible culture when, for example, he regrets "Probably I might have interested him in preserving the dance, by causing young persons to learn it" ("Vacation 1814" 162).

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# Courting the Bourgeois: Stevenson, Baudelaire, and Writing as a Profession

KATHERINE ASHLEY

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(http://www.connotations.de/debate/courting-the-bourgeois-stevenson-baudelaire-and-writing-as-a-profession). If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to <a href="mailto:editors@connotations.de">editors@connotations.de</a>.

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#### **Abstract**

Stevenson's sedulous aping of Charles Baudelaire, the painter of modern life and godfather of French style, is most evident in the prose poems that he wrote in 1875 after reading Baudelaire's posthumously published Petits poèmes en prose (1869). This is not the only connection between Stevenson and Baudelaire, however: their common approach to writing as a career is less studied but no less revealing of intertextual connections. Whereas their prose poems are illustrative of stylistic and aesthetic refinement and experimentation, Stevenson's and Baudelaire's writings on art as a profession grapple with the changes underway in the nineteenth-century publishing world, where aesthetics and economics sat uneasily side by side, and authors attempted to maintain artistic integrity while contending with pressure to sell books and earn a living. This paper compares Stevenson's "Letter to a Young Gentleman Who Proposes to Embrace the Career of Art" (1888), "On the Choice of a Profession" (1915) and "The Profession of Letters" (1881) with Baudelaire's earlier "Comment on paie ses dettes quand on a du génie" (1845) and "Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs" (1846). These essays on writing as a career are informed by a practical understanding of the complex relationship between art, money and work in the capitalist marketplace, where financial independence was seen as a prerequisite for publishing texts that had artistic value, and where appealing to bourgeois tastes was often associated with forsaking artistic integrity.

Robert Louis Stevenson once confessed to suffering attacks of "morbid melancholy," during which he would find himself "in a state of intellectual prostration, fit for nothing but smoking, and reading Charles Baudelaire" (Letters 1: 193-94). By Stevenson's own admission, this reading resulted in imitation: his "sedulous ap[ing]" ("A College Magazine" 29) of Baudelaire, the godfather of French style, is most evident in the prose poems that he wrote in 1875 after reading Baudelaire's posthumously published Petits poèmes en prose (1869). Baudelaire's stylistic influence can also be discerned beyond these experiments in works such as Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes (1878), New Arabian Nights (1878), Prince Otto (1885) and The Black Arrow (1888). Stylistic affinities, however, are not the only connection between Stevenson and Baudelaire: another common point that reveals aesthetic and temperamental kinship is their conceptualisation of writing as a profession. Moreover, as will be shown, their respective comments on this subject have broader relevance insofar as they reflect the changes that were underway in the nineteenth-century literary and publishing worlds, where aesthetics and economics sat uneasily side by side, and authors attempted to maintain artistic integrity while contending with pressure to sell books and earn a living.

In a century where the patronage system died out and novelists like Honoré de Balzac and Charles Dickens worked to excess, perhaps to the point of death, Stevenson and Baudelaire, participants in an aesthetic realignment that prioritized stylistic accomplishment, were conscious of the connection between work and leisure, financial independence and the ability to create works of artistic value. Several of Stevenson's essays, notably "The Morality of the Profession of Letters" (1881), "Letter to a Young Gentleman Who Proposes to Embrace the Career of Art" (1888) and "On the Choice of a Profession" (1915), deal with writing as a career. These can be profitably studied alongside Baudelaire's "Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs [Advice to Young Men of Letters]" first published in *L'Esprit public* on 15 April 1846. There is no direct evidence that Stevenson read this particular piece—he did not comment

on it in his letters or essays; there is, however, ample circumstantial evidence that he read *L'Art romantique*, where "Conseils" was collected in Baudelaire's complete works in 1868-69.2 The timeframe of Baudelaire's influence on Stevenson is illustrative of a generational delay in the transfer of mid-century French "art for art's sake" to fin de siècle British aestheticism. Starting with Thomas Carlyle and his "Gospel of Work," there was an established line of nineteenth-century British authors agonising over the concept of writerly "work," which is unsurprising given the pace of industrial, economic and social change in Britain. Art for art's sake found its full theoretical expression in Britain towards the end of the century in Walter Pater's "Style" (1889), which is heavily influenced by Flaubert. Stevenson's interpretation of Baudelairian concepts of work participates in this Franco-British cultural transfer and is important as a reflection on how to prioritize the artist's craft and innovate while remaining aware of market dynamics and appealing to the public.

Baudelaire's and Stevenson's advice to writers on how to navigate these challenges can be summarized in three broad lessons. First, to be lazy is to sacrifice artistic honour; as a result, writing should be a daily routine, which will encourage artistic inspiration. This anti-Muse stance rejects Romantic notions of inspiration, repositioning creativity as part of the daily tasks of the modern author. For Baudelaire, "l'inspiration est décidément la soeur du travail journalier [inspiration is truly the sister of daily work]" ("Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs" 82); for Stevenson, "habit and practice sharpen gifts" ("Letter to a Young Gentleman" 5).

Second, public success hides countless hours of private toil. Writers have long commented on this topic. Baudelaire tells young authors that

Tout début a toujours été précédé et qu'il est l'effet de vingt autres débuts qu'ils [les jeunes littérateurs] n'ont pas connus [...] Je crois plutôt qu'un succès est [...] le résultat des succès antérieurs, souvent invisibles à l'œil nu. Il y a une lente agrégation de succès moléculaires; mais de générations miraculeuses et spontanées, jamais. ("Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs" 76)

Every successful début is preceded by prior efforts and results from twenty other beginnings that you are unaware of [...] I tend to think that success [...] is the result of past successes, often invisible to the naked eye. There is a slow consolidation of tiny successes; but spontaneous and miraculous successes: never.

Stevenson's comments likewise draw attention to the invisibility of the writer's toil: "to those more exquisite refinements of proficiency and finish, which the artist so ardently desires and so keenly feels, [...] for which, day after day, he recasts and revises and rejects—the gross mass of the public must be ever blind" ("Letter to a Young Gentleman" 6-7). In other words, the work of the writer is largely hidden from the public, who sees the product of the work, but may be oblivious to the work's artistic value. This is a call to arms, but one that assigns value to hidden labour and acknowledges the time taken to create a satisfactory work of art, regardless of whether the public recognizes either the effort or its aesthetic effect.

Third, do not be afraid of appealing to the public. This lesson will not come as a surprise to scholars and readers of Stevenson, given his predilection for working within popular genres. As Fielding notes, "Stevenson threw himself into these newer, shorter and more flexible literary forms to answer the demands of a rapidly-changing reading public" (1). Baudelaire, too, saw the necessity of appealing to the public and getting paid work: "L'homme raisonnable est celui qui dit: 'Je crois que cela vaut tant, parce que j'ai du génie; mais s'il faut faire quelques concessions, je les ferai, pour avoir l'honneur d'être des vôtres' ["The reasonable man is he who says: 'I think this is worth this much, because I have talent; but if I must make some concessions, I shall make them in order to have the honour of being published by you'"] ("Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs 78). This, of course, is not to say that for either man the value of literature stems from how profitable it is. Stevenson is unequivocal in stating that the morality of the profession of letters should not be "debated solely on the ground of money" ("The Morality of the Profession of Letters" 51). There is a distinction between an author's duty to be self-sufficient and the author's duty to art.

These three lessons are informed by a practical understanding of the complex relationship between art, money and work in a capitalist marketplace, where financial independence was seen as a prerequisite for publishing texts that had artistic value, and where appealing to bourgeois tastes was often associated with forsaking artistic integrity—in this respect, the notion of "selling out" seems as old as the literary marketplace. Yet, at first glance, the advice that Baudelaire and Stevenson give on how to pursue writing as a profession seems to conflict with their well-known views on flânerie and idleness. As we will see, their emphasis on the work that goes into writing simultaneously positions writing as a legitimate occupation within bourgeois social structures and focuses attention on the intellectual labour involved in the writing process—the artist's craft—rather than commercial success.

### Baudelaire and Stevenson: Idleness and Leisure

After the publication of Les Fleurs du mal in 1857, Baudelaire had a cultlike status among authors in both France and Britain who considered themselves artists and stylists, rather than hack writers, and his ennui and resolute focus on the "modern" made him the representative par excellence of decadence. His influence has lasted well into the twentyfirst century. Poet and art historian Yves Bonnefoy has called the nineteenth century "Baudelaire's century" because Baudelaire's vision of achieving transcendence through words—metre, sonority, rhythm rather than religion connected the ordinary to the eternal in a materialist society increasingly focused on production and consumption. Baudelaire was a prolific art critic whose writings helped theorize the "modern"; as a poet, he was charged with outrages against religion and public morals for finding beauty in evil, the base, and subjects hitherto unworthy of literature. In addition, Baudelaire often lived beyond his means. His poor money management, coupled with syphilis and alcohol, contributed to his destitution and despair, but these very things also helped codify the archetype of the struggling artist. Despite his canonical status today, Baudelaire struggled financially throughout his life, relying on the support of his mother and a few benefactors; he never achieved financial independence. Stevenson was also fascinated with the nature of evil—novels as different as *Treasure Island* (1883), *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) attest to this. That said, he is primarily associated with romance, adventure and gothic shilling shockers rather than poetry, and he demonstrated an innate talent for adapting popular genre conventions to his artistic ends. Like Baudelaire, Stevenson grappled with financial instability for a large part of his life, relying on his father, who disapproved of his unorthodox career choices and would have preferred his son to have pursued the family engineering profession or, alternatively, a socially respectable profession like law.

Both Baudelaire and Stevenson had reputations as artists' artists, but neither was a reclusive ivory tower dweller. Baudelaire cultivated a reputation as a dandy, an observant flâneur who wandered the streets of Paris, immersing himself in the Parisian crowd while maintaining observational distance. The definition of dandyism in *Mon cœur mis à nu* [My Heart Laid Bare] captures the ideal to strive for: to be rich enough to work because you want to, not because you have to; to be rich enough to work outside the parameters and constraints imposed by bourgeois economic structures. The definition contains an apparent connection between idleness and work that seems to justify the description of Baudelaire's as having a "dilettante work ethic" (Hibbett 143):

Dandysme.
Qu'est-ce que l'homme supérieur ?
Ce n'est pas le spécialiste.
C'est l'homme de Loisir et d'Éducation générale.
Être riche et aimer le travail.

Dandyism.
What is a great man?
It's not the specialist.
It's the man of leisure and general culture.
To be rich and to love work.

Walter Benjamin has described Baudelaire as "unwilling to forego the life of a gentleman of leisure" (123), which is not to say that Baudelaire belonged to the leisured classes. Flânerie implies having the financial means to pass the time strolling the city rather than working. A life of leisure stands in opposition to the life of labour but was an essential ingredient in the work of artistic creation for Baudelaire. Ironically, while the dilettantism that is implicit in having no speciality implies a flightiness or lack of commitment, Baudelaire's flânerie functions as a mark of commitment to an artistic project. It is also worth noting that flânerie requires movement, which brings a physicality to the work of writing—exertion of the body as well as of the mind. In this way, hidden behind a façade of leisure lies serious intellectual labour that takes the writer outside the sheltered interior spaces associated with writing and into the exterior spaces within which people go about their daily business.

Stevenson's peripatetic globetrotting in search of both adventure and improved health is similarly suggestive of an aesthetic of movement that seems at odds with work. Stevenson often travelled in order to write, as with An Inland Voyage (1878), Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes (1879) and "An Autumn Effect" (1875). In "A College Magazine," he is perceived as an idle walker-flâneur by others but is busy apprenticing himself to the craft of writing. Travelling to Menton in 1873 on doctor's orders to maintain his health is another example of this: travel for health reasons was a prescription available only to the few. Further, Stevenson's rootlessness points to a quest for novelty and a need for detachment. What is this other than flânerie on a geographically enlarged scale? The sheer amount of geographical displacement that occurs in Stevenson's novels also exemplifies this. Baudelaire's aimless movement through the city and Stevenson's constant movement across landscapes and borders do two things: they are indicative of financial ease—illusory in the case of Stevenson and Baudelaire insofar as the movement defies the typical workweek restrictions of office jobs or the toil of the labouring classes, who were tied to the land

or the factory; at the same time, the movement is a necessary part of the intellectual work of the writer, part of the writer's "job."

Stevenson's "An Apology for Idlers" provides a framework for understanding this apparent contradiction, situating the question in terms of a rejection of convention: "Idleness so called [...] does not consist in doing nothing, but in doing a great deal not recognised in the dogmatic formularies of the ruling class" (51). The work of the writer needs to be understood outside the strictures of capitalist timekeeping. Stevenson also criticizes "dead-alive, hackneyed people, who are scarcely conscious of living except in the exercise of some conventional occupation" ("An Apology for Idlers" 56). The same criticism is at the heart of "On the Choice of a Profession," where he examines how education and convention are oppressive, trapping people in given paths from which they seldom deviate and of which they are rarely conscious (14). As Pierre Bourdieu notes, "there is no doubt whatsoever that moral indignation against all forms of submission to the forces of power or to the market" (60) feeds into the increasing autonomy of the artist and the elaboration of an autonomous literary field in the mid-to late-nineteenth century. It is thus all the more curious that Baudelaire and Stevenson should offer advice to young writers that encourages them to "court the bourgeois" (Stevenson, "Letter to a Young Gentleman" 8).

# Intertextual connection: "Le Vieux saltimbanque"

Near the end of his "Letter to a Young Gentleman Who Proposes to Embrace a Career of Art," Stevenson refers to Baudelaire's "Le Vieux saltimbanque," one of the more famous of the *Petits poèmes en prose*. Stevenson mentions it in the context of a discussion of art as a trade and the necessity for writers to be frugal to guard against artistic dishonesty and the temptation to "sell a slovenly piece of work" ("Letter to a Young Gentleman" 10). "Le Vieux saltimbanque" is cited as a cautionary tale. The prose poem ends on words that highlight the isolation of

the old acrobat, who is misunderstood and ignored by the crowd of spectators, and in whom the narrator sees himself:

Et, m'en retournant, obsédé par cette vision, je cherchai à analyser ma soudaine douleur, et je me dis : Je viens de voir l'image du vieil homme de lettres qui a survécu à la génération dont il fut le brillant amuseur ; du vieux poète sans amis, sans famille, sans enfants, dégradé par sa misère et par l'ingratitude publique, et dans la baraque de qui le monde oublieux ne veut plus entrer! (101)

And, turning around, obsessed by this vision, I tried to analyse my sudden pain, and said to myself: I have seen, just now, the image of the old man of letters who has outlived the generation which he once entertained so brilliantly; the old poet devoid of friends, family, or children; degraded by poverty and public ingratitude; into whose booth the neglectful world no longer desires to enter!

The scene begs the question of the value of artistic creation in a system where public tastes are constantly shifting. What are the risks of professionalization for the saltimbanque or "literary fellow" who, according to Stevenson, needs to "gain his livelihood by pleasing others" ("Letter to a Young Gentleman" 8)? Calling back to Baudelaire's artist alone in the booth, Stevenson warns that:

We all profess to be able to delight. [...] And the day will come to each, and even to the most admired, when the ardour shall have declined and the cunning shall be lost, and he shall sit by his deserted booth ashamed. Then shall he see himself condemned to do work for which he blushes to take payment. ("Letter to a Young Gentleman" 9)

Baudelaire famously spent half of the fortune he was left by his father in less than two years, only to pass the rest of his life preoccupied by debt—not unlike Balzac before him. His life, in the end, was shaped by debt. He only reaped the rewards of his writing late in life, and then mostly in terms of reputation. In this respect, he is the embodiment of a metaphor that he uses to describe poetry, whereby poetry is "un des arts qui rapportent le plus; mais c'est une espèce de placement dont on ne touche que tard les intérêts,—en revanche très gros [one of the arts

that yields the highest profits; but it is the sort of investment that pays deferred, though very high, dividends]" ("Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs" 82). While the reputational rewards for the poet are considerable in the long term—literary canonization—they do not allow the poet to earn a living. The long-term investment that the writer puts into the work of art accrues symbolic capital, but there is little economic capital to be earned in the short term. In much the same vein as Baudelaire, Stevenson also addresses the lack of immediate return on investment for writers when he comments that "the direct returns—the wages of the trade—are small, but the indirect—the wages of life—are incalculably great" ("Letter to a Young Gentleman" 6). For this reason, Stevenson advises that the writer "must look to be ill-paid" (9).

Framing impecuniousness as the natural expectation of a writer is a means of drawing attention to different types of value and to how people invest their time. This framing is part of a larger comparison between the work of artists and other types of work. Comparing the painter and the banker in "On the Choice of a Profession," Stevenson argues that

The banker has to sit all day in his bank, a serious privation; can you not conceive that the landscape painter, whom I take to be the meanest and most lost among contemporary men, truly and deliberately *prefers* the privations on his side—to wear no gloves, to drink beer, to live on chops or even on potatoes, and lastly, not to be 'One of us'—truly and deliberately prefers his privations to those of the banker? I can. [...] There is nothing so hard to get people to understand as this: That they *pay for their money*; and nothing so difficult to make them understand as this: That money, when they have it, is for most of them, at least, only a cheque to purchase pleasure. How then if a man gets pleasure in following an art? (18)

Although Stevenson's professional choices were not guided by the pursuit of money, one of his strongest desires was to be financially independent from his father. There is also a moral element to his approach to work that is missing from Baudelaire's. This undoubtedly contributed to Stevenson's belief that "the first duty in this world is for a man to pay his way; when that is quite accomplished, he may plunge into what eccentricity he likes; but emphatically not till then" ("Letter to a

Young Gentleman" 7). For Stevenson, the means of fulfilling this duty was to "pay assiduous court to the bourgeois who carries the purse" (8), even though he acknowledges that "it is doubtless tempting to exclaim against the ignorant bourgeois" (7). In Stevenson's case, courting the bourgeois meant looking beyond the serial novel and the triple decker, and experimenting with different literary forms. This is much easier to do as a novelist than a poet, given the artistic hierarchies that existed at the time: novels appealed to an ever-widening public, whereas poetry appealed principally to artists.

Similarly, there is no question for Baudelaire of the artistic inferiority of popular literature; nevertheless, he urges young writers to stop railing against "logogriphes en action [logogriphs in action]" ("Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs" 76-77)—serial novelists like Paul Feval and Eugène Sue. Instead, in language that evokes Newton's laws of motion, Baudelaire recommends that young writers put as much energy, talent and force into their own work as those successful novelists do, but in an equal and opposite direction:

Allumez autant d'intérêt avec des moyens nouveaux; possédez une force égale et supérieure dans un sens contraire; doublez, triplez, quadruplez la dose jusqu'à une égale concentration, et vous n'aurez plus le droit de médire du *bourgeois*, car le *bourgeois* sera avec vous. (77)

Arouse the same amount of interest through new means; possess an equal but superior power that is aimed in an opposite direction; double, triple, quadruple the dose until it reaches the same concentration, and you will no longer have the right to malign the *bourgeois*, for the *bourgeois* will be with you.

In the absence of independent wealth or a profession to support them, authors had to rely on book sales or journalism. The leisurely pose belies a burden to produce, sometimes quickly. As Bourdieu explains, the 1848 artistic bohemia "constitutes a veritable intellectual reserve army, directly subject to the laws of the market and often obliged to live off a second skill (sometimes with no direct relation to literature) in order to live an art that cannot make a living" (57). Abstract conceptions of dandyism and flânerie eventually confront reality. As Andrea Gogröf-

Voorhees pithily remarks, whatever his theories of art, Baudelaire "had to dirty his hands on a daily basis in the business of finding work that pays" (128). Writing for money is a reality, and Baudelaire advises young writers that "aujourd'hui il faut produire beaucoup" and "il faut vendre à tous prix" ("Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs" 77); "Today you have to produce a great deal"; "you have to sell at any price"). Furthermore, writing can be laborious. Baudelaire explains that "pour écrire vite, il faut avoir beaucoup pensé,—avoir trimballé un sujet avec soi, à la promenade, au bain, au restaurant, et presque chez sa maîtresse" [to write quickly, one must have thought a great deal, have mulled a subject over while walking, bathing, eating, or even visiting your mistress]" (80). The verb "trimballer" suggests that there is physical labour involved. Idiomatically, "trimballer" can be translated as "to mull over." However, "trimballer" also suggests struggle, dragging or lugging a weight around. The work of the poet involves intellectual heft.

Professionalization made producers of artists, who were beholden to the economic laws of the marketplace, rather than visionaries inspired by the muses and supported by patrons. Indeed, Franco Moretti considers the "labour" of writing to be a defining feature of "bourgeois prose":

It has been a great achievement, bourgeois prose—and a very *laborious* one. The absence from its universe of any concept of 'inspiration'—this gift from the gods, where ideas and results merge magically in a single instant of creation—suggests how impossible it is to imagine the medium of prose without immediately thinking of work. Linguistic work, to be sure, but of such a kind that it embodies some of the most typical features of bourgeois activity. (18)

The imperative to produce is vividly conveyed in Baudelaire's "Comment on paie ses dettes quand on a du génie," which describes a frantic Balzac trying to put off his creditors by contracting to write anonymous newspaper columns, and then paying a hack writer to come up with the goods by the deadline the following morning (31-35). Toil, cunning, and business acumen, not luck, are the norm, but there is no guarantee that hard work will pay off—in the end, Baudelaire's saltimbanque is ignored by the public, whose tastes have changed. The value of the

work of art therefore lies elsewhere, namely in the artistic labour itself, as is suggested by Stevenson's distinction between the "wages of life" and the "wages of trade." In this sense, there is a shift from what Roland Barthes calls the "valeur-usage" to the "valeur-travail"—a shift away from the product of the labour (*works* of art: books, poems, paintings) to the act of production. Barthes frames this as literature facing "a problem of self-justification": "Writing is now to be saved not by virtue of what it exists for, but thanks to the work it cost" (62-63).

In this respect, Baudelaire and Stevenson participate in what has been called a "Flaubertization" (Barthes 66) of literature, wherein "there is a kind of ostentation in claiming to labour long and lovingly over the form of one's work" (63). Flaubert's ostentation verged on a fetishization of work, which is not the case for Baudelaire and Stevenson, for whom leisure and idleness are key. Nonetheless, as Stevenson points out, most of the effort that goes into achieving a literary end is for the benefit of the writer rather than the reader: "The public knows little or nothing of those merits in the quest of which you are condemned to spend the bulk of your endeavours" ("Letter to a Young Gentleman" 6), and this is something that Flaubert was more than aware of.

Baudelaire and Stevenson both assign value to the intellectual labour of the artist, insofar as it justifies an emphasis on form and style—art for art's sake. This approach validates the artist's labour over the artistic output and reception in a system built on production and exchange. It also makes of writing a legitimate occupation and dignifies the labour by aligning writers with other labourers, which is reflected in Stevenson's advice:

What you may decently expect, if you have some talent and much industry, is such an income as a clerk will earn with a tenth or perhaps a twentieth of your nervous output. Nor have you the right to look for more; in the wages of the life, not in the wages of the trade, lies your reward; the work is here the wages. It will be seen I have little sympathy with the common lamentations of the artist class. Perhaps they do not remember the hire of the field labourer; or do they think no parallel will lie? Perhaps they have never observed what is the retiring allowance of a field officer; or do they suppose their contributions to the arts of pleasing more important than the services of a colonel? Perhaps they forget on how little Millet was content to live; or do they think,

because they have less genius, they stand excused from the display of equal virtues? ("Letter to a Young Gentleman" 10)

Frugality is presented as a virtue, although not necessarily one that either man practiced. The work ethic described here is conscious of market forces, but neither Baudelaire-the-flâneur nor Stevenson-the-bohemian adventurer can be accused of "selling out" to the public as they "court the bourgeois." Indeed, the accusation would be totally misplaced for Baudelaire. Stevenson's work in highly readable short forms opens him up to accusations of selling out, but the emphasis he places on style and literary technique as well as the labour that goes into aesthetic creation enable him to maintain artistic integrity.

In their advice, Baudelaire and Stevenson both directly address the value of intellectual labour when the financial rewards of this intellectual labour are minimal. Baudelaire remarks: "Il y a des jeunes gens qui disent: 'Puisque cela ne vaut que si peu, pourquoi se donner tant de mal?' [There are young men who say: 'Since it pays so little, why give oneself so much trouble?']". To this, Baudelaire answers:

Ils auraient pu livrer de *la meilleure ouvrage*; et dans ce cas, ils n'eussent été volés que par la nécessité actuelle, par la loi de la nature; ils se sont volés euxmêmes; —mal payés, ils eussent put y trouver de l'honneur; mal payés ils se sont déshonorés. ("Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs" 77-78)

They could have produced *better work*; and had they done so, they would have been robbed only by their present needs, by the law of nature; instead, they have robbed themselves; poorly paid, they could still have found honour therein; instead, poorly paid, they have dishonoured themselves.<sup>4</sup>

The literary work ethic presented by Baudelaire and Stevenson is anchored in the honour of the artist. Indeed, Stevenson echoes Baudelaire's sentiments when he advises aspiring authors that "the artist works entirely upon honour," and that

if you are to continue to be a law to yourself [labouring for the pleasure you take from the labour], you must beware of the first signs of laziness. This idealism in honesty can only be supported by perpetual effort; the standard is

easily lowered, the artist who says, "It will do," is on the downward path. ("Letter to a Young Gentleman" 6)

Baudelaire's approach to writerly work has been called a "dilettante work ethic: working for the reward and profit of the work alone" (Hibbett 143). This interpretation captures the gratification of authors who are able to "take pleasure in the exercise of their faculties for its own sake" (Stevenson, "An Apology for Idlers" 56), but it understates the extent to which writers like Baudelaire and Stevenson positioned creative artists as productive participants in the literary marketplace. Although the advice to "court the bourgeois" appears to condone sacrificing artistic integrity at the altar of bourgeois tastes, Baudelaire and Stevenson satisfy both elements, managing to maintain that much sought-after middle ground. This is an odd position for two men who were models for fin de siècle aesthetes, and whether they followed their own advice is another matter altogether. Literary history has paid Baudelaire his dividends, but while Stevenson started to earn towards the end of his career, his literary-historical position has been much more ambiguous than Baudelaire's, which may be due at least in part to his attempts to work the crowd while writing for the pleasure of writing.

> Acadia University Wolfville, Nova Scotia

#### **NOTES**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Translations are my own.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Stevenson owned volumes 1 and 4 of Baudelaire's Œuvres complètes: see EdRLS: Stevenson's Library Database: <a href="https://docs.google.com/spread-sheets/d/1rc3AAewcQcFenSx-">https://docs.google.com/spread-sheets/d/1rc3AAewcQcFenSx-</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;u>TUztpnzVKYugiuF5iWp7oDgTGzvo/edit?gid=0#gid=0</u>. "Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs" was published in volume 3: *L'Art romantique*. It seems likely that Stevenson read *L'Art romantique* based on his comments about Pierre Dupont (Ashley 7).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Also: "there is much in this question of money; and for my part, I believe no young man ought to be at peace till he is self-supporting, and has an open, clear life of it on his own foundation" (Stevenson, "On the Choice of a Profession" 17).

<sup>4</sup>It is notable that Baudelaire's formulation uses the language of craft—"ouvrage"—foreshadowing the connections between aestheticism and the Arts and Craft movement in late nineteenth-century Britain.

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### Stevenson and Traditions of Satire

LINDA SIMONIS

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This article is the first entry in a debate on "Stevenson and Traditions of Satire" (<a href="http://www.connotations.de/debate/stevenson-and-traditions-of-satire">http://www.connotations.de/debate/stevenson-and-traditions-of-satire</a>). If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to editors@connotations.de.

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#### **Abstract**

Stevenson is not usually considered a satirical writer. The following article seeks to explore this hitherto neglected aspect of Stevenson's work. By drawing on two short stories which remained unpublished during his lifetime, "Diogenes in London" and "The Scientific Ape," I will examine how Stevenson uses satirical techniques to shed critical light on current issues of contemporary nineteenthcentury culture and science. Stevenson's recourse to satire is closely linked with intertextuality: in adopting the satirical mode, the author often refers to earlier satiric texts and thereby inscribes himself into the tradition. The stories discussed here appear to be particularly indebted to Jonathan Swift's writings from which Stevenson borrows both technical devices and literary motifs. In "Diogenes in London," Stevenson explores the critical potential of an imaginary confrontation of the ancient philosopher with modern urban life: Diogenes serves as a critical observer and a satirical persona whose perspective unmasks the lack of concern for the individual prevalent in modern society. In a similar vein, in the fable "The Scientific Ape" the narrator adopts the view-point of a group of apes to intervene in the ongoing debates on the topical issue of vivisection. At the same time, the story ironically undermines and subverts the assumption of man's superiority over animals propagated in the course of the vulgarisation of Darwinism.

In one of his short stories, Stevenson evokes a curious character rambling about the streets of contemporary London. It is the ancient philosopher Diogenes who, by a mysterious time shift, has been transferred to the modern age. The philosopher's attempt to find his way through the maze of the modern metropole appears as an almost hopeless task—all the more so when he realizes that he has lost his most important piece of equipment: his lantern, which, apparently, has been stolen.

This is, in brief, the situation at the outset of "Diogenes in London," an unfinished story by Stevenson, written in the early 1880s. It probably remained unpublished during the author's lifetime and was printed for the first time by the prestigious Grabhorn Press, San Francisco in 1920. The following paper takes the figure of Diogenes as a starting point to explore Stevenson's engagement with satire and his uses of satirical techniques in his writing. Although satire is not often associated with Stevenson's works, it nonetheless presents a significant feature in some of his less well-known stories. Apart from "Diogenes in London," we will look at a further text of short fiction by Stevenson, "The Scientific Ape," which, although very different in tone and style, resembles the Diogenes story in so far as it also presents its subject matter in an ironic and satiric light. Before we examine the stories in more detail, it is useful to briefly recall the historical person of Diogenes and what he stands for.

## Diogenes of Sinope—a Model of Satire

Diogenes of Sinope belonged to a group of ancient philosophers called the "cynics," a name which is derived from the Greek word κύων (kýōn) meaning "dog." The cynics saw themselves as doglike beings, leading a natural life, unconstrained by social conventions. In line with this programme, Diogenes adopted a deliberately simple and non-conformist lifestyle, sleeping and eating in the streets unconcerned about rules of decency or civility (see Desmond 77-78).

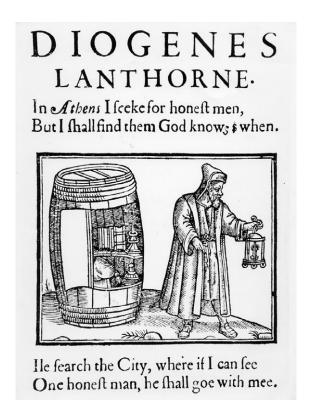
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Apparently, the "philosophy" Diogenes proposes is not a philosophical doctrine or theory. Rather, it consists in a specific way of life, which, by continuous practice and performance, crystallizes into a social and philosophical habit. The cynic mentality represented by Diogenes thus constitutes a "tradition vécue" (Largier 4), a tradition of lived experience rather than a school of philosophical thought. Furthermore, by rejecting social norms and accepted values, the cynic philosopher not only promotes a project of philosophical life, but also takes a political standpoint: he pits himself against the city as much as against the established moral and social order. In this respect Diogenes appears as an emblematic figure. By his posture of non-compliance he stands out as a model of cultural and social critique, in short: as a prototype of the satirist. This aspect of satire foreshadowed in Diogenes' character is what interests Stevenson about the cynic philosopher, and it is the point he further develops in his story.

It is worth noting that the lamp, which figures as a leitmotif in Stevenson's story, is already associated with Diogenes in the ancient sources. The locus classicus for this emblem is an anecdote reported in the most important textual source on Diogenes' life and philosophy, namely in Diogenes Laërtius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (from the third century AD). According to this report, Diogenes used to carry a lamp ( $\lambda$ ύχνος) with him when wandering through the markets of Athens in broad daylight. He would hold up his lamp, peering into the faces of passers-by. When asked what he was doing, he would reply: "I am seeking for a human being." (" $\lambda$ ύχνον μεθ' ἡμέραν ἄψας περιήει  $\lambda$ έγων 'ἄνθρωπον ζητῶ'"; Laertius 42). In the transmission of the anecdote, we mostly find this statement translated as "I am seeking for an honest man."

In the subsequent tradition, the lamp or lantern becomes the hallmark of the cynic philosopher and a recurring feature, particularly in paintings and visual representations.<sup>1</sup> It is not by chance that, when making an appearance, for example, on the title page of an early modern printed book, Diogenes is usually carrying a lantern in his hand. In this

posture he is accordingly also presented on the frontispiece of a collection of short allegorical and satirical texts from the early seventeenth century, composed by the pamphleteer Samuel Rowlands:



It is worth taking note of the lines inscribed above and below the image, two rhyming couplets which, taken together, summarize Diogenes' project while, at the same time, they announce the motto of the booklet:

In *Athens* I seeke for honest men, But I shall find them God knows when. Ile search the City, where if I can see One honest man, he shall goe with mee.

By alluding to the famous anecdote, these lines immediately call to mind the well-known image of the cynic philosopher and spotlight his critical attitude. Diogenes stands out as the speaker of the poem and simultaneously reveals himself as the protagonist of the booklet. The presentation of Diogenes, however, does not merely serve a historical or biographical interest. When calling up the city of Athens as the place of Diogenes' activities, the poem also suggests a parallel between ancient Athens and (early) modern London. The portrayal of Diogenes 174 LINDA SIMONIS

thus invites the readers to transfer the figure of the cynic philosopher to the contemporary world and to imagine him strolling through the streets of London with his lantern. Although there is no evidence that Stevenson knew Rowlands's booklet, the latter's representation of Diogenes appears to foreshadow some features which will come to be crucial for Stevenson's adaptation of the figure of Diogenes. Here, three aspects are worth noting: the leitmotif of the lantern as Diogenes' key attribute, the satirical posture of the cynic philosopher, and the implicit evocation of the city of London as a fitting scene for Diogenes as well as his pursuit of critically scrutinizing the habits and social life of his contemporaries. Rowlands's *Diogenes Lanthorne* thus provides a potential intertextual reference of or at least literary background to Stevenson's story.

Whereas in Rowlands's presentation the encounter of Diogenes with the world of the modern city is not directly expressed, but only hinted at and suggested, Stevenson's story actually enacts this encounter; without offering any further explanation how this transposition may have come about, the story presents us with Diogenes roaming the streets of London.

The following considerations seek to investigate to what extent the satirical approach adumbrated in Diogenes' attitude and critical engagements can be retraced in some of Stevenson's writings. In setting about this inquiry, I will, however, not presuppose a fixed concept or definition of satire. As recent studies on satire have rightly pointed out (see, e.g., Knight 33, Stinson 15), satire is a "protean" form that includes manifold adaptations and variations. Moreover, satire transcends the limits of a single genre and seems to resist a clear-cut definition. Instead of drawing on generic terms, we can more appropriately describe satire as a "mode" or "tone" of writing (Greenberg 9-10) which can find expression in different genres and artistic forms. Of course, we can identify certain rhetorical and literary devices characteristic of the satiric mode such as irony, exaggeration, contrast, paradox, humour or ridicule, but even these elements vary according to the style and purpose

of individual authors. Rather than invoking a general concept or theory, it therefore seems useful to take a closer look at the ways in which the satirical mode develops in Stevenson's texts as well as at the specific effects it produces. Such a pragmatic approach further allows us to account for another distinctive feature of satire, i.e. the circumstance that satire always relates to a particular literary or cultural context on which its understanding and appreciation relies (see Greenberg 11). This observation points to a further aspect which appears to be crucial to the satiric mode: satire is intricately bound up with intertextuality. It frequently refers to something which is turned into the object of the satiric exposure. And this object of satire is, for the most part, not just a "thing" extracted from reality, but rather an element of previous communication or signification, a statement, an expression, a remark, a gesture, an image or text. In this sense, intertextuality can be taken to be intrinsic to satire to the extent that the latter requires a preceding text, discourse, aesthetic expression or performance to refer to and expose to criticism or ridicule. In addition, frequently, and not least in Stevenson, we can find in satire a second kind of intertextuality at work: the reference to previous instances, forms or genres of satiric communication by which the individual text inscribes itself into the satiric tradition. This type of borrowing, allusion or adaptation often serves to give more weight to the satiric intervention and to reinforce its critical effect. Such an employment of literary intertextuality, as we shall see, stands out prominently in Stevenson's satiric writing where it functions as a means to underpin, and, at the same time, to enrich and give more nuance to the satiric depiction and argument.

A first and obvious case of a satirical mode in Stevenson's writing can of course be found in the two Diogenes stories: as protagonist of a literary fiction, Diogenes seems to attract the satirical mode since he provides a persona whose unconventional perspective is predisposed to unfold a critical perception or observation of his environment.

Urban Encounters—Satire as Cultural Critique in "Diogenes in London"

In "Diogenes in London" Stevenson resumes the traditional image of the cynic philosopher but not without investing it with a noteworthy reaccentuation: Stevenson presents a Diogenes who has lost his lantern and is thus deprived of his most important instrument of critical observation.

Significantly, the story begins *in medias res* with Diogenes noticing the loss of his lantern: "My lantern!" he cried. "It is gone—after centuries, gone." And, turning to his companion, a poet, Diogenes adds: "Damn it sir, […] the thing has been stolen!" ("Diogenes in London" 189).

The poet, who is referred to as Mr. Arnold (apparently an allusion to the famous poet Matthew Arnold), remarks that, by some curious coincidence, the theft has apparently occurred immediately opposite to Scotland Yard where they have just arrived. Mr. Arnold invites Diogenes to enter the police station to find his friend Vincent, who is a leading officer of the London police: "Follow me," he continues, leading the way, "it is but a step; there you will find all the benefits of system" (189). The two visitors find Vincent in his office: "At the end of the apartment [...] the great Criminal Investigator sat upon a dais, slightly raised, with his knees under a table" (189). The poet explains the philosopher's concern:

"This gentleman's lantern has been stolen," said Mr. Arnold, [...] "Plucked from his hand upon the street, immediately in front of Scotland Yard. The lantern is of small intrinsic value; but dear to the philosopher from old association." (190)

But the police officer shows an unexpected reaction:

<sup>&</sup>quot;Number 3,566,783," wrote the investigator. "Ha, very, very gratifying."

<sup>&</sup>quot;What is gratifying?" inquired the sage.

<sup>&</sup>quot;The percentage," returned Vincent briefly.

<sup>&</sup>quot;So," said Diogenes.

<sup>&</sup>quot;And now gentlemen, I do not see that I need detain you any longer. All has been done that man can do; [...] and I have only to thank you for this interesting item." (190)

Yet the philosopher will not be turned away so easily. He tries once more to put forward his request:

"And when may I hope to get my lantern?" inquired the sage.

"Your lantern?" repeated Vincent, laying down his pen. [...]

"You have made a mistake sir," he continued, with dignity. "This is the Criminal Investigation department."

"Ah!" said Diogenes.

"Here, sir," continued the chief of police, "we do not cope with crime: we investigate it." (190)

The police officer thus reveals himself to be a scientist, a researcher and theorist who studies and analyses criminal phenomena but does not seek to solve them or to provide a remedy. Vincent stands in sharp contrast with Diogenes: whereas the cynic always aims to put his philosophy into practice, into lived experience, Vincent does not condescend to enter the lower depths of everyday life.

By juxtaposing the two characters, by presenting the police investigator against the backdrop of cynic philosophy, Stevenson develops a critique of modern science and the attitude of the modern scientist. Here, he adopts the traditional satire on the pedantic scholar ("Gelehrtensatire") prominent in European Literature since the early modern period (see Košenina 7-12). As a notable example (which Stevenson may have had in mind) we can recall Jonathan Swift's depiction of the inhabitants of the isle Laputa, whom Gulliver encounters on his third journey (see Swift 133-56). In Swift's narrative, these scientists are presented as selfabsorbed theoreticians who have no regard for any practical results of their own research. While building on the satirical tradition, Stevenson also adds a new aspect to his image of the scientific investigator which gives it a specifically modern twist. This aspect consists in the obsession with numbers that characterizes Vincent's approach. Numbers are the core elements of the new science represented by the criminal investigator. The prominence of this mathematical dimension becomes even more evident over the course of the dialogue, for the investigator now discloses to his interlocutors his passion for a new scientific method which he presents as a French invention:

"We are altogether French in our ideas," pursued Vincent, "entirely French: *Français comme une pomme de terre*. [...]"

"Lucidity, lenity, clarity, classicality," cried Mr. Arnold in a rapture. "French is irresistible. [...]" (190)

The object of the interlocutors' enthusiasm is, however, not French culture or literature but the new discipline of statistics whose remarkable rise in the nineteenth century was largely promoted by the works of French mathematicians, such as Adrien-Marie Legendre and Adolphe Quetelet. In the ensuing conversation, Vincent and Arnold concur in their fascination with the new discipline, while Diogenes functions as a detached observer:

"I can show you the French statistics, Arnold," breathed Vincent, producing a book [...].

"Ah!" exclaimed the poet, "let me gaze on them." [...]

"We are reading it in the original," observed the Investigator, looking up for a second at Diogenes, with a certain radiancy of pride.

"We both speak it like natives," added the poet with a nod. (190-91)

This dialogue points to a tendency in the development of nineteenth-century social sciences which social historians have referred to as "the reign of numbers" (Vormbusch 21). The techniques of empirical data collection and its mathematical analysis provided by statistics gave rise to new quantifying approaches in demography, medicine, and other domains of knowledge, and thereby held out the prospect of a mathematically precise method of investigation for the social sciences.

Yet, when reading the episode from the story, we do not feel invited to join in the celebration of statistics displayed by the poet and the investigator. On the contrary, the devices of exaggeration and amplification produce a satirical effect. The overstated enthusiasm of the two men gives an ironic note to the scene; the interlocutors' behaviour is held up to ridicule.

Moreover, the silent presence of Diogenes establishes a counterpoint to the uncritical endorsement of what appears to be a scientific achievement. Indeed, Diogenes seems to have been almost forgotten by the scientific enthusiasts. This neglect points to the other side of the influence of statistics and calculative measurement in the human sciences: the quantitative perspective reduces the individual and their concerns to a "case" or to an "item" that, together with other items of the same type, enters the calculation process and is thus transformed into a number.

It is true that, in the story, Diogenes does not express any explicit criticism. But his presence as well as the leitmotif of the lamp serve as intertextual signs inviting us to recall the  $\alpha v\theta \rho\omega \pi ov \zeta \eta \tau \tilde{\omega}$  which, according to the ancient testimonies, was the cynic philosopher's personal motto and rule of conduct. This motto reminds us of the flipside of statistical science, the effacement of the individual.

In the second half of the story, the conversation between Arnold, Diogenes and Vincent is interrupted by the entrance of "Miss Braddon," the fictional counterpart of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, a writer of popular sensation novels in the Victorian period. In the presentation of this encounter, the story apparently shifts the focus of attention to another socio-cultural domain, namely to the field of literature and education. Nonetheless, there is an underlying continuity between the two parts of the discussion as the issue of numeric quantification remains implicitly present in the second part, although with reference to a different social sphere—the literary market. Mary Elizabeth Braddon is known to have been one of the most popular and successful novelists of the Victorian period. Her popularity can be inferred from the circumstance that her novels were among the most widely stocked books in public libraries of the period.<sup>2</sup> In Stevenson's story, however, Miss Braddon is received rather coldly by Arnold, who blames her for what appears to him an inappropriate treatment of a novel by Walter Scott: "'You have laid your hands on Scott, ma'am, in a spirit, I fear, far other than courtesy,' said the poet" (191). This reproach refers to a notorious publication project which presented its first volumes around 1880: in this project, which prepared an abridged edition of Walter Scott's novels,3 Mary Elizabeth Braddon had a decisive part. In particular, she was responsible for the edition of Scott's Guy Mannering which appeared in an adapted and considerably abridged version. This editorial practice of adaptation is the object of debate between Arnold and Miss Braddon in

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the story. While Miss Braddon tries to justify her practice as a way of improving and updating the text ("I only Byronised him" 191), and thereby doing homage to its author ("if you knew how I adore him" 191), Arnold considers it as a destructive interference and an infringement of the author's right to determine the form of his work and its reproduction. The interlocutors are not merely characterized by the arguments and positions that they articulate in their dialogue, but equally by the way they present and express themselves. Miss Braddon's frivolous conversational tone betrays her superficial attitude and her lack of aesthetic sensitivity and intellectual depth. This insight, however, is not disclosed by a comment on the part of the narrator. Rather, in accord with the satiric convention, Miss Braddon is exposed to ridicule by her own language. Such a device of satiric unmasking is clearly at work in a casual remark in which Miss Braddon draws a parallel between the manner of dressing one's hair and the process of writing or editing: "You see my curl papers?—each a complete condensed Waverley—in magenta, too, my favourite colour" (191). Here, the obvious incongruity of the metaphor, which reduces the literary text to the trivial register of cosmetics, creates a satiric effect and reveals the fundamental inadequacy of Miss Braddon's approach.4 Furthermore, some of her remarks also reveal a financial interest motivating her novelistic production.<sup>5</sup> Braddon, it seems, is all too willing to sacrifice literary quality for the benefit of economic profit.

Given the rather unfavourable image of Miss Braddon suggested by the story, we might suppose that the reader is then invited to embrace Arnold's position. But this is not the case. For Arnold, in his turn, becomes subject to irony and critical scrutiny. This ironic perspective on Arnold is foregrounded when Miss Braddon, prompted by her realization of Diogenes' Greek origins, broaches the theme of classicism: "Let us do something classical" (192). This suggestion is immediately taken up by Arnold with great enthusiasm:

"Classical!" cried the poet with sudden energy. "You bet your life! Vincent, touch the lyre, and we will tread a measure." (192)

Subsequently we find Arnold and Miss Braddon performing a dance to a melody played by Vincent on a whistle:

and soon the apartment rang to that sweet melody; while the two famous authors, each bounding and tripping like a kid, followed the mazes of a gay impromptu dance.

"You now behold me happy," said the poet, "Quite the Greek, you see." (192)

The scene playfully and humorously brings to light Arnold's attachment to classical Greek literature and culture. By presenting his classicist attitude in the form of a childlike dance, the story discloses the arbitrary nature and somewhat obsessive character of this predilection. Again, the episode alludes to a phenomenon of historical reality, the movement of classicism which crucially influenced the cultural and educational conceptions of nineteenth-century intellectuals. Matthew Arnold, as Stevenson's contemporary readers would have known, was one of the most fervent adherents of classicism of his time. He admired and imitated classical Greek and Roman literature (see Shrimpton 472-75) and firmly defended the idea of the superiority and timeless exemplarity of classical models (see Vanheste 116-19). In his lectures On Translating Homer (1861-1862), for instance, Arnold promoted the idea of Homer's unsurpassable perfection by referring to his work as "the most important poetical monument existing" (Arnold 1) while insisting that English translations of Homer, following the example of the German translator Johann Heinrich Voß, should be composed in "good English hexameters" (Arnold 76). By showing the Victorian "Sage" absorbed in the childlike activity of an "impromptu dance" the story sheds an ironic light on Arnold's humanist ambitions suggesting a certain untimeliness of his classicist attitude and its potential failure to respond to the needs and challenges of contemporary society.

Finally, near the end of the story, Diogenes takes the chance to give voice to his sceptical quest for the human, which he presents in the form of a song:

I have been East, I have been West, To earth's remotest bound; On every hand I sought the best, The good I never found. At last, from all the fools in flocks, Methought I saw a man, A-taking out the works of clocks, Afar in the Soudan. (194)

Contrary to what is reported by the tradition, the protagonist of the song does find "a man," but, ironically, the goal of his search is only reached in a place outside Europe, "afar in the Soudan." By this ironic turn, the song humorously undercuts the pretended superiority of European culture along with the assumption that Western culture had a privileged access to the humanist legacy of classical antiquity.

The story apparently relies on a readership who know about Diogenes and his cynic philosophy; what is more, Stevenson even seems to expect his readers to be familiar with the anecdote of the lamp, perhaps even its literal wording, as reported in the *Lives of the Philosophers*. Intertextuality here serves to reinforce, if not to produce, the satirical impulse and critical effect of the narrative. Like his model in antiquity, Stevenson's Diogenes takes the role of unmasking the illusions and false beliefs of his fellow-citizens.

## Apes and Men: A Satirical Perspective on Modern Science

While "Diogenes in London" can be seen as a light-hearted, though serious mode of satiric narration, a darker and sharper form of satire can be observed in another story by Stevenson, "The Scientific Ape." This fable was published posthumously in September 1895, in the August and September issues of *Longman's Magazine* (see Parfect 388).

In "The Scientific Ape" the narrator adopts the viewpoint of an ape (or, more precisely: a group of apes) living on an island in the Pacific. One of them is caught by a vivisectionist and subjected to experiments in the laboratory before he manages to escape and return to his fellow apes with, as the narrator ironically adds, "only a trifling lesion of one foot" ("The Scientific Ape" 142). Inspired by what he has seen in the laboratory, the escaped ape becomes a fervent proponent of modern

science, in particular vivisection. He appears to have endorsed the ideas of biological evolution and Darwinism, which he now propagates, although with a slight shift in perspective:

"Man is only a promoted ape," said he, hanging his tail from a high branch. "The geological record being incomplete, it is impossible to say how long he took to rise, and how long it might take us to follow in his steps. [...] Man lost centuries over religion, morals, poetry and other fudge; it was centuries before he got properly to science, and only the other day that he began to vivisect. We shall go the other way about, and begin with vivisection." (142)

Apparently, the ape's speech is infused with allusions to the contemporary discussions on Darwin and his theory of biological evolution which Stevenson followed with great interest. Moreover, the passage refers to the controversy on vivisection which became an issue of public debate in Victorian England in the 1880s. Several leading scientists, among them Darwin himself, took part in this discussion (see Danta 51-55). In his account of the process of evolution, however, the scientifically informed ape inverts the conventional viewpoint: instead of regarding the human being as the most highly developed species of biological evolution, the cited passage reduces man to the status of a "promoted ape" while simultaneously attributing a higher evolutionary potential to the apes. Consequently, and not unlike his human homologues, the scientific ape considers vivisection as a key to scientific progress. To conclude his argument, he gives out the motto of the proposed scientific approach: "By vivisecting men, we find out how apes are made, and so we advance" (143).

But not all the apes are convinced by their fellow's proposal. A vivid debate ensues, unfolding an exchange of arguments some of which (although with inverted premises) will have been familiar to the nine-teenth-century reader:

"It seems rough on the men," said the ape with one ear.

"Well, to begin with," said the doctor, "they say that we don't suffer and are what they call automata; so I have a perfect right to say the same of them."

"That must be nonsense," said the disputant; "and besides it's self-destructive. If they are only automata, they can teach us nothing of ourselves; and if they can teach us anything of ourselves, by cocoanuts! they have to suffer."

"I am much of your way of thinking," said the doctor, "and indeed that argument is only fit for the monthly magazines. Say that they do suffer. Well, they suffer in the interest of a lower race, which requires help: there can be nothing fairer than that." (143)

It is not by chance that the apes' controversy centres on the questions of suffering and pain. These issues were strongly debated in the scientific and public discourses of the later nineteenth century, in particular in the context of discussions on vivisection (see Danta 51-55). Apart from its ethical and practical implications, the notion of the animals' sensitivity to pain also has theoretical significance. The disposition to feel pain marks a shared property of humans and animals and thereby questions the common assumption of a clear-cut divide between human and non-human living beings (see Danta 60). But as the doctor ape's reasoning shows, the argument of suffering can be turned around so that—instead of providing a common ground and uniting humans and apes in a community of living beings—it reinforces the division.

Finally, then, the doctor ape prevails, and the apes decide to begin their experiments by vivisecting the scientist's baby. They manage to kidnap the baby and take it with them to the trees. But the vivisection experiment is interrupted by one of the apes who changes his mind:

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"But I wish it would not cry," said the ape with the one ear,
"it looks so horribly like a monkey!"

"This is childish," said the doctor. "Give me the razor."

But at this the ape with one ear lost heart, spat at the doctor, and fled with the baby into the next tree top. (144)
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The anti-vivisectionist position defended by the ape with one ear is then supported by the chief ape who intervenes to resolve the situation:

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"What is all this about?" cried the chief. [...]
"Can apes descend to such barbarity? Take back that baby where it came from." (144)
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But what seems to be a happy ending, a reconciliation of the species, again turns around and takes an ironic twist:

The vivisectionist (who was an estimable family man) was overjoyed, and in the lightness of his heart, began three more experiments in his laboratory before the day was done. (145)

Once more, this passage flips around the conventional assumptions about human beings and animals: while the apes prove to be sensitive and humane in showing compassion for the human baby, the human scientist, by contrast, remains unmoved and continues his vivisectionist project to its brutal conclusion. Or, to put it in more abstract terms: the apes acknowledge their biological affinity and commonality with human beings, whereas the human scientist apparently disavows or ignores his affiliation with the Primate (and, by implication, animal) world.

Significantly, the story presents itself in a deliberately non-realistic mode: apes, as we know, cannot speak nor do they practice vivisection. Besides, the postures and behaviour of the apes in the story are exaggerated and overdrawn. Taken together, these features clearly signal to the reader that the story presents a fictional scenario, a thought experiment, which is nonetheless able to relate to and comment on events and occurrences of the social world. Viewed from another angle, these elements are, of course, exactly the features that point out the irony and invite us to read the story as a satirical text.

Notwithstanding its overt simplicity, the literary technique of the fable is subtle: by reversing the roles of vivisectionist and the object of vivisection, of scientist and ape, the fable produces a decisive shift in perspective. The exchange of roles moreover invites an analogy and comparison between human beings and apes. Both aspects, the playful shifting of perspectives as well as the human-animal comparison are typical devices of satire. We might think, for example, of *Gulliver's Travels* again, where the protagonist first encounters the Lilliputians, while, in the next episode, he finds himself in a land of giants. Similarly, *Gulliver's Travels* also offers a model for the human-animal comparison suggested by the fable of the "Scientific Ape." Here we can evoke the example of the Houyhnhnms, the horse-shaped speaking animals Gulliver meets in the final part of his voyages. For the satirist, the human-

animal relation provides a means to inquire into what it means to be human and to expose the shortcomings and failures of human beings. In addition, a further parallel to Swift's satirical writings can be observed: the vivisection of monkeys or humans in Stevenson's fable recalls the idea of slaughtering and eating human babies satirically suggested in Swift's *A Modest Proposal*. In both texts the cruelty of the proposed procedure is intensified by making an innocent baby its object and victim.

In a similar vein, Stevenson uses the human-animal relation to critically examine the human species, in particular in the shape of the modern scientist, and to cast doubt on man's assumed superiority over other living beings. The ironic point of this juxtaposition is, of course, that, paradoxically, the seemingly inferior monkeys prove to be more humane than their human counterpart, the scientist.

In the two stories discussed above we find two different kinds of intertextuality at work in Stevenson's satirical writing. While "Diogenes in London" mainly relies on references and allusions to literary texts (and their authors), "The Scientific Ape" draws primarily on non-literary scientific and wider public discourses whose arguments are taken up and reshaped in the discussions among the apes. In both cases, the satiric mode enables the texts to intervene in a public field of ongoing discourse and to recast the debate by their critical observations and ironic remarks. But despite the interventive quality of their satirical mode, Stevenson's stories do not become completely absorbed in the discourses they comment upon, nor can they be reduced to a single unequivocal message. While using the mode of irony as a way of entering the discussions of their time, they also keep apart from them creating an aesthetic distance by their playfulness and humour. Intertextuality offers not least a means to maintain this distance.

Ruhr-Universität Bochum

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>We may recall, for example, the famous paintings by Georges de La Tour (1620), Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein (1780), Jean-Léon Gérôme (1860), and John Waterhouse (1882).

<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Rose (39) mentions a total of 2,254 volumes stocked in public libraries between 1883 and 1892.

<sup>3</sup>For a critical review of this questionable editorial undertaking, see "Literary Iconoclasts" 393-97.

<sup>4</sup>Miss Braddon's superficial approach to literary and cultural matters becomes further evident when she addresses Diogenes as "one of these charming Greeks" (192), thereby reducing the classical authors to a diminutive status suitable for a casual conversation in a literary salon rather than a serious engagement with the texts. Moreover, the epithet "charming" sticks out as a particular inappropriate characterization of the cynic Diogenes whose countercultural habit was not at all meant to be charming.

<sup>5</sup>See for example: "But come, Mat—you know, I'm nothing if not local—coloury—the furniture in each of my books alone is worth the money" (192).

<sup>6</sup>This also holds true for "The Scientific Ape": as Robert-Louis Abrahamson rightly points out in his commentary (145), the fable, despite its critical stance, does not simply "condemn" vivisection, but by enacting a dialogue, an exchange of arguments, invites the reader to seek for a more complex and nuanced understanding of the issue.

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## One More Time: Stevenson's "Across the Plains" and the Genre of Trans-American Travel

CAROLINE MCCRACKEN-FLESHER

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#### **Abstract**

In 1879 Robert Louis Stevenson set out from Scotland and then travelled across America on the emigrant train. The narrative of his sea voyage troubled the sensibilities of his friends and father and was withdrawn from publication; the narrative of his transcontinental travels was published first in serial and then book form. This article considers Stevenson's account of his American journey in the context of earlier and later emigration narratives. It pursues issues of space, place and progress, and of time as its perception shifts through experience. Stevenson's journey activates not the "to" of historic travel or the "through" of the modern railroad; "Across the Plains" dwells, to the point of insistence, on the person traveling "in." Given the complex publication history of Stevenson's American travels, citations reference both the first publication of "Across the Plains" (as an article in two issues of *Longman's Magazine*, 1883) and also Julia Reid's *The Amateur Emigrant*, which brings together Stevenson's sea and land voyages, and uses the manuscript for its copy text (Edinburgh UP, 2018).

Halfway through recounting his 1879 trip "Across the Plains," Robert Louis Stevenson remembers how the train "shot hooting" down the canyons of the newly incorporated Wyoming Territory (Stevenson,

"Across the Plains" 2.10: 373; ed. Reid 106). Stevenson pauses for a moment to express gratitude to the train, "as to some god who conducts us swiftly through these shades and by so many hidden perils" ("Across the Plains" 373, 374; ed. Reid 107). The perils are of the past: "Thirst, hunger, the sleight and ferocity of Indians are all no more feared," he records, of a land now transected by the railway and compressed into rapid time and reachable space. "Yet we should not be forgetful of these hardships of the past," he continues. Then "to keep the balance true," he turns to "an original document," retelling the story of a native attack upon a lone wagon "only twenty years ago" ("Across the Plains" 374; ed. Reid 107).

Stevenson's reminiscence of his 1879 experiences first appeared in *Longman's Magazine* over two issues in 1883. The conclusion of Part I had already emphasized what we should not forget: "one could not but reflect upon the weariness of those who passed by [Nebraska] in old days, at the foot's pace of oxen" (2.9: 302; ed. Reid 102). Despite this insistence on remembrance, however, Stevenson's narrative of his transcontinental journey may be most remarkable for its strategic forgetting. This paper locates the Stevenson who had cast off one continent for another within earlier and later discourses of westward travel, and thereby considers how his deliberately experiential writing and protonaturalism perversely depend upon a spatial and literary emptiness that he himself laboriously constructs.

From the first, Stevenson's westward voyage depended on the assertion of absence. Most obviously, Stevenson withheld news of his departure until it was practically accomplished, and he notified his parents (then in Scotland) only indirectly and by a delay, under enclosure to Sidney Colvin (who was then in England) (see *Letters* 3: 2). Moreover, Stevenson worked hard to remain outside parental access and knowledge, telling friends to write to him in Scotland via Charles Baxter (see *Letters* 3: 4). No one could reach him in San Francisco except by a doubled indirection, through the fiancé (unbeknownst to Stevenson, actually the husband) of his future daughter-in-law and, he insisted in addition, "under cover" (see *Letters* 3: 6n; 6-9). He even chased down his

outgoing manuscripts in case he had carelessly entered an American return address that might circulate back to his parents and cause a family eruption (see 3:8).

Within this energetically constructed emptiness, Stevenson would travel in space and time. He would race across an ocean and then a continent to Fanny Van de Grift Osborne, the married object of his affections, and change his life. As he traveled, he aimed, too, to expand in authorship. The sea voyage, because of its discomforts, he thought would make "the first part of a new book" (Letters 3: 5), and he recorded his experiences and impressions to that end (ed. Reid 7). Once in Monterey and properly at work, he reflected that the dual narrative of "The Amateur Emigrant" and "The Emigrant Train" should be "more popular than any of my others; the canvas is so much more popular and larger too" (Letters 3: 15). Indeed, the opening prospect of sea as well as continent constituted expectation and opportunity for more people than Stevenson. Critics waited eagerly, the Athenaeum's "Literary Gossip" anticipating "a third set of his charming impressions de voyage" (7 February 1880: 185). "The book," the Athenaeum declared with some certainty, "is called 'The Amateur Emigrant,' and sets forth how its author journeyed as a steerage passenger from Glasgow to New York, and how he afterwards went out West, from New York to California, in an emigrant train" (185-86).

The transatlantic voyage, however, together with its New York aftermath, turned out not so charming. It fell subject to criticism by Stevenson's cadre of advisors and then to suppression because of parental prudishness about the unpleasantness of shipboard life (see Letters 3: 107n, 167). Thomas Stevenson, the author's father, worried as well about negative reactions from the shipping line, with which he was in business (167n). Although the editor at Good Words, to which it had been submitted, thought it "capital—full of force and character and fine feeling, and quite the kind of thing which will suit" (Letters 3: 65n), Colvin, who acted as Stevenson's main literary advisor, found it "bad" (76n). Thomas Stevenson told his son he considered it "altogether unworthy of you" (167n). Stevenson labored to please and to publish, and

James D. Hart, in his restoration of Stevenson's text, identifies deletions of up to about thirty percent to accommodate these criticisms before the proofs, still unacceptable, were bought up by Stevenson senior (see Hart xli-xlii). These deletions removed the "filth of men, women, and children living together in close quarters" that the first manuscript "pungently forced upon us" (xl). Stevenson himself gets a makeover: "A bit of fever and some general discomfort," Hart writes, "Colvin could tolerate in print, but he could not allow a description of the vermin-infested body of Stevenson that had made him a mass of sores and reduced him to endless scratching" (xli; for Stevenson's illness, see ed. Reid 82-83). On 23 October 1880, the Athenaeum "Literary Gossip" announced that "Mr. R. L. Stevenson has determined to suppress his 'Amateur Emigrant' [...] and has withdrawn it from his publisher's hands" (23 October 1880: 534). It was then that "The Emigrant Train," still in development and ultimately published as "Across the Plains," emerged as Stevenson's alternate site of absence and as a stealthy manifestation of problematic presence. Stevenson's transcontinental journey resists the landscape through which it travels and, his advisors' disapproval notwithstanding, brings strongly to the fore the excess that is the author's suffering body.

In the middle of the struggle over "The Amateur Emigrant," Stevenson boosted this "second part" (*Letters* 3: 75). Though it was "written in a circle of hell unknown to Dante; that of the penniless and dying author," he claimed of this travelogue—as he did of other texts—"I shall always think of it as my best work" (75). Yet he remembered with no great fondness "one page in Part 2 about having got to shore and rivers and sich [sic], which must have cost me altogether six hours of work as miserable as ever I went through," and that he culled before publication in *Longman's*. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew identify this as a passage restored in Hart's edition (see *Letters*, 75n):

For we are creatures of the shore; and it is only on shore that our senses are supplied with a variety of matter, or that the heart can find her proper business. There is water enough for one by the coasts of any running stream; or if I must indeed look upon the ocean, let it be from along the seaboard, surfbent, strewn with wreck and dotted at sundown with the clear lights that pilot

home bound vessels. The revolution in my surroundings was certainly joyful and complete. (Hart 105-06; ed. Reid 88. Reid quotes MS as "me" not "one," "surf-beat," and "home-bound.")

Making scenery yield to the passing body required its functional erasure. Hence the romantic passage just cited—and its later omission. Hence the execrable poetry that celebrated traveling "By flood and field and hill, by wood and meadow fair, / Beside the Susquehannah and along the Delaware" (*Letters* 3: 8) that Stevenson admitted in the moment "will rather stop a gap in the present than go down singing to posterity" (9), and that never made it beyond his letters. What remained of the Susquehanna River in Stevenson's published text manifests a struggle for mastery over poetic allusions and tropes:

[It] was called the Susquehanna, the beauty of the name seemed to be part and parcel of the beauty of the land. As when Adam with divine fitness named the creatures, so this word Susquehanna was at once accepted by the fancy. That was the name, as no other could be, for that shining river and desirable valley. ("Across the Plains" 2.9: 289; ed. Reid 88. Reid quotes MS as Susquehanna.)

Stevenson was laboring to clear the ground for his unique experience. That required the production and then the ruthless excision of both British and American literary traditions and affectations as he went.

Stevenson began his disengagement from established literary practice in the final chapter of his ship-board narrative—the text that his father suppressed. The transatlantic experience ends by putting the author ashore in New York, where he falls subject to the travails of a landward traveler. Poised to disembark, Stevenson recounts and mocks the well-known folktale of a benighted traveler in a den of thieves as a commonly held urban legend among the immigrant underclass about New York (see ed. Reid 73-74). He goes on to show the requisite architecture of hidden apertures echoed in his own lodging, and then to undermine the *frisson* by staying up all night *not* in fear of vagabonds but because of that "certain distressing malady which had been growing on me during the last few days" (80). When he goes to a pharmacy in search of relief, the chemist's polite fiction that he must have a liver complaint

only exacerbates his suffering and expands it upon the page: "I was ready to roll upon the floor in my paroxysms" (82). In the journey to come, story repeatedly would be usurped by suffering.

Riding the rails in "Across the Plains," Stevenson worked his way through the narratives of America as imagined in contemporary Britain, and he similarly discarded them one by one. In Pittsburgh, he meets an African American waiter with such personal aplomb that the familiar codes supplied by Harriet Beecher Stowe in Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), or by shows of the blackface Christy Minstrels who toured Britain in the 1850s and 1860s (see Graham 28), cannot apply (see "Across the Plains" 2.9: 290; ed. Reid 89). "Imagine a gentleman," he writes, "every inch a man of the world, and armed with manners so patronisingly superior that I am at a loss to name their parallel in England. [...] familiar like an upper form boy to a fag; he unbends to you like Prince Hal with Poins and Falstaff" ("Across the Plains" 290; ed. Reid 89. Reid quotes MS: "fag,"). Ohio does not conform to the plots of the English Percy Bolingbroke St. John, whose Amy Moss Stevenson had read as a child and found disappointing, even then, for the "Indian brave, who, in the last chapter, very obligingly washed the paint off his face and became Sir Reginald Somebody-or-other" (291; Reid 90. Reid quotes MS: no commas after "who" and "chapter"). Stevenson's memory was long: Amy Moss appeared in Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper from May 13 to September 30, 1854. The plot roils with stolen children (three) and overt and apparent racism; "Custaloga" indeed performs as Stevenson remembers—and was rightly forgettable. Even the "six fat volumes" Stevenson carried with him (285; ed. Reid 84), the American George Bancroft's History of the United States, prove to be only a burden, "ponderous tomes" to be hauled between stations in Chicago (293; ed. Reid 92).

If fictions populated the land east of the Missouri, the westward trail was heavily stocked with personal reminiscences that also stood as a challenge to an author who was constructing a strategic absence within which to assert his own story. John D. Unruh, Jr. notes that the overland emigrants from 1840 to 1860 "took such pains to record their activities

for posterity" that their writings constitute "a veritable 'folk literature'" (Unruh 3-4). Adding to the information and experience that circulated as the shared discourse of emigration and settlement, many such narratives were widely accessible in print before Stevenson's travels of 1879. Yi-Fu Tuan famously begins his Space and Place with a meditation on the Great Plains of America, what in the nineteenth century was loosely termed "the Great Desert" and—erroneously—considered uninhabited. "The Great Plains look spacious. Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (Tuan 3). And place for Tuan is effectively sedimented time; by repetition, by dwelling, place evolves from duration in space: "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. [...] place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into a place" (6). As Stevenson traveled, he could not but be aware of earlier emigrant experiences that had translated wide open space into a place now recognizable to the white and European eye. Although his doggerel about the Delaware claimed "I have been changed from what I was before" (Letters 3: 8), the landscape around had been written into familiarity. After Nebraska's "Desolate flat prairie" with only a yellow butterfly for distinction, the author registered "Bitter Creek [...] a place infamous in the history of emigration" (Letters 3: 10-11). Stevenson presumably was drawing on emigrants' shared knowledge, as expressed by A. K. McClure in 1869: "Bitter Creek [...] is so impregnated with alkali that neither man nor beast can drink it without injury" (McClure 146). But such prior community consolidation of space into place left little room for the personal and literary expansion to be showcased through Stevenson's travels.

How to make a mark? In Monterey, and waiting for his own romantic narrative to unfold, Stevenson recognized and thought to embrace the phenomenon of western sensation that was the dime novel. Alongside the account of his sea voyage, he drafted at least 85 pages of the "somewhat scandalous" novel, "A Chapter in the Experience of Arizona Breckonridge or A Vendetta in the West" (Letters 3: 26, 19). But as the first part of "The Amateur Emigrant" sank, the "Vendetta," too, evaporated. What

evolved in its place was a fast/slow retelling of the westward trail that translated a discourse often focused on the goals or the way points of travel into one centered on the traveler himself. For Bakhtin, "Time [...] fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road)" (Bakhtin 244), which then serves as a locus for encounter in which "the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways, even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of *social distances*" (243). By contrast, Stevenson's journey activates not the "to" of historic travel or the "through" of the modern railroad that now processed through knowable place, or even the "together" Bakhtin describes. Instead, "Across the Plains" dwells, to the point of insistence, on the person traveling "in."

Stevenson's longest disquisition on transcontinental travel falls in "The Desert of Wyoming." Here the challenges of space and time, desire and experience align into thematic affect. In San Francisco, about five months after he had arrived on the west coast, Stevenson admitted his difficulty in writing "The Emigrant Train," for he was "ill the whole time and [had recorded] scarce a note, only about three pages in pencil in a penny notebook" (Letters 3: 51). But it is precisely when he succumbs to illness on his journey that the literary contrast between travel and traveler comes into focus. The train progresses "Hour after hour" through an "unhomely and unkindly world" ("Across the Plains" 2.10: 372; ed. Reid 105). It seems "the one piece of life" amid a "paralysis of man and nature" (373; ed. Reid 106). Yet its progress seems infinitesimal only in this space and time: in fact, the train manifests the acceleration of a burgeoning commercial and industrial society, having been "pushed through this unwatered wilderness and haunt of savage tribes [to] bear an emigrant for some 12l. from the Atlantic to the Golden Gates" (373; ed. Reid 106. Reid quotes MS: "Emigrant" and "twelve pounds"). It is thus, Stevenson observes, "the one typical achievement of the age in which we live, as if it brought together into one plot all the ends of the world and all the degrees of social rank, and offered to some great writer the busiest, the most extended, and the most varied subject for an enduring literary work" (373; ed. Reid 106-07. Reid quotes MS

"extended"—no comma). He concludes, however, "But alas! it is not these things that are necessary; it is only Homer" (384; ed. Reid 107). As for this writer, he did not attempt to emulate Homer or to anticipate Bakhtin. He focused elsewhere.

If Stevenson did not remember much of this segment of his travels because of his illness, it did not matter greatly, for it was his own experience, his own bodily affect, that stood central to "Across the Plains." Writing to Colvin on the eve of his departure from Greenock, the author declared: "I have never been so detached from life; I feel as if I cared for nobody, and as for myself I cannot believe fully in my own existence I seem to have died last night; all I carry on from my past life is the blue pill" (Letters 3: 2-3). The pill was a remedy for diarrhea, and he joked to Baxter "it's but little of my native land I'll carry off with me" (3). In this moment the cynosure of every friendly and familial eye, this empty, suffering body, moving in space, would prove to be the amateur emigrant's primary matter of personal and literary concern. Thus Stevenson arrives at his disquisition on the train, its slowness and speed, because of its expression through his body. "I had been suffering in my health a good deal all the way," he tells us as he enters the "Black Hills of Wyoming," and now that discomfort achieves prominence: "[The] evening we left Laramie, I fell sick outright" ("Across the Plains" 2.10: 372; ed. Reid 105). We then read a page and a half of powerful naturalist imagery focused on the suffering body: Stevenson, awake all night, describes his fellow travelers'

uneasy attitudes; here two chums alongside, flat upon their backs like dead folk; there a man sprawling on the floor, with his face upon his arm; there another half seated, with his head and shoulders on the bench. The most passive [...] continually and roughly shaken by the movement of the train. [...] the degradation of the air [is] intolerable [...] Outside, in a glimmering night, I saw the black, amorphous hills shoot by unweariedly into our wake. (372-73; ed. Reid 106)

## Day is no better.

It is this section that Stevenson concludes by a turn to history in the form of an 1860 letter held by his San Francisco landlady that told of her brothers' journey and a native attack ("Across the Plains" 2.10: 374-75; ed. Reid 107-08). (For the letter and its provenance, see ed. Reid fig. 2 and xxxv.) Yet if this narrative supplements Stevenson's prose, adding past time and authentic memory, it also focuses attention on his use of external information when he misreads, overreads, or elaborates on the base narrative to imagine a scalping. Ryan et al. argue a perceptual difference between two kinds of travel narratives, one bearing the characteristics of a "tour," the other deploying the capabilities of a "map" (Ryan et al. 8-9). The tour offers "a description of space from the point of view of a moving, embodied observer who visits locations in a temporal sequence" (Ryan et al. 8-9)—as one must when crossing a continent by train, and as does Stevenson. The map allows "a representation of space as seen from a fixed, elevated point of view that affords the observer a totalizing, simultaneous perception of the relations between objects" (9)—as in Stevenson's remembered travel which can, if it would, draw on narrative assumptions and literary tropes. In this instance, it does. A. K. McClure undertook the westward journey as a "tour" just as "the great overland route" (McClure 18) was becoming pacified, and two years before the railroad would substantially alter the landscape and dynamic of travel. "Still," he insists, "it is exposed to perils not known in the boundaries of civilization" (18). He goes on to fill his sensational and racist account with second-hand stories of scalping of the innocent pioneer (see 100-01, 108, 131, 252, 311, 355-57). Sarah Raymond Herndon, who traveled in 1865 and then serialized her account in the Rocky Mountain Husbandman beginning May 1880—while Stevenson was still working on his remembrances—more reliably cites specific cases. Of July 16, 1865, she recounts an event that took place one week before her wagon train passed Rock Creek: two men who had fallen behind a previous group were found "dead, and scalped," their wagons set on fire (Rocky Mountain Husbandman 9 September 1880: 5). Stevenson, it seems, performs the "tour"; at the same time, he adopts a particular perspective, highlighting parts of the "map" that may be actual (as in Herndon), but that are also becoming literary (as in McClure). If conventional tales of travel, such as the scary stories Stevenson heard in New York or St. John's overwrought imitations of James Fenimore Cooper, proved easy to recognize and elude, it was no small task to resist a burgeoning western narrative.

Largely, however, Stevenson succeeds, mapping for his audience that much less familiar territory: himself. Four narratives published before and alongside Stevenson's travels help make the case. Three recount Gold Rush-era travel to California: Martha M. Morgan's *A Trip Across the Plains in the Year 1849* (published in 1864), James Abbey's *A Trip Across the Plains, in the Spring of 1850* (published in 1850), and physician George Keller's *A Trip Across the Plains, and Life in California* (recounting an 1850 trip and published in 1851). Herndon's 1880 serialization, "Crossing the Plains in 1865," follows the westward trail to the Montana cut-off. These show how much Stevenson's narrative pursued well-trodden ground, inscribed by its own accumulation of literary tropes, but also how he departed from it. Theirs is not the tale Stevenson tells.

In some respects, despite its originality for the British audience, Stevenson's tale broke no new ground. For instance, however many rivers and canyons, mountains and even volcanoes stood between the Missouri and the Pacific Ocean, the imaginative life of America had already and definitively launched itself "across the plains." Numerous works published before Stevenson's travelogue used the exact phrase as a title or subtitle. In addition to the four listed above, there are also at least Ingalls (1852), Udell (1859), and Ludlow (1870) in book form, and many in newspapers. "Crossing the Plains" also surged as term and as trope, in a range of prints of which George Holbrook Baker's 1853 series in "Hutchings Panoramic Scenes," may be best known. The phenomenon became generic to the degree that the Century Magazine in 1902, in an article illustrated by Frederic Remington, looked back and joked that "In the rude ballads and songs of [the 1850s], the phrase for crossing the plains was 'the plains across'; never by any chance did the versemaker write 'across the plains.' [...] to this day you will find old pioneers [...] who never admit that they came across the plains; they came

the plains across" (Brooks 803). To cross the plains—as a trend, as a tale and as a title—by Stevenson's time of writing was firmly fixed in the American imaginary.

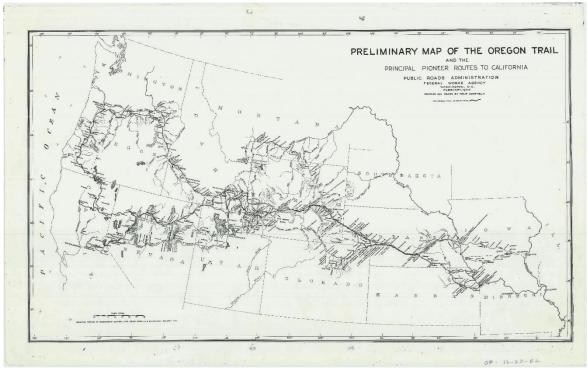


Fig. 1: A map of the nineteenth-century emigrant trails across America, National Archive RG30OregonTrail.

Of the plains themselves there was agreement, too: Sarah Herndon, like Stevenson, laments the "tedious, tiresome, monotonous view of these vast prairies" (Herndon, entry for 10 May 1865, "Crossing the Plains in 1865," *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* 10 June 1880: 5). Like Stevenson, many travelers express astonishment at the sheer numbers heading west and also returning east. Unruh calculates that as early as 1841, "nearly 10 percent of the departing caravan [...] made their way back to the Missouri settlements" from which they had launched their travels (Unruh 122). The traffic was never one way, no matter how much that surprised Stevenson as he passed through this well-traveled space for the first time.

In contrast to Stevenson, however, these laborious journeys, often walking alongside the ox-drawn wagon, dwell on practicalities, rehearsing distances and feeding grounds for cattle, cut-offs to speed the way, the perils of overloading, and the strategies to ford streams or winch teams down precipitous slopes. Charles W. Baley observes of Udell's journals that, "typical of many emigrant journals of the period [...] He recorded mostly such things as weather and road conditions, locations of campsites, availability of water, grass, and firewood, number of miles traveled each day, and the distance of each camp site from the Missouri River" (Baley 180-81).

More notably, these narratives manifest a frontier constantly shifting under pressure of immigration, and a relativity to time produced by differing modes of transportation and delivery. Sarah Herndon, on her trusty pony, on 19 June 1865 overtakes an old friend who is night herder for a slow-traveling wagon train of freight (Herndon, *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* 29 July 1880: 5). All around, fast and slow, go the walkers, the wagons, the wagon trains, the processions of freight wagons (see Unruh 106-107, 10). Messages stand still, pinned to a post (Unruh 131-33), languish or leap ahead by mail (Hewitt 110-14, 209-10, 462; Collins Part I: 22), and after 1861 might even hum by on the telegraph line (see McClure 28).

For Stevenson in 1879, following the relatively direct route of the transcontinental railroad, now ten years old, the experience inevitably differed.

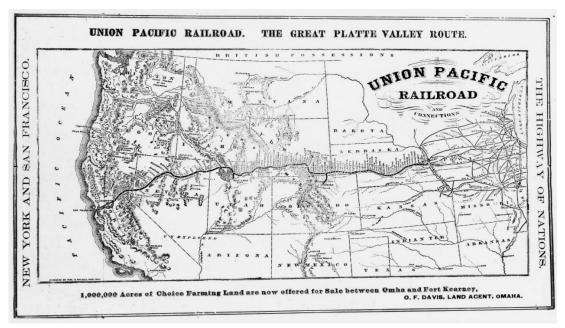


Fig. 2: An 1870 map of the Transcontinental Railway line, which had been completed in 1869. American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Trains did stop frequently to take on wood and water, and Stevenson describes delays along with the inconvenience of changing stations in Chicago. By the standards of the day, however, he did, as he said, proceed "swiftly" and "skim these horrible lands; as the gull, who wings safely through the hurricane and past the shark" ("Across the Plains" 2.10: 374; ed. Reid 107).

Was it the speed of his transit or his focus on California, his journey "through" and "to," that made the middle of America for him a vast vacancy? Travelling at speed, to Stevenson his progress felt slow; eager to record, he yet ignored the accumulated prairie trash of abandoned objects with which two generations of immigrant wagons had marked their way through the landscape (see Unruh 150). He commented to no extent on the giant western trains with their spark and cattle catchers, unlike Isabella L. Bird who in 1873 bounded off the train to explore the scenery at every opportunity, and then appreciated the "huge Pacific train, with its heavy bell, thunder[ing] up to the door" of her Truckee lodging house (Bird 25). Stevenson muted the memory of a Civil War scattered along the line in the multiplied towns called Sherman, the native culture suppressed on behalf of the union by Confederate prisoners of war (see Herndon, 10 June 1865, Rocky Mountain Husbandman 15 July 1880: 5), or the tattered uniforms that now clothed the west. Where he noticed the demoralized natives "dressed out with the sweepings of civilisation," dwelt on the "truly cockney baseness" of his fellow passengers, and made an impassioned plea for justice ("Across the Plains" 2.10: 381; ed. Reid 115), Bird focused on the natives themselves in an extensive (if tacitly racist) anthropological report (Bird 4-5). Stevenson provided no such detail.

Stevenson had been working on detachment, beginning by detaching himself from Scotland. If he left his parents without a word, the idea of separation was not new and ran deep. In *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, published the same year as he leaped across the Atlantic, Stevenson invoked those who "aspire angrily" (*Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes* 3) to escape Edinburgh's bounds. With a thinly disguised autobiographical impulse, he described how, leaning over "the great bridge which joins

the New Town with the Old" and that spans Edinburgh's Waverley Station, they might "watch the trains smoking out from under them and vanishing into the tunnel on a voyage to brighter skies." Such "[h]appy [...] passengers" could "shake off the dust of Edinburgh" and head to "that Somewhere-else of the imagination." Having finally caught that train to the "Somewhere-else of the imagination," the space of Stevenson's imagination proved fully occupied not by the experiences of the travelers who preceded him, or much by those who lived along the line, but by his own travails. In Ryan's terms, for Stevenson the American landscape served largely as "the environment in which narrative is physically deployed [...] the medium in which narrative is realized" (Ryan 1). This narrative was all about Stevenson.

The displacement of Stevenson's narrative into America and away from British people and sensibilities was enough to satisfy Sidney Colvin. Reading it on an English train, the critic found himself "chortling at frequent intervals," and apparently missing the depravities of "The Amateur Emigrant" that had so concerned him (Letters 3: 76). But although Stevenson may have taken a sidestep into American spaces and into the no-place that was a transcontinental train on the move, away from Edinburgh and its norms his "late-Victorian degenerationist rhetoric" (Reid, Bottle Imp) in fact becomes considerably exaggerated. In the face of much modernity, it is animal images that abound. Worse, where earlier travelers noted the bison and antelope, shot the unfortunate snakes and played among the prairie dogs, Stevenson narrowed his gaze from the space extending all around him to the crowd of human animals inhabiting the "American railroad-car, that long, narrow wooden box, like a flat-roofed Noah's ark" ("Across the Plains" 2.9: 296; ed. Reid 95. Reid quotes no hyphens). Having passed the desert of Wyoming, and constricted our vision to the night-time sleepers, sagging in body, "continually and roughly shaken by the movement of the train" (2.10: 373; ed. Reid 106) and making animal murmurs in their sleep, the one waking/suffering sensibility turns his attention to the stink of train cars continually occupied for ninety hours. The air is "rancid," "pure menagerie, only a little sourer, as from men instead of monkeys" (376;

ed. Reid 109. Reid quotes "menagerie;"). He explicitly aligns humans with apes and the Yahoos of *Gulliver's Travels* and acknowledges—and resists—the pressure to become "such another as Dean Swift; a kind of leering, human goat, leaping and wagging your scut on mountains of offence" (376; ed. Reid 109. Reid quotes MS: "Swift:" "leering" "scut," "offense"). In Stevenson's progress, we are thoroughly immersed *in* travel—the travail seeping through every sense and centered, for readers sitting uncomfortably at home, in our author's own body. The yahoos on board take Stevenson, in his illness, for their mark (377; ed. Reid 110-11), but he has already untethered his text and travels from literary and cultural expectation. The author extended a vacancy of perception all around that leaves as the cynosure for every eye his own visibly suffering body—with which no respectable American wishes to "chum" (2.9: 296-97; ed. Reid 95-96) or double up at night on the train.

Later writers crossing the plains begin to echo Stevenson's discourse. Indeed, between Sarah Herndon's 1880 reminiscence of her 1865 travels and their book publication in 1902, she takes up Stevenson's powerful imagination of how "at each stage of the [railroad's] construction, roaring, impromptu cities, full of gold and lust and death, sprang up and then died away again, and are now but wayside stations in the desert" (2.10: 373; ed. Reid 106. Reid quotes MS "sprang up,"). Looking back at her travels by pony and ox-drawn wagon, she adds a paean to "this town of tents and wagons [that] has sprung up since yesterday morning when there was no sign of life on this north bank of the South Platte, and now there are more than one thousand men, women and children, and I cannot guess how many wagons and tents" (Herndon, Days on the Road 123). Herndon seems to have adapted Stevenson's observation of the railroad's industrial-strength capitalism to the walking pace of the ox and the haulage capacity of the cart. G. W. Thissell, remembering his 1849 travels from the vantage of 1903, falters at what "No pen can describe" (Thissell 10)—a cholera epidemic—before he has even disembarked at St. Louis on his way west. Delayed ashore, Thissell himself is ill, but unlike in Stevenson, the suffering is generalized, as "many sickened and died [and others] sold their out-fits and returned home"

(Thissell 11). Illness has moved center stage; its specificity, however, has not.

Stevenson's influence, if any, proved fleeting in the discourse of late-century westward narratives. Remembering his launch across "the border line of civilization" that was Council Bluffs, a mere way-station for Stevenson, Thissell begins populating the landscape both with rural stores and settlements that Stevenson overlooked, and with stories bearing strong resemblance to the tall tale: "thrilling adventures and hair-breadth escapes from death, as well as many amusing incidents" (7). Then, by 1907, speed and sensation overtake any hope of Stevensonian sensibility when Clarence Young's "Motor Boys" head "Across the Plains" in their "big touring car" (Young, *Motor Boys* [1907] Preface).

What, then, did Stevenson achieve through his voyage across the plains? Thinking again about "The Amateur Emigrant," and with "Across the Plains" still in production, Stevenson realized that "I could also leave out the names of the Clyde and the like; so that it could be identified with nowhere" (*Letters* 3: 167). And in the end, whereas later authors drew on the author's slim volume as one more intertext, Stevenson's unique contribution to the westward narrative is forgetfulness. Such a deliberate forgetting of literature and of landscape centers the gaze on the suffering space that was the traveling author. This was a territory both attractive and uncomfortable to inhabit—a compelling territory for realist and naturalist authorship. It is a territory that would wait to be fully unfolded until James Joyce, in *Ulysses*, sent Leopold Bloom's unwieldy body on its progress around a Dublin both overfull and, one might argue, ultimately irrelevant.

University of Wyoming Laramie

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# Othello in the South Seas: Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Beach of Falesá" as Shakespearean Rewriting

LUCIO DE CAPITANI

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#### **Abstract**

This article reads Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific novella "The Beach of Falesá" (1892) as a rewriting of Shakespeare's *Othello*. There are, in fact, several clues that Stevenson had *Othello* in mind while travelling in the Pacific, and while working on "Falesá" specifically: once the two texts are compared, a set of structural parallels and thematic convergences appears. While "Falesá" is not strictly speaking an adaptation of *Othello*, it is, however, an early case of "writing back" to Shakespeare's text, anticipating the work of several postcolonial and feminist authors. In a first step, I will explore which clues invite this reading to begin with, while also showing that Stevenson's engagement with Shakespeare is connected to his interest in realism. Secondly, I am going to stress several convergences between the character relations in *Othello* and those in "Falesá," detailing how Stevenson translates the character dynamics of *Othello* into the South Seas, initially focusing on Othello/Wiltshire and Iago/Case. Finally, I will discuss how and why Stevenson, in a few deliberate deviations from *Othello*, subverts Shakespeare's tale, with a special focus on Uma and Desdemona.

#### 1. Introduction

Early in his career, Robert Louis Stevenson was rather fond of unsubtle, playful nods to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. For instance, in *Prince Otto* (1885), the reader is told that Grünewald, where the story is set, borders Seaboard Bohemia, "celebrated for its [...] mountain bears" (4)—a reference to both Shakespeare's geographical liberties and to the most famous animal to have graced a stage direction in the history of English theatre. Keeping up with the joke, it is also suggested that Otto "drew his descent through Perdita, the only daughter of King Florizel the First of Bohemia" (4)—most likely the daughter of Florizel and Perdita from Shakespeare's play. Prince Florizel of Bohemia is also the protagonist/recurring character in other early works like *The New Arabian Nights* (1882) and *The Dynamiter* (1885). This overt set of references functions primarily as an intertextual divertissement: Stevenson indulges in creating a micro-genealogy for his princely characters that leads back to a literary world he is enamoured with.

The engagement with Shakespeare that this essay explores, conversely, is rather *covert*, but it also involves a serious critical response to Shakespeare's work, a far cry from the facetious intertextual game discussed so far. My argument, in short, is that it makes sense to read the Pacific novella "The Beach of Falesá" (1892) as a rewriting of Shakespeare's Othello. This is because there are several clues that Stevenson had Othello in mind while travelling in the Pacific, and while working on "Falesá" specifically; and because, once the two texts are compared, a set of structural parallels and thematic convergences appears. To the extent that "adaptations have an overt and defining relationship to prior texts" and "usually openly announce this relationship" (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 3), "Falesá" is not an adaptation of Othello. It does work, however, as an early case of "writing back" to Shakespeare's text, as several postcolonial and feminist authors have done in the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (see Chambers). In other words, I propose to treat "Falesá" as a subversion of the Shakespearean text.

The essay is divided in three parts: firstly, I explore which clues invite this reading to begin with, while also showing that Stevenson's engagement with Shakespeare is connected to his interest in realism. Secondly, I stress several convergences between the character relations in *Othello* and those in "Falesá," detailing how Stevenson translates the character dynamics of *Othello* into the South Seas, initially focusing on Othello/Wiltshire and Iago/Case. Finally, I discuss how and why Stevenson, in a few deliberate deviations from *Othello*, subverts Shakespeare's tale, with a special focus on Uma and Desdemona.

### 2. Realism à outrance Nothing Extenuated

In 1883, in a letter to his cousin Bob, Stevenson praises Shakespeare as "the only realist who ever succeeded" (Letters 4: 181). This is indeed high praise, since Stevenson, at the time, would not have called himself a realist. At that stage of his career, Stevenson embraced a conception of fiction, largely coinciding with romance, that eschewed a social and psychological focus, and was looking "not for eloquence or character or thought, but for some quality of the brute incident" ("A Gossip on Romance" 249). In "A Gossip on Romance" (1882), Stevenson conceives of romance as the "poetry of circumstance" (250), focused "not upon what a man shall choose to do, but on how he manages to do it; not on the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience, but on the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence" (251). Such art form represents "the plastic part of literature," which "embodies character, thought, or emotion in some act or attitude that shall be remarkably striking to the mind's eye" (257). To convey that effect, Stevenson proposes a decidedly anti-mimetic strategy: as he elaborates in "A Humble Remonstrance" (1884), assuming that "life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant" and "a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate" (285), he suggests that a novel should be "not a transcript of life, to be judged by its

exactitude; but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity" (297).

Shakespeare, within this conception of art, stands as a major exception—hence, arguably, as an impossible standard: he is able to represent social and psychological "life," in its complexity, without losing the "brute" impact or plasticity that for Stevenson is characteristic of romance. In Stevenson's words, Shakespeare is an artist "who reached the clear design and force of the ideal, and yet carried along with him the bulk and the lineament, freshness, colour and brute imprint, of actual detail" (*Letters* 4: 181). Shakespeare is thus deeply admired but is not a model—and perhaps this is why Stevenson seems to be fond of playfully *mentioning* Shakespeare's characters in these years, but apparently prefers not to significantly engage with them.

However, if in 1883 Shakespeare features in Stevenson's theoretical reflections as an exception, the relationship changes a few years later, as Stevenson's poetics transform. As discussed by Roslyn Jolly, Stevenson's travels in the Pacific mark a newfound engagement with realism, as he attempts to "represent the contemporary Pacific world accurately in his fiction and non-fiction, and to intervene in that world through his writing" (*Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific* 25-26). This leads him to embrace the mimetic form of fiction that he had previously dismissed.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore no surprise that Shakespeare—"the only realist who ever succeeded"—should reappear in Stevenson's letters as he is working on "The Beach of Falesá," defined, in a letter to Sydney Colvin, as "the first realistic South Seas story; I mean with real South Sea character and details of life" (*Letters* 7: 161).

Specifically, in another letter to Colvin, written in 1892, Stevenson complains about the plans to alter the text of the false marriage certificate that binds Uma and Wiltshire at the beginning of "Falesá"—and, more precisely, to lengthen the duration after which Wiltshire is entitled to "send her to hell" ("The Beach of Falesá" 11). Stevenson reminds Colvin that the certificate is based on an authentic document, stressing its faithfulness to realism with an intriguing formulation:

Yesterday came yours. Well, well, if the dears prefer a week, why I'll give them ten days, but the real document, from which I have scarcely varied, ran for one night. [...] Perhaps you do scarce justice to the fact that this is a piece of realism à *outrance* nothing extenuated or adorned. (*Letters* 7: 281)

With the phrase "nothing extenuated," Stevenson subtly, but unequivocally, evokes Othello: specifically, his final speech. In the concluding act of Shakespeare's play, Othello, who has just strangled Desdemona, is belatedly brought to realize, due to Emilia's incandescent intervention, that he has been manipulated by Iago into believing in his wife's unfaithfulness; he then metaphorically composes his own epitaph, just before killing himself, by asking the Venetians to:

Speak of me as I am. *Nothing extenuate,*Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well; (5.2.340-42; emphasis added)

Othello's appeal to truth and objectivity is apt and effective in rebuking Colvin and defending the factually accurate marriage contract against the "extenuated" version. While Othello's ambivalence here deserves more commentary, let us just notice—for the time being—how the letter clearly connects "Falesá" and *Othello*/Shakespeare through a reflection on realism. Furthermore, a subsequent passage of the letter shows explicitly that Stevenson is here thinking of Shakespeare to elaborate on his own realist poetics. He discusses with Colvin his difficulties in writing a love story—like "Falesá"; it is his concern that his inclination not to mince words, when discussing what love and erotic attraction imply, may result in "grossness":

I am afraid my touch is a little broad in a love story: I cannot mean one thing and write another. [...] if my characters have to go to bed to each other—well, I want them to go. [...] With a writer of my prosaic literalness and pertinency of point of view, this all shoves towards grossness [...]. This has kept me off the sentiment [love] hitherto, and now I am to try: Lord! Of course Meredith can do it, and so could Shakespeare; but with all my romance, I am a realist and

a prosaist, and a most fanatical lover of plain physical sensations plainly expressed and expressly rendered; hence my perils. (*Letters* 7: 284; emphasis added)

The representational issues at stake here are certainly relevant for "Falesá"—which hinges on his protagonists having "to go to bed to each other." Shakespeare—who certainly does not shy away from "plain physical sensations plainly expressed" in *Othello*—is here fully promoted to an operative model: while still standing, in Stevenson's eyes, for a miraculous balance of ideal and brute representational force, he is now a writer Stevenson aspires to emulate in some respect.

Othello, however, also makes other appearances in Stevenson's Pacific texts, specifically in some passages of In the South Seas, which was published posthumously in 1896 in book form, but whose composition (1889-1891) and magazine publication (1891) precede "Falesá." In the Marquesas section, in chapter VIII ("The Port of Entry"), Stevenson relates the story of a white man who "fell in love with a native lady, a High Chiefess in Ua-pu"; since she "could never marry a man who was untattooed," he decided to get a full body tattoo, only to be mocked and rejected by "the fickle fair one" (In the South Seas 50). Stevenson notes that he "could never see the man without a kind of admiration; of him it might be said, if ever of any, that he had loved not wisely, but too well" (50; emphasis added). This further reference to Othello's final speech signals that Stevenson is not only interested in Shakespeare as a realist writer, but specifically in Othello as a play to discuss interracial relationships and their complications. Yet, importantly, the events here described are decidedly comedic rather than tragic, which hints at a desire to alter the Shakespearean matter.

An analogous operation is carried out in the Gilberts section, in chapter VII ("Husband and Wife"), where Stevenson addresses the real marriage certificate that was the source of the one in "Falesá." Speaking of a number of Polynesian women married to white traders, Stevenson points out that "the certificate of one, when she proudly showed it, proved to run thus, that she was 'married for one night,' and her gracious partner was at liberty to 'send her to hell' the next morning" (200).

However, he also points out, once again recasting the Shakespearean formulation "not wisely but too well" within a comedic framework, that the woman "was none the wiser or the worse for the dastardly trick" (200). Most intriguingly, he immediately goes on with a reflection on how differently adultery and jealousy interweave with gender in the Gilberts. Specifically, he mentions that:

Stealthy adultery was punished with death; open elopement was properly considered virtue in comparison, and compounded for a fine in land. The male adulterer alone seems to have been punished. It is correct manners for a jealous man to hang himself; a jealous woman has a different remedy—she bites her rival. (51)

The reference to adultery and jealousy once again connects the Pacific context with *Othello*, the quintessential play on jealousy and its self-destructive nature in the British canon<sup>3</sup>—"the green-eyed monster, which doth mock / the meat it feeds on" (3.3.168-69), as Iago famously puts it to warn Othello of the very evil he is so successfully "poisoning" (3.3.328) him with. But, by referencing the utterly different (though not less strict) rules through which adultery and jealousy work in the Gilberts—most specifically, separating jealousy and adultery from male violence on women—Stevenson hints again at a subversion of at least some aspects of Shakespeare's play, which he will enact in "Falesá."

This constellation of variously veiled references, linking *Othello*, interracial relationships, "Falesá" and realism, indicates that Stevenson, while exploring the colonial space of the Pacific, did justifiably feel the lure of a text that presents a "Molotov cocktail of false friendship, cross-cultural love, racism, military confrontation, and extreme sexual possessiveness" which later made it "irresistible to many artists from post-colonial backgrounds" (Chambers 6). This must have been especially true while he was writing a story—"Falesá"—that features (roughly) the same ingredients, albeit in a radically different setting. *Othello*, besides, is a play that is accustomed to travel and to speak to widely different contexts, "whose staging, readings and meanings have mutated and evolved over time" (Thompson 3) and that "invites revision" (5)—

especially after, paraphrasing Ben Okri, history made it a play about race, if it was not one to begin with (see Okri 72). It is certainly a text that has been repeatedly revised throughout modernity, having much to say on the ways racism, misogyny, trade, war and violence interweave, especially in cosmopolitan and colonial contact zones, and as globalisation unfolds—not least because it bears witness to the early modern beginnings (or reinvention) of those dynamics. Stevenson, being "an important witness both to nineteenth-century imperialism and to the creation of the modern post-colonial world" (Jolly, Introduction xxxiii), is, unsurprisingly, an ideal respondent to Shakespeare's tragedy.

As discussed so far, Stevenson also responds to Shakespeare's realism; but it is worth noting that the Shakespearean citation which he employs to vindicate his own realism—"Nothing extenuate"—is utterly interwoven with the mystification of the truth. As Peter Erickson points out, "there is [...] a conspicuous gap between this stipulation ["Nothing extenuate"] and the extenuations Othello actually makes as he strives to reshape the narrative structure of his identity in a way that remains ingratiating" (Erickson 4). This is true of Othello's final speech in general, but even more so of the other line that seems to have captured Stevenson's imagination: Othello's self-definition as "one that loved not wisely but too well." This is a rather lenient portrayal of his relationship with Desdemona, culminating in her brutal murder. Emilia's identification of him as a "murderous coxcomb" (5.2.231), among other epithets, might be a more just summary of Othello's final course of action.

Therefore, the "realism à outrance" of "Falesá" is supported by a reference to a phrase in *Othello* that represents one of the final attempts in the play—though definitely not the only one—of twisting reality through the power of words. This paradox introduces an important thematic point of contact between the two texts, which I will develop further as I discuss the characters and their parallels. *Othello*, with its focus on the fabulative acts of Othello and Iago and on how the latter ends up overpowering the former, is "a play about storytellers, their tell-

tales and their effects on gullible listeners" (Thompson 2), as well as an epistemological drama that insists on the deceptive paradigms of sight and listening (Bassi, Introduzione 20). Similarly "Falesá" is a story about unreliable (or outright deceiving) narrators that is concerned with learning which senses and which words to believe in; whose commitment to realism comes with a significant degree of scepticism towards what seem to be the most commonsensical and reliable sources of the truth. Such scepticism also influences, perhaps most of all, the "plain sense" ("The Beach of Falesá" 24) that the narrator-protagonist claims to possess. In short, both stories, as Barry Menikoff argues regarding "Falesá," show that "language itself, and the way in which we organize and build our sentences, provide an illusion at odds with reality" (Menikoff 43).

In Othello, the shorthand for such lack of epistemological clarity is the way Iago dismantles the meaning and transparency of the word "honest." Because of Iago's manipulations, the word is obsessively and frustratingly employed to describe both Desdemona, whose honesty is unfairly questioned, and Iago himself, who carves a reputation as and is thus assigned the epithet "honest," when he is anything but. "Honest" Iago's plan relies, among other things, on the fact that "The Moor is of a free and open nature, / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (1.3.398-99). The same can be said for Wiltshire, who, at the beginning of "Falesá," is lured into believing in Case's trustworthiness by the latter's hospitality, helpfulness and silver tongue, not to mention his knowledge of the local language ("The Beach of Falesá" 5). "Honest" does not appear nearly as often in "Falesá," but, when the word is uttered for the first time, its utterly treacherous significance is identical to the one that Iago imposes on the discursive world of Othello. Appropriately, it is Case who says it, telling Wiltshire that "everyone was honest in Falesá" (6)—exactly as everyone is honest, nominally or otherwise, in Venice and Cyprus. Case is here signalling that we are setting foot onto a very similar stage, with very similar character dynamics, although the results of his own intrigue—his own "net / That shall enmesh them all" (2.3.356-57)—will have different results than Iago's.

### 3. Sick for White Neighbours

While I have thus far highlighted a number of intertextual and thematic convergences between "Falesá" and Othello, I must still address the central operation of Stevenson's rewriting, which concerns the core dynamic between the three main characters (Othello, Desdemona and Iago; and Wiltshire, Uma and Case) being fundamentally the same. This is the particular relationship triangle that Stevenson translates from early modern Venice/Cyprus to late nineteenth century Falesá, suggesting what could be called, in Steve Shapiro's words, "an exploration of analogous similarities across time" (Shapiro 246). Both works explore the predicament of an interracial couple. In both cases, we find a wise, proud, but socially isolated woman (Desdemona/Uma) and a superficially confident, secretly insecure and internally split man, characterized by doubts about his place in society, his racial allegiance and cultural belonging (Othello/Wiltshire). In both cases, these couples are involved in an illicit wedding; and, in both cases, the male protagonist is manipulated and deceived by a devilish trickster figure (Iago/Case). In both works such a trickster, posing as the male lead's friend and as a reliable cultural mediator, relies on the male lead's racial/gender anxieties to manipulate him to his own advantage—though the plan is rather different in the two texts: in one case it is about stirring the jealousy of the male lead, so that he destroys himself alongside his wife; in the other, it is about uniting the male and female protagonist, so that the taboo which the latter bears will make an outcast of the former, while keeping him in the dark about the nature of their union. As I will discuss in the final part of this essay, whenever there are significant changes in such dynamics—such as the treatment of the woman character's agency, the male lead's jealousy, or the overall success of the trickster's intrigue—, they are so deliberate that I take them to indicate Stevenson's desire to comment on Shakespeare's story.

Of course, there are two immediate objections to this assumption: the different historical setting and the different race/gender combination of the interracial couple. An interracial marriage between a Moorish

general and a Venetian noblewoman in early modern Venice is, after all, not the same as the marriage between a working-class British trader and a Polynesian villager in the nineteenth century: the sexual, racial, cultural and material implications are, from a strictly historicist point of view, completely different. But, in line with the broad comparative approach that makes Stevenson juxtapose the predicament of Highlanders and Polynesians (see *In the South Seas* 12-14), using his familiarity with the former to interpret the latter, I would argue that Stevenson is similarly using *Othello's* insight into racial and gender dynamics—even though they are not strictly speaking the same dynamics—to comment on another, specifically colonial, situation. This is an approach that, besides, makes perfect sense if one considers these historically situated instances as manifestations, from a *longue durée* perspective, of the unfolding of colonial and capitalist modernity at different stages and in different locations.<sup>4</sup>

So let us analyse these dynamics in detail, starting with the male protagonists, Othello and Wiltshire. Both are narrator-storytellers but unreliable ones: they are accustomed to relating tales through a distorted and often self-ingratiating perspective, albeit by means of different styles. Moreover, this unreliability is connected to their unstable place, and the insecurity about their place, in relation to whiteness and its others. Wiltshire—the narrator of "Falesá"—often frames himself as more in control than he really is, usually at the expense of the Polynesians from which, in the first part of the tale, he tries to separate himself. When he meets the island chiefs in the hope that they will lift the mysterious taboo that has befallen him, he declares to the audience:

I know how to deal with Kanakas: give them plain sense and fair dealing, and—I'll do them that much justice—they knuckle under every time. They haven't any real government or any real law, that's what you've got to knock into their heads; and even if they had, it would be a good joke if it was to apply to a white man. ("The Beach of Falesá" 24)

Wiltshire's assessment that he knows "how to deal with Kanakas" is clearly in contradiction with how the episode will play out—the meeting, mediated and manipulated by Case, will not solve anything, and

only Uma will later be able to shed light on Wiltshire's predicament, in spite of the latter proclaiming that "it's a bad idea to set natives up with any notion of consulting them" (21). Nor do Wiltshire's previous interactions with Polynesian leaders, which involve, by his own description, repeated instances of "getting tabooed, and going down to the Speak House to see and get it taken off" (5), justify his confidence. In other words, Wiltshire tries to claim/perform a normative whiteness, because he feels excluded from white society, as a defence mechanism against the Polynesian society that he does not (initially) understand, linguistically and culturally. In doing so, however, he reveals how alienated he is from either.

In a similar vein, when he explores the bush later in the tale, he maintains that he is not scared by Uma's yarns about the dangerous aitus (spirits): "Don't think it was Uma's yarns that put me out; I don't value native talk a fourpenny-piece; it's a thing that's natural in the bush, and that's the end of it" (51). However, he later admits that Uma's talk did affect him. When Uma comes to his rescue, right before his final confrontation with Case, he confesses: "It wasn't Case I was afraid of, [...] what took me, as sharp as the colic, was the old wives' tales, the devilwomen and the man-pigs"; what is more, when he first sees her running after him, he takes her for "a devil-woman, just as the way I had figured she would look," letting out "a yell so big that I thought it was my death" (63). Wiltshire maintains the facade of the uncompromising, stoic imperial hero—an efficient—domineering white colonialist who does not treat the natives as equals, only for that facade to be put in crisis by his own narrative. As Menikoff points out in his detailed analysis of Wiltshire's speech patterns, the trader is keen on "[declaring] his understanding and control over the events described and experienced," but "the more Wiltshire declares his control the less he actually possesses" (Menikoff 39).

These contradictions in Wiltshire's tale speak of greater, unresolved interior conflicts. On the one hand, in his narrative, he clings to his role as a self-styled "white man, and a British subject" who has "come here to do them good, and bring them civilisation" (23). On the other hand,

his narrative shows him learning to respect, live with and collaborate with the Polynesians—for instance, he acknowledges the chief Maea as a peer, as well as an ally against Case, when he says that he has "[shaken] hands with that Kanaka like as if he was the best man in Europe" (57). Most importantly, Wiltshire ultimately links his fate to and finds emotional fulfilment with—a Polynesian wife and then his mixed-race children, but he is unable to let go of a lingering uneasiness about his situation. This internal struggle emerges most powerfully in the novella's final paragraph, foregrounding his conflicted feelings about his and Uma's children—"They're only half-castes, of course; I know that as well as you do, and there's nobody thinks less of halfcastes than I do; but they're mine, and about all I've got" (71). It is also at work, however, at the very beginning of their relationship, when he admits that he is "ashamed to be so much moved about a native" (13). These conflicting feelings, moreover, variously intersect with Wiltshire's shame about his own class, which makes him think of himself as unworthy of love, respect or salvation. For instance, he claims that Uma is "no even mate for a poor trader like myself" (12); and he presents himself to Tarleton the missionary as "just a trader; [...] a common, low, God-damned white man and British subject, the sort you would like to wipe your boots on" (35). Indeed, such shame is one of the reasons why Wiltshire finds white supremacist talking points appealing, as they offer him a form of surrogate pride as a white man.

Many scholars have commented on Wiltshire's contradictions, writing of a "protagonist whose capacity to act upon humanitarian impulses is seriously compromised by his implacably racist mentality" (Linehan 408); who ends the story still dominated by a "lingering desire for racial purity" (Buckton 241); and who is still "struggling with the defensive anxieties about class and race which have persistently marked his narrative," to the point that he is "trapped within a racial ideology from which his emotions have been liberated" (Jolly, "Stevenson's 'Sterling Domestic Fiction'" 481). Wiltshire is, indeed, a realistic psychological portrayal of a decent working-class man navigating the systemic violence of a colonial world without having quite all the tools

to understand (or dismantle) his role in it, materially and epistemologically. What receives less commentary, however, is the fact that Wiltshire is also a storyteller. Even if we agree that he is, primarily, a "limited-consciousness narrator" (Jolly, "Stevenson's 'Sterling Domestic Fiction'" 481), namely that his unreliability as a narrator stems chiefly from a lack of self-awareness, he is nevertheless *performing* his tale for an audience that we have all reasons to believe is primarily white. Thus some of his most glaring contradictions might be read not *just* as slips of his racist subconscious, but also as connected to the fact that he is performing whiteness for other white people, reassuring his audience at the same time he assuages himself.

Stevenson's portrayal of Wiltshire's struggles with his own split self, and with turning his contradictions into a somewhat cohesive narrative, may have taken some lessons from Othello. The Moor is also a split self—tragically so after Iago's intervention, but perhaps even before (see Adelman 128)—and an unreliable storyteller that actively performs his racial identity as a self-defensive mechanism, while not necessarily fully (or always) in control of that performance (or that identity) due to the lack of "a penetrating self-knowledge" (Kelley 57). In general, Othello is defined by his storytelling performances, most notably in the first act, when he relates how he won Desdemona's love through the telling of the "story of [his] life" (1.3.130), of which the audience—and the Venetian Senate—hears just a fragment when he promises to convey the "round unvarnished tale" (1.3.107) of their love. But there is little of "unvarnished" in Othello's speech, which includes, besides "battles, sieges, fortunes" (1.3.131) and other adventures, wondrous and exotic tales "of the cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (1.3.144-46). His favourite storytelling style follows the model of early modern travel writing, combining an insistence of eye-witnessing as an absolute mark of veracity with the account of fantastical events (see Rapetti 217). In broader terms, this characterizes Othello as a speaker who, by carefully mixing truth and fiction, "seems capable of managing social circumstances through the manipulation of narrative—calculating, eloquent, and convincing" (Kelley 51).

This volatile relationship with the truth leads to a number of questionable moments, such as Othello's already commented-on self-fashioning as "one that loved not wisely but too well." Or when, earlier in the play, already affected by Iago's poison and led to question Desdemona about the missing handkerchief, he invents a complex and bizarre origin story for the item that will eventually come to signify his wife's guilt, replete with threats:

[...] That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give.
She was a charmer, and could almost read
The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it,
'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
Entirely to her love; but if she lost it,
Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
Should hold her loathed, and his spirits should hunt
After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me
And bid me, when my fate would have me wived,
To give it her. I did so; and—take heed on 't!
Make it a darling, like your precious eye!—
To lose 't or give 't away were such perdition
As nothing else could match. (3.4.57-70)

The psychological violence of Othello's implied threats to Desdemona, driven by the viciousness of his jealousy, anticipates the physical violence of the ending. But, on top of that, Othello later changes the account when he presents the handkerchief as proof that his killing of Desdemona was justified, claiming that it was "an antique token / My father gave my mother" (5.2.214-15). This shift confirms the far from innocuous, self-serving nature of Othello's manipulations, up until his death.

If Othello is manipulative, however, his manipulations—like Wiltshire's—frequently come from a place of profound insecurity with respect to whiteness and white society. As a stranger in Venice that has acquired a significant status through military prowess but nevertheless

remains an outsider, Othello has to constantly justify his presence, which is contingent on the benevolence of "very noble and approved good masters" (1.3.78) whom he addresses in the Senate scene and who incorporate him into their society for opportunistic reasons. He does so by reminding the Venetians, through his stories, of his remarkable military experience and feats; by entertaining them with exotic tales; but also by reassuring them that he has successfully assimilated into the European/White/Christian/Venetian fold. This performative exercise, as Shaul Bassi points out, results in Othello internalizing xenophobic stereotypes, while still not assuaging his doubts about understanding Venetian society, despite his social status and aristocratic wedding (see Bassi, Introduzione 16-17). In his last rhetorical performance, Othello asks the Venetians to:

[...] say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turbanned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him—thus!

He stabs himself (5.2.350-54)

As the climax of Othello's final speech and self-made epitaph, the passage combines several of his favourite tropes, including his military feats and the exotic locations. Most importantly, it epitomizes Othello's split self: the Moor simultaneously identifies with "the circumcised dog" and with his former self as Christian servant of the Venetian state, who kills the Turk just in the same manner that he is about to kill himself. Othello's desire for assimilation—his desire for whiteness—metaphorically kills the "otherness" in him, and, in turn, Othello himself.

Of course, what happened between Othello's first, confident speech in front of the Senate and Othello's epitaph is Iago, who, "split himself, [...] is a master at splitting others [...], introducing [Othello] to the world of self-alienation that [he] inhabits" (Adelman 128). But Iago's plan, in crucial ways, could not work if Othello were not already deeply insecure about his position in Venetian society as well as his ability to meaningfully read its dynamics and be accepted by it—and, more specifically, if he were not insecure about his worth as a black man whom

a white woman can sincerely love back. Iago uses this insecurity to "poison" Othello and to sow mistrust in Desdemona, simultaneously feeding Othello with and leading him to interiorize racist and misogynistic stereotypes. The Moor is only too ready to accept them, with self-destructive results.

Therefore, Iago, boasting his knowledge of Venetian customs, suggests that Desdemona, as a Venetian woman, must be a cunning deceiver of husbands: "I know our country disposition well-/ In Venice they do let God see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience / Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown" (3.3.204-07). To this end, he uses misogynistic stereotypes about the promiscuity of Venetian women to build an ethnographic authority from which Othello is excluded. Building on this authority, Iago argues—and convinces Othello—that it is reasonable to imagine Desdemona being unfaithful. After all, she chose to marry outside "her own clime, complexion, and degree" (3.3.234), showing "in such a will most rank, / Foul disproportion thoughts unnatural" (3.3.236-37); and he boldly suggests that "her will, recoiling to her better judgment, / May fall to match you with her country forms / And happily repent" (3.3.239-41). Othello does not protest against this line of reasoning, and, once Iago has convinced him that he is no fit companion for Desdemona due to his race, and that their love is unnatural, the tide has turned for the two lovers.

If Iago can therefore be described as a devilish cultural mediator, Case, in "Falesá," operates in fundamentally the same manner. He feeds Wiltshire with toxic racial models of European and Polynesian people (especially white men and Polynesian women) to keep him under control and ultimately destroy him, building his ethnographic authority on the fact that he knows the local culture and language, while Wiltshire, characterized initially by his "ignorance of the native" ("The Beach of Falesá" 5), does not. Moreover, he exploits Wiltshire's being "sick for white neighbours" (4), and his desire to properly belong among whites and in whiteness, which, as commented, is also a function of his class-based shame. As long as Wiltshire behaves according

to the supremacist racial ideology that Case fosters in him, his plan works.

Most specifically, Case relies on Wiltshire behaving in an exploitative, misogynistic fashion towards Polynesian woman, which he encourages not only by initially suggesting to "get [him] a wife," but by moreover proposing that he can "have her [Uma]," and that he can "have your pick of the lot for a plug of tobacco" (7). Wiltshire, for his part, initially justifies the necessity of the false wedding by arguing that, if not for the influence of the missionaries in the islands, he could have "taken all the wives I wished, and left them when I pleased, with a clear conscience" (11). He is thus more than willing to believe, at least at first, that the Pacific is (or should be) a sexual paradise, full of promiscuous native women that he is entitled to exploit, and hence easily lured in Case's trap. Later in the novella, Case explicitly evokes racial solidarity to reinforce his hold on Wiltshire: "'[...] Understand me, Wiltshire; I don't count this your quarrel,' he went on, with a great deal of resolution, 'I count it all of our quarrel, I count it the White Man's Quarrel, and I'll stand to it through thick and thin, and there's my hand on it'" (22). It is when Wiltshire forgoes the promise of racial solidarity and white supremacism in favour of a (more) equal intimacy with Uma that Case's plan begins to fail.

Iago and Case, therefore, both trade in racist and misogynistic images and stereotypes, as well as violent and blunt ideological talking points, to control Othello and Wiltshire—not necessarily believing wholeheartedly in these representations, but being very skilled at manipulating others who might find them convincing or appealing.<sup>6</sup> They are also similar in the way they use their mediator role to elicit untruths out of situations that their victims are prevented from properly interpreting. In "Falesá," when Wiltshire is parlaying with the chiefs and Case "translated it—or made believe to, rather" (24), Case uses Wiltshire's inability to understand what the conversation is actually about to keep him in the dark. This sequence is based on the same kind of aural deception as the scene in *Othello* (4.1) in which Iago has the Moor witness a conversation between him and Cassio—Desdemona's alleged lover—

but from a distance. Othello does not realize that they are actually talking about Cassio's lover Bianca, who, on top of that, arrives on the scene with Desdemona's handkerchief, granting Othello the "ocular proof" (3.3.363) of Desdemona's unfaithfulness. In both cases, being unable to listen to what is being said allows for the deception to work—though, as regards Case, not for long.

## 4. An Honest Talk and the Possibility of Wisdom

Ultimately, Iago's plan succeeds, while Case's fails, and Stevenson turns a domestic tragedy into a domestic tale with an open and at least partially happy ending.<sup>7</sup> The marriage between Wiltshire and Uma, in spite of Wiltshire's misgivings, is in many respects a successful one, with Wiltshire telling that, in the penultimate paragraph of the story, "there's no manner of doubt that [Uma]'s an A1 wife" ("The Beach of Falesá" 71). The only victim, as the curtain falls, is Case, killed by Wiltshire in their final confrontation: a rather tame result, compared with the several deaths of Shakespeare's story. Why should Stevenson, assuming he is at the very least taking inspiration from *Othello*, opt for a relatively happy ending in his rewriting?

One possibility could be, if Stevenson is indeed interested in *Othello* because it centres on the predicament of an interracial couple, that he finds Othello's and Desdemona's relationship dynamic useful to think about but unsatisfactory in itself. Shakespeare's tragic ending, after all, cuts short the complications of interracial love—and his Venetian tale seem to provide a bleak, fatalistic answer to questions of coexistence and fair treatment of racialized others (see Bassi, *Pianeta Ofelia* 113-14). Stevenson is perhaps more interested in exploring how, and to what extent, that kind of relationship could work; as much as through which compromises and contradictions. Subverting the original relationship dynamic, therefore, might be necessary to comment on interracial relationships as he actually witnessed them in the Pacific. Registering these complexities could be part of his realist project for the Pacific, doing

justice to the experiences of both the interracial couples he had met while travelling as well as to the mixed unions—and children—he had significant experience of during his stay in Samoa (see Treagus 316-18).

Ursula K. Le Guin, in her essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," advocates, among other things, for a realist approach to (science) fiction focused on a kind of narrative that explores mundane, though complex, relationships, as opposed to a tragic/triumphant/heroic narratives based on conflict. In this respect, she points out that such realist narrative "cannot be characterized either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but continuing process" (Le Guin 168-69). Somewhat similarly, Stevenson is interested in interracial relationships as, in Le Guin's words, a continuous process: complex, contradictory, even conflictual, but neither inherently tragic nor harmonious. To explore that, tragedy—or idyll, for that matter—will not do. What results is Uma and Wiltshire's union, which explores some of the possibilities and the limitations of interracial love. Stevenson does not hide the unequal power relations and ambiguities from which the relationship emerges, which are never actually resolved, as Wiltshire's final words imply. Nevertheless, the relationship can survive, develop and be explored in its complexities thanks to crucial variations from Shakespeare's model.

In a way, Stevenson's choices, in envisioning his exploration of interracial relationships, anticipate a number of key insights from another, much more explicit, rewriting of *Othello*: Toni Morrison's *Desdemona* (2012). Conceived as a play-concert in unison with Malian singer Rokia Traoré and director Peter Sellars, Morrison's rewriting imagines a timeless afterlife in which *Othello*'s characters, to an extent delivered from the constraints of life, are free to engage with each other in dialogue. This situation provides them with the confrontations that death and the world has denied them (although none of these confrontations is even remotely easy or frictionless). This approach allows Morrison to further explore the background and motivations of various major and minor Shakespearean characters, including Desdemona, who is both forced to confront her own mistakes and privileges as well as allowed to confront

Othello on their relationship. What interests me is the very last conversation between Othello and Desdemona, which, I think, reads Shake-speare's characters in a way that curiously resonates with Uma and Wiltshire. Commenting on their downfall, Desdemona says:

DESDEMONA True. Yet Cassio lives to rule and we do not because love cannot survive without trust.

Your doubt and my righteousness mangled our love.

# To which Othello replies:

OTHELLO We should have had such honest talk, not fantasy, the evening we wed. (Morrison 54)

I would like to suggest that this is exactly the kind of revision of Othello that Stevenson imagines, in order to represent an interracial relationship that can work in spite of lingering contradictions. He, too, portrays two individuals from different cultures, within an uneven power relation, that fall in love with a fantasy of each other. At first, Wiltshire alternates between seeing Uma as an exotic erotic object or, in a whitewashing operation that he initially uses to justify his growing affection, through images of European womanhood ("some girl at home in the Old Country," and "a countess [...] dressed to hear great singers at a concert"; "The Beach of Falesá" 12). These visions respond to Wiltshire's contradictory needs—his aspiration to perform a proper white colonial masculinity, and his search for emotional connection—but both crystallize Uma in a role that has little to do with the person she really is. Uma's initial vision of Wiltshire is equally abstract, though her exact motivations may be more difficult to ascertain. She may be genuinely (and, at first, erroneously) convinced that Wiltshire is inherently more honest than other white people; or she might be strategic in her show of affection, knowing full well that Wiltshire, who, from her perspective, is determined to wed her in spite of her taboo, might be her only chance to marry. At any rate, both characters initially project their (pragmatic, ideological or sentimental) aspirations onto the other person.

That could be the recipe for disaster, but Uma and Wiltshire manage to establish trust by dispelling the fantasy that they had of each other—and, in Wiltshire's case, by making amends for his initial deception—so that their love can survive. This is how Wiltshire describes the beginning of their intimacy, though this technically precedes his full confession: "I didn't pretend to myself, and I didn't pretend to her. I saw I was clean gone; and if she was to make a fool of me, she must. And I suppose it was this that set her talking, for now she made sure that we were friends" (30). Both Uma and Wiltshire, from their different gender, racial and material predicaments, accept the risks of a more even intimacy. Wiltshire, in particular, lets go of the uneven intimacy, based on deceit, that he had initially planned, and in this way enables the "honest talk, not fantasy" that Desdemona and Othello never had.

The honest talk in "Falesá" largely consists, in a further subversion of *Othello*'s tropes, in Uma's life story. Uma, in other words, takes up the role of storyteller herself, but, consistently with the revision Stevenson is operating, her tale is not a fantasy: unlike Othello's beguiling but manipulative fabulations, it is a clarifying tale. From a pragmatic point of view, Uma's story has many functions: it fully reveals Case's knowledge of Uma's taboo, so that it is clear that he had set them up together to eliminate Wiltshire as a business rival; and it finally makes Wiltshire fully accept his responsibilities and seek out, soon afterwards, a missionary, so that they can be properly married. But it also includes a crucial exchange that defines their relationship and further sets them apart from their early modern counterparts, and is in a sense the heart of the honest talk. Uma tells Wiltshire that, at some point, she had received a wedding proposal from an island chief, and she would have liked very much to marry him:

He was a small chief, and had some fine mats and old songs in his family, and was "very pretty," Uma said; and, altogether, it was an extraordinary match for a penniless girl and an out-islander. At the first word of this I got downright sick with jealousy.

<sup>&</sup>quot;And you mean to say you would have married him?" I cried.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Ioe, yes," said she. "I like too much!"

<sup>&</sup>quot;Well!" I said. "And suppose I had come round after?"

"I like you more better now," said she. "But, suppose I marry Ioane, I one good wife. I no common Kanaka. Good girl!" says she.

Well, I had to be pleased with that; but I promise you I didn't care about the business one little bit. ("The Beach of Falesá" 31)

In a complete reversal of the festering role of jealousy in Othello, Wiltshire's nascent jealousy is addressed only to be completely deflated by Uma's confidence and unfailing ability to cut through Wiltshire's nonsense. Uma does not reply to Wiltshire's hypotheticals in a way that satisfies his ego-denying her attraction for Ioane or the fact that she was willing to marry him; yet, at the same time, she uses the exchange to comment on and establish the earnestness of her commitments. After all, as Sylvie Largeaud-Ortéga argues in reference to the wedding, Uma had taken the union seriously from the beginning: "Because Uma believes the wedding ceremony is genuine, she and her mother dutifully perform the necessary Polynesian wedding rituals" (Largeaud-Ortéga, "Stevenson's 'Little Tale' is 'A Library'" 122). In other words, differently from Desdemona, Uma is able to express her sexual desires, but she simultaneously pushes against misogynist/racial stereotypes. More precisely, she undercuts the hypersexualization of Polynesian women, previously voiced by both Case and Wiltshire.

Introducing a dose of realism, emotional sincerity and accountability, which also undermines exploitative gender/racial constructions, Uma forces Wiltshire, however reluctantly, to concede and let go of his unreasonable feelings of jealousy. This resolution of the conflict establishes a healthier dynamic between the two that allows their relationship to prosper despite Wiltshire's anxieties, insecurity and lingering racism. Uma's wit and wisdom, and the fact that she does not tolerate her husband's potentially (self-)destructive and toxic qualities, plays a crucial role in enabling their relationship to work.

By possessing those qualities, I argue, Uma *is* a reimagining of Desdemona, even if their fate (and race and class) is drastically different. When Desdemona is allowed to speak, she "demonstrates a linguistic power of persuasion equal to Othello's" (Erickson 3), most notably in

her impeccable, bold yet strategic, perfectly reasonable but utterly implacable reply to her father when he asks her, in relation to her wedding to Othello, "where most you owe obedience?" (1.3.170):

My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty.
To you I am bound for life and education:
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty.
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband:
And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord. (1.3.180-89)

Desdemona's stance here, walking a fine line between respect and boldness, is echoed by Uma's "kind of an obeisance, but [...] the proudest kind" (28) which accompanies her revelation that the taboo belongs to her. Moreover, her astonishing courage at the end of the tale, when, battling her fear of the aitus, she runs to warn Wiltshire, in the bush, that Case is coming to kill him, matches Desdemona's, as she performs an "act of astonishing disobedience [...] that unsettles the orthodox schema of hierarchical obedience" (Greenblatt 240). However, if "the overall outcome of Othello is the silencing of Desdemona" (Erickson 3), the outcome of "Falesá" is, at least, a validation of Uma's voice, as the narrative acknowledges "Uma's role as a guide" (Largeaud-Ortéga, "Stevenson's 'Little Tale' is 'A Library'"119). Her insights, in her exchanges with Wiltshire, are given the chance to steer her relationship with her husband towards a happier development; and her observations, actions and tales variously direct Wiltshire's struggle against Case, as well as leading him to overcome his isolation among the islanders (see Largeaud-Ortéga, "Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Voyage of Discovery"). This makes her a partial vindication of Desdemona, namely a rewriting of the tragic fate of Shakespeare's character that is consistent with how, in Stevenson Pacific short fiction, women systematically save their husbands with their courage and resourcefulness (Jolly, Introduction xxi).

To conclude, let us briefly return to the final conversation between Othello and Desdemona in Morrison's play; specifically, the following exchange:

DESDEMONA Alone together we could have been invincible.
OTHELLO And now? Together? Alone? Is it too late?
DESDEMONA 'Late' has no meaning here. Here there is only the possibility of wisdom. (55)

In this passage, and with Desdemona's final words in the play—"We will be judged by how well we love" (56)—Morrison is clearly subverting Othello's "Of one that loved not wisely but too well" as well as his exclamation "It is too late" (5.2.83), which he cries out as he smothers his wife. But does this exchange tell us something about Uma and Wiltshire too? How well—and how wisely—do they love each other at the end of the tale? As I have discussed in this final section of the essay, the answer is far from simple, especially as, even with its final paragraph, "Falesá" mars the perfect happy ending. Stevenson, indeed, does not offer an idyllic representation of interracial love to replace Shakespeare's tragic bleakness. But, by crafting a story in which relationships, interracial or otherwise, are not simply resolved, neither happily nor tragically, but are shown as a messy open process, he does insist, like Morrison, on the possibility of wisdom.

Ca' Foscari University Venice

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>"The Beach of Falesá" has a complicated and controversial editorial history. It variously entailed editorial expurgations, unauthorized interpolations and substantial bowdlerization of the original manuscript, which Stevenson was only partly and intermittently able to resist. This process resulted in the publication of several different and often non-authoritative versions of the text between 1892 and 1893. The letter to Sydney Colvin I discuss in the second section of this essay is but a small part of the arguments Stevenson had with his editors about "Falesá." Such editorial history has been studied in detail by Barry Menikoff, whose critical edition, published by Stanford UP in 1984, is based on the original manuscript. The edition I use for this essay is the 1996 OUP edition, edited by Roslyn Jolly. This edition incorporates some key variants and passages from the manuscript, but otherwise uses, as copy-text, the 1893 text published in *Island Nights' Entertainments*, "on the grounds that it represents the latest version of the story corrected by the author" (Jolly, "Notes on the Texts" xxxiv). I find Jolly's philological reasoning convincing, hence my choice.

<sup>2</sup>To what extent this is supposed to be a clean break with Stevenson's previous poetics is up for debate, and the perspective might change depending on which part of Stevenson's Pacific writings is discussed. For instance, Philip Steer, focusing on *The Ebb-Tide* and *The Wrecker*, argues that "Stevenson's attempts to portray the Pacific 'realistically' took the form not of realism but of romance" (351), albeit a *critical* romance that is actively modified "to draw out its potential for offering a critical account of the spatiality produced in the region by western trade and investment" (344).

<sup>3</sup>The topic is central, of course, also to *The Winter's Tale*.

<sup>4</sup>On this approach to comparison from a world-literary perspective, see, for instance, Warwick Research Collective; Deckard and Shapiro; Shapiro.

<sup>5</sup>Othello is a refined and accomplished orator, whose eloquence represents a significant part of his seductive power. Although he claims, with false modesty, to be "rude [...] in [his] speech" (1.3.82), he is anything but. Conversely, Wiltshire, *is* rude in speech, since he is, in Menikoff's words, "a semiliterate trader" who "was not schooled in the English language" and whom Stevenson consistently characterizes through an "oral and colloquial style" (Menikoff 35), as it emerges particularly in the original manuscript.

<sup>6</sup>Shaul Bassi defines Iago's racism as pretextual, because he probably does not believe in all he claims about Othello but uses it to remorselessly advance his aims (see *Pianeta Ofelia* 116). In a somewhat similar fashion, Roslyn Jolly, while commenting that traders like Wiltshire and Case, as agents of an informal colonialism, can hardly legitimize their actions in the Pacific through their links with the British empire, comments that "the difference between the two traders is that Case is aware of the fictional nature of his status as an imperialist, while Wiltshire never seems to grasp that his connection to the empire is little more than rhetorical" ("Piracy, Slavery, and the Imagination of Empire" 162).

<sup>7</sup>It is worth noting that *Othello*, genre-wise, is "a political tragedy bleeding into a domestic one, and vice versa" (Thompson 12), while "Falesá" has been defined as "a generic hybrid, its deepest and most consistent affiliations [being] with the feminine realm of domestic fiction" that Stevenson uses to "debunk" imperial romance (Jolly, "Stevenson's 'Sterling Domestic Fiction'" 464).

<sup>8</sup>After listening to Uma's tale and noticing the arrival of the missionary, Wiltshire comments: "I thought it was a strange thing I should be glad to have a missionary; but, if it was strange, it was still true" ("The Beach of Falesá" 32). This repetition of "strange" is a noteworthy formal parallelism to how Desdemona is said to react to Othello's life story: "She swore in faith 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange" (1.3.161).

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# Liminality, Art, and Murder in Paula Hawkins's *The Blue Hour*

ROBERT LANCE SNYDER

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#### **Abstract**

Best known for her highly successful first novel *The Girl on the Train* (2015), Paula Hawkins returns in *The Blue Hour* (2024), after a Gothic novella titled *Blind Spot* (2022), to the narratological complexity that characterized *Into the Water* (2017) and *A Slow Fire Burning* (2021). The concept of liminality is the thematic focus of her most recent crime story as it pertains not only to the tale's tidal setting on Eris Island in the Outer Hebrides but also to such issues as art, murder, and feminism. The tale revolves around two women, artist Vanessa Chapman and general practitioner Grace Haswell, who despite their differences in age, background, and temperament become each other's default guardians. After Chapman's death Haswell serves as executor of the painter's estate, in which capacity she warily allows James Becker, an ardent admirer of Chapman's *oeuvre* and a curator for the Fairburn Foundation, access to the artist's diary. Over the course of their interaction Becker learns too late for his own well-being the compulsions that drove both women in the sanctuary they sought on Eris Island.

Reviewers of Paula Hawkins's corpus of fiction often allege that, after the bestselling success of her debut novel *The Girl on the Train* (2015), she has moved in a more "literary" direction with her psychological thrillers.<sup>1</sup> While not wholly inaccurate, the claim seems to equate soaring sales worldwide and a film adaptation with lesser fare. Even so it

cannot be denied that, with the narratological complexity of Into the Water (2017) and A Slow Fire Burning (2021), Hawkins gravitated toward a more refracted, layered, and polyphonic form of storytelling.<sup>2</sup> Her 120page novella Blind Spot (2022), issued by Penguin Random House as a paperback, signaled a retrenchment of sorts as she stripped her tale of everything except its Gothic skeleton. With Hawkins's next effort, The Blue Hour (2024), those who follow this author's career are immersed once again in a compelling crime story that engages with such issues as art, feminism, and misogyny. Liminality is conveyed through the tidal flux that governs the novel's setting, an island connected to the Scottish mainland by a causeway that floods twice in every twenty-four hours. For those stranded on Eris Island, the prospect is delicately balanced, like the threshold between sleep and wakefulness, at "'l'heure bleue'" of either dawn or dusk (218; cf. 274). The present essay argues that, beyond its meteorological implications, the trope of liminality also pertains to other tenuous margins involving art and murder in Hawkins's narrative.

The novelist prepares for this thematic focus by juxtaposing characters of entrenched sociocultural standing with those of a more independent spirit who have ventured beyond their backgrounds. A leading example of the latter is James Becker, earlier in life a "fatherless bastard of a supermarket checkout girl" and "state-school boy in a cheap suit" (7), who now works as a curator at the Fairburn Foundation after strategically befriending the son of its former director, Douglas Lennox, while at university. Another such agent, though a psychologically troubled one, is Grace Haswell, a general practitioner in her mid-sixties whom artist Vanessa Chapman appointed executor of her estate before dying of cancer five years ago in October 2016. Completing the group of focal personae is the painter and ceramicist herself, who ever since she moved from Oxfordshire to Eris Island in 1997 revels in the freedom to "answer to no one, only the tide" (19).3 In contrast to these characters, the secondary cast—Sebastian Lennox, his mother Lady Emmeline, and Becker's wife Helena (née Fitzgerald)—is comprised of fairly static, two-dimensional figures. Given the centrality of what transpires on Eris

Island, Hawkins's fourth novel according to one source presents "an exploration of obsession in its many forms" reminiscent of Patricia Highsmith and Daphne du Maurier (Rev. of *The Blue Hour*). Supporting this claim is the fact that *The Blue Hour* makes intertextual mention of du Maurier's haunting *Rebecca* (1938), "The Birds" (1952), and *Don't Look Now* (1971), while also referring twice to Artemisia Gentileschi's early Baroque painting *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (see 27, 28, 231; 51, 247). Because the latter is widely regarded as a depiction of strong women, an interviewer for CrimeReads.com found a pronounced streak of feminism in Hawkins's most recent narrative (see Hawkins, "Paula Hawkins Talks Art"). While this claim is doubtlessly true, the fiercely independent Vanessa Chapman is also depicted as vulnerable in her artistic passions.

In her personal life, at least up to mid-2002, Vanessa was still beguiled intermittently by her estranged husband Julian, a spendthrift given to "a devil-may-care approach to life" (16) who, while involved with a wealthy lover named Celia Gray, visited Vanessa on Eris Island but never returned from the trip. His unaccountable disappearance raises suspicions of foul play, particularly because his distinctive sportscar, a red Duetto Spider 1600, was never found. Aside from these disturbances, however, Vanessa Chapman devotes herself unsparingly to her art as she struggles to develop a distinctive style somewhere, according to her critics, between abstraction and figuration. Driven to be "singleminded," as she writes in her diary, because she must "put work at the heart of my life" (53), Vanessa increasingly finds that art becomes the only medium by which she is revitalized. A yearning for the illimitable has its counterpart for her in dark seascapes. As she puts it in another of her diary entries, "The sky challenges, but the sea confounds: restless, ever-changing, the deep round swell of it, the violence" (96). What she seeks to capture on her canvases, readers can infer, is the dynamic and constantly shifting liminality of the ocean itself.

The other main characters are distinguished by their consuming devotion to Vanessa Chapman: Grace Haswell as her live-in companion and James Becker as an ardent researcher of the artist's *oeuvre*. In both

cases their admiration for Chapman is traceable to personal circumstances involving their pasts. Ever since Nick Riley, a boy she knew as an undergraduate, "abandoned her" (78), Grace over the ensuing decades has sought to escape her loneliness by becoming a "provincial GP" (59). After treating Vanessa for a broken wrist in 1998, she became entranced by her patient's solitary way of life on Eris Island and, except for "an eighteen-month period when Grace left the island and took a temporary job in the north of England, the year following Julian Chapman's disappearance" (116), has shared Vanessa's retreat ever since. James Becker's fascination with the artist is also rooted in the past. Happily married to his seven-months pregnant wife Helena, the Fairburn Foundation curator explains in an email letter to Grace Haswell, hoping to persuade her to allow him access to Vanessa Chapman's papers, that his awareness of the artist began when he was thirteen. At that age, though "clueless about art" (60), he searched through the belongings of his mother, a "talented watercolorist" before as an unwed mother she had to drop out of college and take a menial job (59), in a futile attempt to find a cherished eight-by-five-inch oil painting by Chapman that she had bought. Years later, Becker recounts, he acquired the 1993 work titled Hedgerow with his first paycheck from Christie's auction house.4 The personal confession persuades Haswell, who on their first meeting had rejected him as an intrusive outsider, to grant him a second visit.

From this point onward Chapman's executor and the Fairburn emissary, both of whom are servitors, come to a working agreement whereby the artist's legacy will be honored. For her part Grace will entrust James with some of Vanessa's private notebooks and letters, in return for which he will ensure that no more threats of legal action are mounted by the Foundation he represents. The bargain works well initially, though later it will lead to outcomes that neither party could have foreseen. These include the novel's subsequent revelation that, owing to her emotional scarring in the past, the woman whom Sebastian Lennox dismissively characterizes as the "'Wicked Witch of Eris Island'" (12), owing to her reluctance to relinquish all of Chapman's work, is what criminologists often consider a borderline serial murderer. Before

divulging that twist, however, *The Blue Hour* adumbrates a homicide committed by Lady Emmeline Lennox, the imperious and silver-haired dowager who presides at the Fairfield estate and whom Becker considers an "'[e]vil hag'" (15) because of her patrician condescension toward him.

Hawkins's novel initially leads readers to view these two older women as antitypes. Near the beginning, for example, she writes of Haswell that "All the years on Eris Island—more than twenty of them now—have made Grace tidal. A lunatic. An actual lunatic! Governed by the moon" (21). As though to reinforce that diegetic comment, the text immediately mentions Grace Haswell's charitable kindness toward "[a]nother lunatic" named Marguerite, who lives in a cottage at the harbor (22). Now in her seventies, the addled native from Brittany is still obsessively worried that her abusive husband Stuart Cummins, who has been gone for more than twenty years, might return to hurt her again. Interwoven with that backstory is an account recorded in Vanessa Chapman's diary of how Grace prevented Cummins from raping Vanessa in her studio by wrapping a clay-cutting wire around his neck and restraining him until police arrived an hour and a half afterwards (see 136-37). Chapman later depicted her initial encounter with Cummins in a painting titled Black II,5 but as a consequence of the assault Haswell moved to Eris Island while continuing to work at a hospital on the mainland. If "All the years on Eris Island [...] have made Grace tidal," Hawkins implicitly is paralleling Haswell's impulse toward murderous violence with the sea's liminal power that Vanessa Chapman seeks to capture in her art.

Ostensibly far different from Grace Haswell as a "provincial GP" is the haughty matron at Fairfield who presides, if only by longevity, over the estate, but she too figures in the novel as a vengeful madwoman, if not quite a lunatic. Roughly a third of the way into *The Blue Hour* it is mentioned that Lady Emmeline Lennox, later said to be a crack markswoman worthy of competing in the Olympics (see 177), "'accidentally shot her husband in the neck'" while hunting together, "'and he bled

out in front of her.'" Upon hearing his employer recount the event and say "'That's just the way it went,'" James Becker skeptically recalls:

The way it went was that Mr. Bryant, the gamekeeper, who is not much younger than Sebastian's mother and has worked for her family since he was a teenager, claimed that the stray shot came from his gun, sparing Lady Emmeline the ordeal of a police investigation and all the press intrusion that would go with it. There was an investigation, which cleared Bryant of any wrongdoing—the fault, if there were any, lay with Douglas himself, who had walked ahead of the guns and put himself in harm's way—and [Bryant] retired a few months later. Quite possibly, Becker thinks, with a rather more generous pension than he might have been expecting. (87; italics in original)

Lady Emmeline shot her husband Douglas after she was humiliated by firsthand evidence of his sexual encounters with Vanessa Chapman (see 111), but compounding the matriarch's disgrace is that an "actual lunatic," namely Grace Haswell, is aware of what transpired. "'I could make life difficult for that family if I put my mind to it'" (248), Haswell boasts to Becker, and subsequently she does so by telling police that she has reason to believe Douglas Lennox's death was not accidental.

The Blue Hour thus traces an arc of women's desperation leading to homicide that is rooted in the overpowering need for simple respect. To state the case quite so baldly, though, risks reductionism because, unlike Lady Emmeline's, the circumstances faced by Grace Haswell are far more severe. Chronologically, she first commits murder when in 1993 an emaciated Nick Riley, whom she had met more than a decade earlier, shows up at her clinic in Carrachan, and Grace, while billeting him in her small house, attends to restoring his health. Upon his arrival she thinks to herself: "This is what the end of loneliness felt like [...]. It felt like the end of hostilities: with the world, with herself. It felt like the beginning of possibility" (290). That prospect is crushed, however, when during an outing on Eris Island he announces his intention to leave the next day in order to "'track Audrey down'" in Manchester (293), the same girl with whom, though all three were "'flatmates for a while'" (155), he abandoned Grace on an overseas camping trip in 1981. While quarrelling over Nick's current plans, which for Grace reprise

painful memories, he stumbles into the pit of an upended tree and, after he drags himself to level ground, she without "really understanding what was happening, without *intention*," closes her "butcher's hands" around his throat (295). The human rib that, at the novel's beginning, is found in Vanessa Chapman's glass-enclosed piece titled *Division II*, circa 2005, becomes a relic that attests to Grace Haswell's initial crime.

Her second murder also occurs as a direct consequence of male dismissal, mockery, and humiliation. Nine years later, before Julian Chapman went missing in 2002, he showed up in Vanessa's kitchen, and the next day, passing beneath an open window, Grace heard him referring to her as *la petite boule de suif*. When, on the following afternoon, Vanessa explains that the epithet means "butterball" but was not intended cruelly, Haswell bristles at her friend's casual dismissal of the derogatory characterization. "'Men like him,'" she fulminates,

"have a special kind of contempt for women like me—ugly women. I've felt it all my life. An ugly woman is barely human to a man like your husband. It's sickening but not all that shocking. What's worse, what is utterly abject, is the way that women like you—the pretty, the chosen—the way you collude in that contempt." (147-48; italics in original)

Understandably hurt by her friend's insensitivity to the chauvinistic slight, Grace accepts Vanessa's apology but a few days later finds her kneeling in her studio with a bloodied hand. After a brief trip to Glasgow, before which Vanessa left a note for Julian discontinuing further financial support and saying that "now we can be free of each other" (160), he, in revenge, had destroyed several of her ceramics and canvases, and she had cut herself while picking up the pieces. Pursuant to a police inquiry about the missing Julian, it is revealed fifteen chapters later that he had returned to Eris Island during Vanessa's absence and belligerently claimed that she was planning to go abroad with him a few months thereafter. Outraged at yet another threat of abandonment, Grace swings a mason's hammer, "smashing it into his temple and shattering his skull" (262). Subsequently, "with an undeniable surge of pleasure" (275), she maneuvers Julian's corpse into the septic tank behind Vanessa's house.

In contrast to these other homicides, the third, with which Hawkins's novel ends, is quite different in terms of victim and circumstances. Having come to enjoy James Becker's company during his visits, Grace Haswell, at the same time, jealously guards her relationship with the artist, keeping to herself a 2003 letter that Vanessa had written to her in Carlisle saying, "I don't want you to come back to Eris. You know things you shouldn't, and I'm not sure how to be around you again,"6 though that communication was followed by a plangent note reading "I need you. Please, come" (117; underlining in original). Not privy to this private correspondence, Becker tries to reconstruct Vanessa's career from her diary entries and notebooks, all the while worrying about his pregnant wife Helena during his absences from home. Although aware that "Grace is hiding things from him" (157), James is astonished to learn that in Vanessa's final days Haswell had injected her companion with morphine when cancer had metastasized to her brain. Upon divulging this secret, Grace assures Becker: "'Everything is for her protection, you see. Everything I did, everything I do'" (179). That justification apparently extends to her having hidden three of Vanessa's canvases, including one titled *Totem*, and the final painting in her *Black* series,<sup>7</sup> which James happens to see. While preparing to leave Eris Island for the mainland on the day after a storm, he searches for his car key, but Grace has hidden it in a drawer. Before his departure, atop a granite cliff overlooking the Irish Sea, she confesses to having murdered Julian Chapman, prompting a disillusioned and repulsed Becker to regard Vanessa's sanctuary as "a place of [...] horror" (279). Recognizing that her visitor might divulge to police what he has learned, Grace now sees that she has "gambled" by her disclosure and "Becker has lost" (283). The Blue Hour's final pages describe how she administers morphine to her physically nauseated visitor and leaves him to drown in his car on the causeway as the incoming tide submerges it.

By virtue of its narratological complexity Hawkins's fourth novel marks her return to the style of *Into the Water* and *A Slow Fire Burning*, but at its displaced center is the story of a woman who, much like Rachel Watson in *The Girl on the Train*, finds herself capable of murderous

violence when exploited by men, including someone as benign but opportunistic as James Becker. Before his death she contemplates what seems to her the absurdity of her situation:

Grace thinks of herself in a lot of different ways. Like anyone, she could describe herself with any number of adjectives: conscientious, hardworking, loyal, strange, lonely, unhappy, good. She is a doctor, a friend, a carer. She is a killer. She says the word quietly to herself, sounding it out. It sounds absurd, melodramatic. Protector, she thinks. Mercy killer. But kill three, she has heard, and that makes you a serial killer. She almost wants to laugh. It's ridiculous, it's like saying you're a unicorn. Three strikes and you're in. (297)

The reflection attests to Grace Haswell's insight into the reductionism of legal categories that fail to acknowledge the complexity of human experience and motivation. Hawkins's emotionally crippled character devotes herself unsparingly to Vanessa Chapman because she glimpses in her, at least when she is wholly immersed in an artistic project, a strong woman who can transcend or ignore the limitations of everyday life. *The Blue Hour* thus is consistent with Emma Roche's recent interrogation of the reformulated romance genre in a postmillennial and postfeminist era. Because liminality figures so prominently in Hawkins's most recent novel, it can be extrapolated to suggest where her main female characters find themselves today.

University of West Georgia Carollton, GA

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>For a recent example of this inclination, see Moira Redmond's review titled "Paula Hawkins' New Thriller Is Even Better than *The Girl on the Train.*"

<sup>2</sup>I have discussed these narratological features in "Geographies of Memory: Paula Hawkins's *Into the Water* and *A Slow Fire Burning.*"

<sup>3</sup>This passage derives from the first of many excerpts from Vanessa Chapman's diary that appear between the novel's chapters. The publisher renders these interstitial excerpts in a different font than the main narrative. I have not tried to replicate this typographical distinction.

<sup>4</sup>It warrants mention that in his email Becker also quotes from memory a statement by Chapman about what painting meant to her: "'Art is legacy, it is solace. It soothes, consoles, arouses. It's work. It's what you do all day. It's how you work things out, how you understand the world. It's the opportunity to start over, to shed your skin, to take revenge, to fall in love. To be good. To live long'" (60-61).

<sup>5</sup>The painting, coupled with Vanessa Chapman's diary entry about the attempted rape and her rescue by Grace Haswell, constitutes an intertextual parallel to Gentileschi's representation of Judith and her maidservant's collaboration in assassinating the Assyrian general Holofernes.

<sup>6</sup>In its iteration of the passage in which Vanessa writes to Grace that "I <u>don't</u> want you to come back to Eris. You know things you shouldn't, and I'm not sure how to be around you again," the novel reveals her closing comment that "We need to be free of each other now." When Becker reads the words in a letter he has secretly purloined, he thinks: "We need to be free of each other—almost exactly the same words Vanessa used in her note to Julian Chapman. […] What does Grace know?" (208; italics in original).

<sup>7</sup>When Becker happens to view the paintings, Grace explains that the third is an abstract rendering of her hovering over a prostrate and immobilized Stuart Cummins until police arrive.

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# From Illustration to Meme: The Pictorial Representation of Duality in Editions of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

Wolfgang G. Müller

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This article is the first entry in a debate on "From Illustration to Meme: The Pictorial Representation of Duality in Editions of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*" (<a href="http://www.connotations.de/debate/from-illustrations-to-meme">http://www.connotations.de/debate/from-illustrations-to-meme</a>). If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to <a href="mailto:editors@connotations.de">editors@connotations.de</a>.

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#### **Abstract**

This essay investigates illustrations of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr.* Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), spanning the time from the pictorial representations of the beginning of the twentieth century to the memes of the digital age. As the title of the tale suggests, its focus is on two figures who turn out to be actually manifestations of one person. The orientation on a pair of two closely interrelated figures is rendered in the illustrations in increasingly inventive ways, while the text retains its incomparable art of suggestion and implication. The main object of the article is to explore the ways illustrators have risen to the challenge of representing duality. Extensive attention is given to Macauley's illustrations (1904), which are quite close to the text, capturing the atmosphere of the city, describing the main figures and their actions as well as presenting moments and motifs which reflect the phenomenon of duality. Important graphical and aesthetic innovations are verified in S. G. Hulme Beaman's illustrations (1930). Hulme Beaman's cover illustration is interpreted as heralding, in the representation of the names of Jekyll and Hyde together with the pictorial representation, the arrival of the meme as a unit of cultural discourse. The memes of Jekyll and Hyde have, in their wide distribution over the world, become an important element of popular culture.

#### Introduction

Among the multitude of possible relationships between different literary works, the re-use or variation of pre-existent figures (characters) plays an important part, a phenomenon which has been called interfigurality (Müller, "Interfigurality"). A specific re-use of literary figures, which is relevant in the context of the present paper, is the transfer of the figure(s) into visual media such as plays, films, musicals, paintings and book illustrations (Müller, "Literary Figure into Pictorial Image"). This transfer presents a particular artistic challenge if the identity of the figures is fluid, as is the case in Stevenson's narrative: the title of the text suggests two protagonists, identified by name on the cover or frontispiece of the book, which assigns to them separate civic identities (Dr., Mr.). In the course of the narrative these personages prove to be actually one figure or, more precisely, two insolubly connected variants or versions of one and the same person.

This paper attempts to show how illustrators have made efforts to give graphic clues to the dualistic nature of the pair of Jekyll and Hyde. However, we have to be aware that illustrations of a novel do not and cannot simply provide pictorial equivalents of narrative givens, since the two media have their own aesthetic principles as much as modes of expression and production. The titular figures of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are from first to last characterized by such a pervasive interconnectedness and ambiguity in their narrative presentation that an analogous graphic representation of their duality can hardly reach the complexity and sophistication of the original written text. More specifically, we have to be aware of the fact that Stevenson's tale presents a sequence of different perspectives. We perceive the action and the involved characters through the eyes of varying figures who are differentiated by the author in a masterly manner. This technique can hardly be responded to in illustrations. Yet illustrators have produced miraculous results in their attempts to represent Jekyll and Hyde and their shared identity, even if—or because—they deviate from the original at times. An important aspect of the reception of the pair of Jekyll and Hyde is the fact that in the digital age the meme as "a unit of cultural transmission, or a

unit of imitation" (Dawkins) becomes a a key instrument for the dissemination of this configuration. It is by the meme that Jekyll and Hyde gained unparalleled presence in popular culture. And the meme equally turns out to be a catalyst even in deluxe illustrated editions of Stevenson's work.<sup>1</sup>

Charles Raymond Macauley's Edition (1904) as an Early Illustrated *Jekyll and Hyde* 

Before we deal with individual illustrations of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a brief word on terminology and a general comment on illustrated versions of Stevenson's novel is necessary. It has to be stressed that Stevenson never designed his text as an illustrated narrative. That is why the term "iconotext," used by Peter Wagner and others for narrative works that, like Dickens's novels, combine both verbal and visual representation, is inadequate for the text under discussion. Standard editions confine themselves to the text and do without illustrations, except for the occasional use of cover images (and a few other instances like the one in fig. 1). Yet Stevenson's text has so much descriptive strength and evocative power that a transformation into a graphic mode of representation comes as no surprise.

The first edition of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* appeared in 1886; the first illustrated edition, crafted by Charles Raymond Macauley, was published in 1904. Later editions, especially those designed for teaching purposes, for instance Usborne English Readers Level 3 (illus. Valdrigi, 2021), and comics, for instance Classics Illustrated (illus. Cameron, 2016), offer illustrations with a marked tendency to reduce the textual component while enhancing the visual dimension. The process of a popularization of a literary work with an avid reception by other media and genres such as theatre, musical, film and comic can here be observed in an exemplary way. The focus of the following investigation will be mainly on the rendition of the relation between Jekyll and Hyde. It will be asked if, and if so, in which ways the two media brought together in this case interact cognitively and aesthetically, and if there is

something like a semantic and aesthetic surplus to be noticed in this amalgamation.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde till at last I got into that state of mind when a man listens and listens and begins to long for the sight of a policeman. All at once, I saw two figures: one a little man who was stumping along eastward at a good walk, and the other a girl of maybe eight or ten who was running as hard as she was able down a cross street. Well, sir, the two ran into one another naturally enough at the corner; and then came the horrible part of the thing; for the man trampled calmly over the child's body and left her screaming on the ground. It sounds nothing to hear, but it was hellish to see. It wasn't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut. I gave a view halloo, took to my heels, collared my gentleman, and brought him back to where there was already quite a group about the screaming child. He was perfectly cool and made no resistance, but gave me one look, so ugly that it brought out the sweat on me like running. The people who had turned out were the girl's own family; and pretty soon, the doctor, for whom she had been sent put in his appearance. Well, the child was not much the worse, more frightened, according to the Sawbones; and there you might have supposed would be an end to it. But there was one curious circumstance. I had taken a loathing to my gentleman at first sight. So had the child's family, which was only natural. But the doctor's case was what struck me. He was the usual cut and dry apothecary, of no particular age and color, with a strong Edinburgh accent and about as emotional

Fig. 1: "Story of the Door" by Charles Raymond Macauley (1904). Rpt. in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde.* Orinda, CA: SeaWolf P, 2023.

The first illustration from Macauley's edition to be commented on, actually one of the smallest illustrations in the edition, is Mr. Hyde's act of callous indifference against the little girl close to the door of his habitation (fig. 1). Though the illustration, which is integrated into the narrative text, may seem sketchy, it is rewarding to have a closer look. It does not and cannot represent the action in its temporal progression, but it singles out a moment which it arrests in such a way that the reader/spectator can sense and quasi co-experience the forward motion of the "Juggernaut," as he is called (Tusitala Edition 3). The opposition of aggressor and helpless victim is expressed by the contrast of size and position of the abuser and the girl, who is trampled over and is now lying stretched out helplessly on the pavement. An aspect to be noted is Hyde's body height. He is repeatedly referred to as a small

man, the opposite of a stately person. The illustration appears to strongly contrast with Hyde's small body height as noted in the text. Incidentally, in "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case" Dr. Jekyll provides a plausible explanation for the fact "that Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter, and younger than Henry Jekyll" (Tusitala Edition 60-61).

Another significant aspect is that Stevenson makes Enfield, a manabout-town, recount the scene to the lawyer Utterson. Enfield is a rather straightforward man. He feels outraged by what has happened and compares Hyde to Satan, but he retains a certain coolness, and his report is brisk and vivid. He says that Hyde is disgusting-looking but finds himself stumped when asked to describe the man. When he compares the abuser to a "Juggernaut," he characterizes his machinelike action of trampling over the little girl, which is well expressed by the illustration. In this respect, the illustration provides an equivalent of the text. Perhaps it can even be regarded as a sign of withholding extreme emotionality that just this illustration is so small.



Fig. 2: "The Carew Murder Case" by Charles Raymond Macauley (1904). Rpt. in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde.* Orinda, CA: SeaWolf P, 2023.

The next picture represents the murder of a well-esteemed gentleman, MP Sir Danvers Carew, which in the narrative is described from the perspective of a maid servant in the upper floor of a neighbouring house (fig. 2). The point of reference is the statement "clubbed him to the earth" (Tusitala Edition 21). In the text, the serene mood of a peaceful night is interrupted by the brutality of a motiveless murder, a change which the illustration focusing on a moment in time cannot represent. Carew, a man who had accosted Hyde most kindly in the street, is attacked by him in a fury of anger. Again, a moment is singled out by the illustration, the aggressor brandishing his cane, the victim helplessly raising an arm and shielding his eye with his other hand. The horror of the action is here represented more intensively than in the first scene of violence. Stevenson now musters up his capacity for arousing the reader's emotions. We must always be aware of changing viewpoints and special narrative effects and ambiguities of the story. In this case the terrible event is shown from the perspective of the maid. As impressive as the illustration may be, it cannot convey the full horror of the scene, with the maid watching the murderer "trampling his victim under foot, and hailing down a storm of blows," while the horrified maid loses consciousness. To represent such a scene visually in its full temporal extension, the medium of film would be a visually and acoustically more adequate, though Macauley's achievement is admirable. It is interesting that there is a similarity of perspective in the representation of the two brutal acts by Hyde. There are similar points of view, a similar difference in body height between Hyde and his victim, similar actions (the act of trampling) and, most importantly, the abuser is shown from the back, probably to avoid showing his face.



Fig. 3: "Search for Mr. Hyde" by Charles Raymond Macauley (1904). Rpt. in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*. Orinda, CA: SeaWolf P, 2023.

The next illustration (fig. 3), once more gives evidence of the artist's reluctance to confront us directly with Hyde, now in the scene of Utterson's search for Hyde and his encounter with the mysterious personage. Stevenson turns this confrontation of a representative of the solid middleclass lawyer and a mysterious suspicious outsider into one of the great moments of mystery fiction. Utterson accosts Hyde and actually asks him to show his face. Hyde complies with this demand after some hesitation. The illustration here deviates markedly from Stevenson's text. It restricts itself to the shadow of Hyde, and, what is more, it shows just the shadow of the back of the person, thus emphasizing the mysteriousness and indeterminacy of the apparition. Macauley's supreme art of illustration is additionally indicated by the fact that, when Utterson is waiting for Hyde, both throw a similar shadow of their hand. It is significant that the frontispiece of Macauley's edition has an image of Hyde in a position like the picture of him trampling over the girl (fig. 1), but instead of the victim there is just the abuser's black shadow to be seen underneath him. That the shadow of a person is related to his or her identity is a commonplace in nineteenth-century literature. A well-known example is Adalbert von Chamisso's story *Peter Schlemihl* (1814).

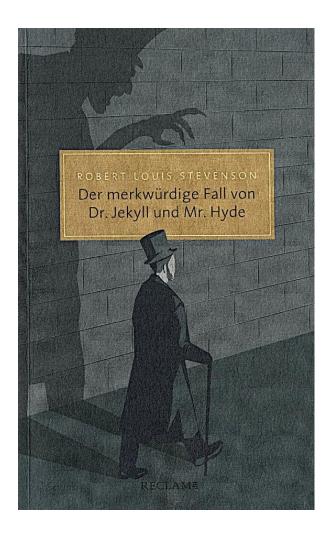


Fig. 4: Der merkwürdige Fall von Dr. Jekyll und Mr. Hyde. Ditzingen: Reclam, 2020.

A German Reclam edition of 2020 has an impressive cover illustration of Jekyll (fig. 4), dressed elegantly with a top hat and a walking stick, and the shadow of Hyde looming over him with a ghastly, contorted face, actually on the point of his hand of grasping him. Alternatively, Hyde could be holding a puppet-like Jekyll on string (an interpretation I owe to Isabel Vila Cabanes).

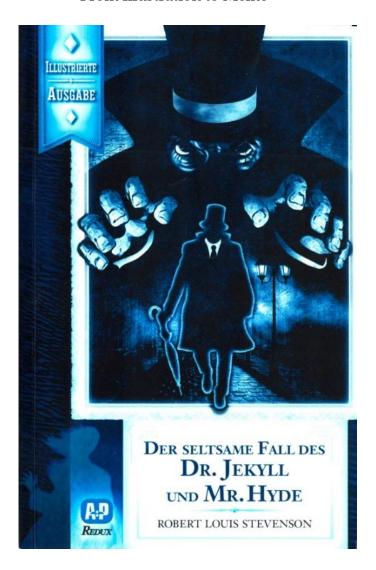


Fig. 5: Der seltsame Fall des Dr. Jekyll und Mr. Hyde. German Edition. Illus. Tracy Tomkowiak. N.p.: Alden P, 2023.

An interesting use of this motif (fig. 5) is to be found in the cover of a German edition of 2023. The shadow of Hyde assumes a threatening power, seeming to hold the body of Jekyll in its clutch, with the latter's size diminished radically. Stevenson's opposition of a tall Jekyll and a small Hyde is here inverted. On the whole this illustration is a good example of interfigurality in the context of duality. What can be noticed is the attempt to outdo earlier treatments of this particular motif, a phenomenon which will be dealt with in the context of the meme theory.



"Solely occupied by one thought—the horror of my other self"

Fig. 6: "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case" by Charles Raymond Macauley (1904). Rpt. in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*. Orinda, CA: SeaWolf P, 2023.

Another image (fig. 6), which Macauley uses in order to signify the problem of identity, is that of the mirror. In Stevenson's tale this image appears only in the last chapter, "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case," where the mirror is of paramount importance. Originally Jekyll had no mirror in his room. It was brought there "for the very purpose of those transformations" (Tusitala Edition 60). Jekyll uses it to perceive changes of his physical appearance, being increasingly overwhelmed by "horror of my other self" (Tusitala Edition 72). As such it is one of the most important occurrences of the mirror image in the late nineteenth century. It is characteristic of Macauley's illustrations that Hyde's frontside is not shown in the mirror. We only see Jekyll looking agonized at his other self in the mirror. Macauley created a tradition of Jekyll before the mirror, a motif that recurs ever and again in illustrations of Stevenson's narrative, though undergoing marked changes, as we will see.

# Illustrations of Jekyll and Hyde and the Concept of the Meme

Looking at illustrations of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in a diachronic perspective, a significant cultural phenomenon can be observed, which can be explained by referring to the concept of the meme. The term was coined by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*, who defined memes as units of cultural information. According to Dawkins, memes are related to genes. They involve a biological or evolutionary development or, to put it simply, a change of the human brain. Memes are supposed to be replicators like genes. Central terms in Dawkin's theory are "replication" and "imitation." As examples of memes he mentions "tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches" (192). As distinct from my project, he and his follower Susan Blackmore (*The Meme Machine*) are not concerned with literature at all. Significant forays into the field of literary memes, based on the concept of cultural memory, are undertaken by Ziva Ben-Porat.

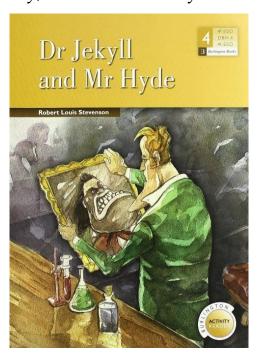


Fig. 7: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Spanish Edition, ES04. Burlington Books, 2011.

For my purposes, the opposition of imitation and emulation, which has a tradition since Renaissance poetics, is useful. Just as memes replicate and outdo previous memes, new illustrations imitate, change and outdo earlier representations. If we look, for example, at the use of the image of the mirror in illustrations of Jekyll and Hyde, we can observe the face of Hyde, which Macauley did not pictorialize, getting increasingly prominent. In an exorbitant example (fig. 7), Jekyll is aghast at seeing in the mirror his terribly distorted face with a grotesquely oversized set of teeth. As we have seen, Macaulay avoids such a self-confrontation, a face-to-face meeting of Jekyll and Hyde in the mirror. And the author Stevenson, to return once more to the text for a moment, presents a different self-perception of Jekyll as Hyde than any of his illustrators: "And yet when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself" (Tusitala Edition 61). As enthusiastic as one may be about the great variety of successful illustrations of *Jekyll and Hyde*, there is no denying the fact that they cannot attain the complexities and ambiguities of Stevenson's representation of duality. Macauley knew why he was so reluctant to depict Hyde's face.

The illustrations on the covers or frontispieces of the editions have to be looked at closely. They usually consist of the two names Jekyll and Hyde and a corresponding image. In Stevenson's narrative we are, except for Dr. Jekyll's concluding "Statement," never confronted with the two figures together. Simultaneous presence of the doubles is ruled out, though there are moments when one of the two changes into the other as a consequence of drinking the potion. However, the cover illustrations have to deal with the already-mentioned problem that there is the title containing the names of two persons and a pictorial image of one person, which, in view of the story, just cannot represent the two persons named in the title and yet must somehow try to do justice to the fact that the two are one and the same person. This is an artistic challenge to which the illustrators have to rise. The illustrations focus on the correlation of fair and good on the one hand and of ugly and evil on the other. The classical ideal of kalokagathia, the fusion of good looks and moral excellence, and its implied inversion, the fusion of bad looks and bad morality, is not evoked by Stevenson. This may be the impression which the illustrations create, but this is definitely alien to Stevenson's text which is much more complex than such a striking visual opposition may suggest. The cognitive and moral point of Dr. Jekyll's dual existence is that it reflects divisiveness as a general feature of the human soul and particularly of the Victorian state of mind, which hides vice, debauchery and many other kinds of abuse and malpractice under a gentlemanlike exterior and perfect manners.

Let us now look at instances of the representation of duality which appear as memes, i.e. cultural replicators, particularly in covers and title pages of Stevenson's narrative. It is a task of the illustrators to find ways of designing the object of their illustrations so as to suggest duality, the co-presence of two contrary sides of one and the same person which emerges as an aesthetic as well as an ethic dichotomy. The following example (fig. 8) actually contains two personages. It consists of a lightly sketched portrait of a man wearing a jacket and tie. His hair is thin, his eyes are closed, and he holds his face thoughtfully or just careless in his right hand. Over his left shoulder we see the upper half of a darkly sketched face with straggling black hair and the eyes wide open, looking pressingly at the other's face. The devil is commonly depicted on the left shoulder, the angel on the right. The double portrait is an impressive attempt at a graphic visualization of two intertwined personages, one forcing himself on the other one.



Fig. 8: *Der merkwürdige Fall von Dr. Jekyll und Mr. Hyde*. Illus. Robert de Rijn. Ditzingen: Reclam, 2015.

The Origin of the Central Meme of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde



Fig. 9: "The Transformation" in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*. Illus. S. G. Hulme Beaman. London: John Lane, 1930.

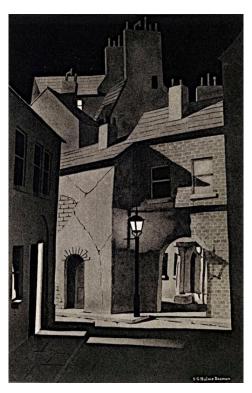


Fig. 10: *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*. Illus. S. G. Hulme Beaman. London: John Lane, 1930.

The most outstanding image or meme appearing in illustrations of Stevenson's narrative is, of course, the image of the bipartite or divided or split face, which has spread over the whole world and acquired fame independent of Stevenson's text. Before discussing examples of this image, we will turn to the intricate issue of its origin. I must admit that I do not know a solution to this knotty problem, but I wish to look at an illustrated edition of Jekyll and Hyde which may have paved the way for the meme. This is Hulme Beaman's edition of 1930, one of the finest illustrated editions of Jekyll and Hyde ever to have been produced. Its cover is a collage of the two illustrations (figs. 9, 10) presented above.

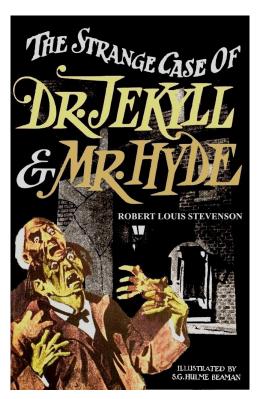


Fig. 11: *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* (with the original illustrations by S. G. Hulme Beaman). London: John Lane, 1930.

The cover (fig. 11) renders a moment in the process of the protagonist's metamorphosis in the lower left corner and a view of the city scenery in the background of the right-hand side with emphasis on the door through which Jekyll's double passes. The human dimension of the illustration is represented in colour, while the elements of the city are displayed in black and white. This illustration is impressive in that

it connects a horrible moment in the tragic story of a double self and the city in which it is inalienably situated.3 In the context of our argument, two aspects are of special significance. First, there is an extraordinary physical connectedness of the two figures to be noted. A sense is evoked of their being almost glued together. Though they are clearly two persons, their faces and hands seem to be overlapping, and they share signs of being extremely horrified. The interconnectedness of the two persons is pictorially expressed more intensely than in any earlier representation. This is again a supreme case of interfigurality in the context of duality. Second, the cover illustration cites the names of the "two protagonists" together with the illustration, thus combining language and picture, which is characteristic of memes. The illustration also integrates the title into the picture, with the elegantly curved line of the first four words and the straight letters of the names Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, whose colours are, a point not be overlooked, adapted to the images of the two persons (yellowish and greenish). With its combination of word and picture the cover set a precedent which inspired many to follow, vary and outdo it.4

# The Bipartite Face as a Meme

The following two covers (figs. 12, 13) show the split of a person marked by a rupture running right through the middle of the face, a deviation from realism common in memes such as the well-known "kilroy meme." Interfigurality is here reduced to the representation of the face. The similarity of these images seems so strong that one may believe them not to have been produced independently. But the editions appeared in the same year, 2021, which makes plagiarism implausible, and upon closer inspection they reveal significant differences, e.g. as to the distribution of colour and the design of the faces. What they have in common is that the evil part of each, actually the right-hand side of the faces from the reader's perspective, seems to be influenced by traditional images of demons and devils. I am not sure but there may be

an allusion to Hitler's face in the second image. The likeness of the faces represented in the two illustrations may be a characteristic of their features as memes. This does not exclude them from being parts of authentic editions, the first one with an excellent afterword by Ulrich Baer. What is astonishing in Baer's edition is that it is a regularly printed product without illustrations which still has a meme on its cover. We thus can perceive that the meme, which essentially belongs to the digital culture, can even have an impact on a printed book. The line of my argument will be clearer in the next chapter, where I refer to Bob Kane's Batman supervillain *Two-Face* which first appeared in August 1942, in Detective Comics #66 ("The Crimes of Two-Face").

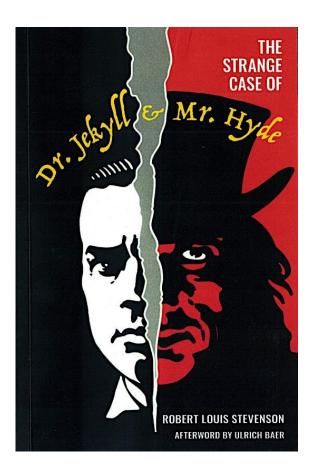


Fig. 12: The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Afterword Ulrich Baer. New York: Warbler Classics, 2021.

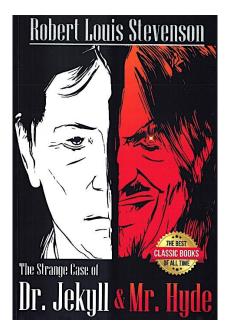


Fig. 13: *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Illus. Dmitry Mintz. Wroclaw: Mr. Mintz Classics, 2021.

In the history of illustrations of Jekyll and Hyde examples such as these represent an iconographic innovation of profound cultural significance. According to my knowledge, there are no precedents for this graphic constellation, neither in classical antiquity nor in the Middle Ages or modernity. In classical mythology there is double-faced Janus (Janus Gemini), God of beginning and end. He has two faces, but not a split face. In medieval sacral architecture there is a significant parallel in the statue of "Frau Welt" ("Dame World"), for instance in the cathedral of Worms (fig. 14). It is of alluring beauty and splendour when seen from the front, but from its backside it looks ugly, full of puss, vermin, toads and snakes. Contrary to this front-back opposition of the sacral statue, the dichotomic image of Jekyll and Hyde is side by side, caused by a rupture in the representation of the face. The near-simultaneity of the strongly similar illustrations of Jekyll and Hyde excludes the probability that one of them can be taken as the origin of the new iconographic tradition. Both of them have to be taken as memes, visual images in a row of replicated manifestations. The origin of the iconographic split face is unclear. An interesting picture in this context is, for instance, the eerie cover page of a 1990 comic by John K. Snyder (fig. 15) which is marked by a division of a face into a rather normal part and a larger grotesque, phantasmagorical part, which seems to explode with energy and demonic glee and extends to yellow and blue zigzag lines in the sky of the city. Actually, the picture represents one face with a half face glued to it. The illustrator is on the way to the split face.



Fig. 14: *Frau Welt*. South portal of Worms Cathedral, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany. Photo by Jivee Blau. <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Worms-Dom-S%C3%BCdportal-Frau Welt 10.8.2010.jpg">https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Worms-Dom-S%C3%BCdportal-Frau Welt 10.8.2010.jpg</a>

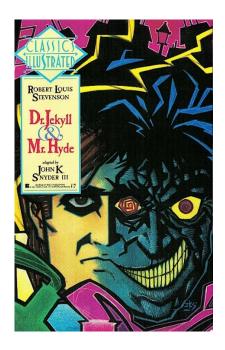


Fig. 15: *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Classics Illustrated. Adapted and illus. by John K. Snyder, TM and © First Classics, Inc. Chicago: Berkley, 1990.

#### A Note on Batman and Two Faces

A decisive influence on the split-face illustrations of Jekyll and Hyde was exerted by the Two-Face images in the Batman series, which itself was influenced by the Stevenson heritage but produced a powerful new iconographic tradition with an incredibly rich effect especially in the world of the internet. Unfortunately, in this paper we can present only one from the vast number of remarkable instances.

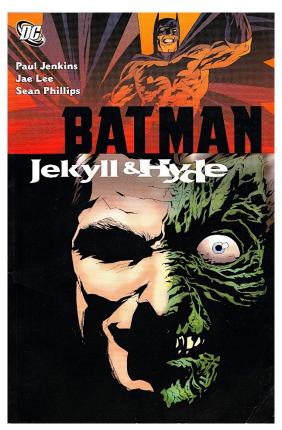


Fig. 16: *Batman: Jekyll & Hyde*. Author Paul Jenkins, Illus. Jae Lee and Sean Phillips. Cover by Sean Phillips. London: Titan Books, 2008.

The chosen image (fig. 16) belongs to the Batman Jekyll and Hyde story which was written by Paul Jenkins. The story was illustrated by Jae Lee for the first half and by Sean Phillips for the second half. It was published from June 2005 to November 2005 in the comic book series *Batman: Jekyll and Hyde*. The story deals with the psychology behind Harvey Dent's split personality. "Two-Face" harbours two souls, each bent on the other's destruction. The attempt to extricate the evil component from the dual personage fails with dreadful consequences. The

story was inspired by Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* but pursues its own agenda. The wikipedia page cites a book by Bob Kane, in which he is supposed to have named Stevenson as a direct inspiration for Two-Face. I believe this proposition to be plausible, though I cannot access the book to check: "In creating Two-Face, Kane was inspired by the 1931 adaptation of the Robert Louis Stevenson story *The Strange Case of Robert Louis Stevenson*'s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which Kane described as a 'classic story of the good and evil sides of human nature,' and was also influenced by the 1925 silent film adaptation of Gaston Leroux's novel *The Phantom of the Opera.*" A comprehensive investigation of the relation between Jekyll and Hyde and "Two-Face" cannot be attempted here, and the explosive augmentation of the double-face image all over the world, which coincides with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, would simply be impossible.

## Imitation, Emulation, Innovation

What the illustrations adduced so far share is the principle of imitation which is particularly conspicuous in book covers. Another feature memes have in common is emulation, the permanent attempt of illustrations to outdo their precursors, a general feature of memes in which Dawkins finds an evolutionary principle. Emulation implies creativity, the effort to enhance the graphic achievements of previous illustrations. Emulation can also result in innovation. What can be observed here is the return of the classical productive relation of imitation (imitatio) and emulation (aemulatio) under new cultural conditions. The following picture (fig. 17) shows a book cover which focusses on the scientific aspect of the interrelation between Jekyll and Hyde, the way the chemical liquid is conducted into Jekyll's brain from a flask via a tube. The respective levels of the liquid in the protagonists are indicated by the various fillings of test tubes. The image also appears to repeat the magnification of Hyde that was observable in earlier illustrations—the monster appears to be re-conceived, in a metamorphosis, so large as to be more

threatening. The image imitates earlier representations of the scientific aspect of the story of Jekyll and Hyde and at the same time outdoes them in an unprecedented way. It is an innovative image which would reward closer examination. Behind the chemical and cerebral operation in the foreground, the figure of Hyde is looming in the background. This is actually a composite meme, consisting of the metamorphosing scientist in the foreground and the result of the metamorphosis as a dark shadow in the background.

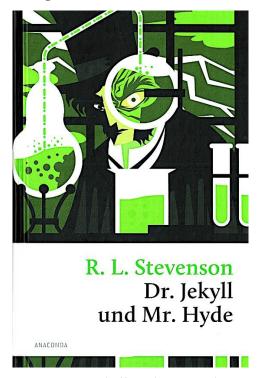


Fig. 17: Robert Louis Stevenson. Dr. Jekyll und Mr. Hyde. © 2005, Anaconda, Munich, in the Penguin Random House Publishing Group.

The next illustration (fig. 18) from a German large-format edition shows a butterfly as a cover image with two wings, one white, with a beautiful yellow and black pattern, and the other black, looking like a ragged black mask with two yellow eyes and a suggested row of teeth. This illustration, which looks like an object of art, is innovative in that it shifts the representation of the two opposite sides of a person's face into a purely aesthetic sphere. It is of great interest to investigate the ways in which the myth of the double existence of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde traversed eras and cultures and produced remarkable artistic and

literary creations, which in spite of their uniqueness cannot be detached from their point of origin, Stevenson's ingenious tale.

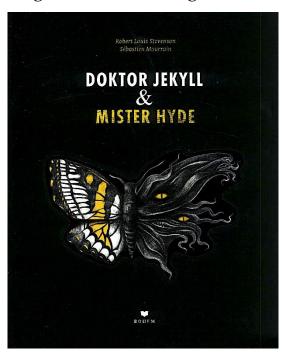


Fig. 18: Cover illustration by Sébastien Mourrain. *Doktor Jekyll & Mister Hyde*. Münster: Bohem P, 2017.

Another highly inventive modern illustration shows a picture from a further remarkable large-format edition which offers pictures by Seymour Chwast (1995). The cover illustration (fig. 19) differs from the tradition of Jekyll and Hyde memes in that it presents two separate personages, who are, however, like Siamese twins, related by sharing just two hands. It is important that this illustration goes back directly to Stevenson's text. The person who represents Hyde is shown in the process of writing on a sheet of paper which is held fast by the other's hand. Hyde has taken over Jekyll's hand and is writing for him. This illustration refers to the testament which Jekyll is made to write in the tale in favour of Hyde. The illustrator has obviously had a close look at the text. His picture throws light on one of the important moments of the story's action. The fact that here the two protagonists appear side by side deviates from the text, which hardly ever presents them together. Yet it follows the text in that it goes back the questions of Dr. Jekyll's will.

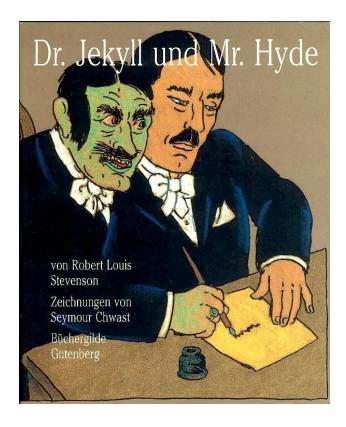


Fig. 19: Cover illustration by Seymour Chwast. *Dr. Jekyll und Mr. Hyde*. Frankfurt a. M.: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1995.

By way of conclusion, this essay will look at just one of the many remarkable illustrations of Stevenson's city (fig. 20). As a city tale *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is placed strongly in the tradition of Edgar Allan Poe, specifically of his story "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), which is also set in the City of London. Stevenson was familiar with Poe. The picture represents a figure as a dark shape which blurs into the darkness of the city. The darkness of the figure is accentuated by the brightness of its edge in the picture's upper half, caused by the light of the streetlamp. The amalgamation of the figure with the city is made visible by the fact that the cobbled pavement of the street recurs in the dark shape of the figure. Hyde is visualized as a spawn of the city. The meme outdoes all representations of Hyde as a wanderer through the city at night.



Fig. 20: Der seltsame Fall des Dr. Jekyll und Mr. Hyde. German Edition. Illus. Tracy Tomkowiak. N.p.: Alden P, 2023.

## Conclusion

Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde has had an amazing reception by illustrators and artists who succeeded in capturing the atmosphere of the city of London, significant architectural details, the physiognomies of participants in the action, the shadowy persons who move through the city at night, carrying with them their secrets, and the horrible crimes which are committed. In particular, they highlight motifs that are relevant to the issue of duality such as the reflection in a mirror and the shadows thrown by persons, aspects to be taken up by later illustrators. The magnificent edition of 1930 with illustrations by S. G. Hulme Beaman represents a significant turning point in the history of illustrated editions of Jekyll and Hyde, first, by the intensity of the depiction of an extreme connectedness of the two bodies of the dual personage, and, second, by the cover illustration which, with the association of the names of the two actors and the illustration, suggests a mixed identity. This is the birth of the meme of Jekyll and Hyde, which has achieved worldwide dissemination, augmented most strongly by the

internet. The meme is a phenomenon of popular culture. Without this culture, the image of Jekyll and Hyde could never have had its astonishing dissemination. The triad of the constitutive elements of the meme—imitation, emulation, innovation—made it possible that, side by side with the multiplicity of mainly replicatory instances, the meme could add to the richness of one of the most enduring modern myths.

Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Dr. Isabel Vila Cabanes, Jena, for technical support and enlightening discussions and to Richard Dury, Edinburgh, for valuable comments.

<sup>2</sup> For published works on mirror symbolism, see Works Cited, e. g. Cock; Esther; et al.

<sup>3</sup>Hulme Beaman has found a unique solution by showing successive stages of movement in space (reminiscent of paintings of the Futurist Boccioni and also Duchamp in the second decade of the twentieth century). There is the back door, the cracked and neglected blind wall above it and the arch to the courtyard as well as a crazy combination of forms, angles and shadows making it difficult to distinguishing one house from another. I am indebted to Richard Dury for these observations.

<sup>4</sup>As to the visual representation of duality in one person, theatre and musical offer interesting examples, to which Richard Dury drew my attention in a written communication: "The avant-garde Italian actor Carmelo Bene did a one-man stage version of Jekyll and Hyde for which he had half his face made up as Jekyll and the other half as Hyde. This allowed the idea of transformation to be combined with the idea of one man containing two opposites (*Lo strano caso del dottor Jekyll e del signor Hyde*, Genova, 1961). The 1990 musical (taken all over the world in many productions) *Jekyll & Hyde* (by Leslie Bricusse and Frank Wildhorn) has a scene towards the end in which the actor wears Hyde's long untidy hair but on the left side only: sings a duet with himself, by turning to the left and looking up towards the light as Jekyll, then turning round to face right and crouching with the long hair now hiding his face as Hyde."

<sup>5</sup>The second of these two editions is an illustrated edition by Mr. Mintz Classics. Its illustrations, by Dmitry Mintz, are traditional in the style of Macauley. All the more surprising is the meme on the cover.

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# Approaching Canonicity through a Digital Inventory of Exempla: A Response to William E. Engel

**GRANT WILLIAMS** 

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This response is a contribution to the debate on "Literary Anthologies and Canonicity" (<a href="http://www.connotations.de/debate/literary-anthologies-and-canonicity">http://www.connotations.de/debate/literary-anthologies-and-canonicity</a>). Further contributions to this debate are welcome; please contact <a href="mailto:editors@connotations.de">editors@connotations.de</a>.

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### **Abstract**

My response offers an alternative to Engel's metacognitive view by exploring how the rhetorical device of the exemplum illuminates the problem of canonicity. The pitfall of canonicity is, simply put, the exclusion of marginalized voices from a literary collection. When Engel, Loughnane, and I selected the passages for our anthology *The Death Arts in Renaissance England*, our fear of this pitfall did not arise from expecting ideological lapses, but from the limitations of the inductive method, that which scholars, to some degree or another, strive to implement when selecting texts. I argue that one can avoid such fear of leaving someone out by conducting an inductive inquiry through what I call a "digital inventory." My reflections are based upon my current death-art project that collects from the EEBO-TCP the exempla of Herostratus, a premodern antecedent of cancel culture. Because a digital inventory transparently sets the parameters around one's own canon, it can provide visible justification for the contingency and provisionality of one's selection of texts. It is also a heuristic tool for delving into the EEBO-TCP, neither bound to the traditional canon's terms of "author" and "work" nor restricted to the notion of the representative—either the popular or the famous.

In attempting to represent the early modern death arts in a series of excerpts from printed works published between 1500 and 1700, our editorial team expressed misgivings about compiling an anthology that could be perceived as ossifying a closed canon. The culture wars of the 1980s taught us to distrust canon formation on the grounds that any act of establishing a recommended list of readings risks the charge of obscuring and even marginalizing less represented groups and interests, particularly with respect to gender, sex, race, and class. To mitigate the problem of canonicity, our team adopted, as my co-editor Bill Engel recounts, a metacognitive approach whereby our introduction reflected upon the early modern print record's biases and the anthology's compositional process, emphasizing our provisional and preliminary efforts in an ongoing research program.

Bill Engel's germane thoughts about the scholarly anxieties around anthologizing texts has stirred me to reflect further upon canonicity and its inherent limitations. For us, the danger of misrepresenting cultural diversity never stemmed, at least consciously, from a desire to ideologically homogenize the period's death arts. It arose in large part from the challenge of carrying out an inductive method. My response to Engel's case study thus takes a methodological angle to canon formation, supplementing his insightful comments upon the metacognitive approach. I argue for the heuristic efficacy of a digital inventory, that is, textual selection based upon a thorough inductive inquiry into the early modern digital corpus. A scholar need not be a cutting-edge digital humanist to reap the benefits of thinking with and through such an inventory. My reflections take advantage of my latest death-art project, which examines what the story of Herostratus tells us about one significant way in which early modern English books rhetorically enacted commemoration-or, in Peter Marshall's lucid phrase, "postmortem fame" (276). Herostratus, a classical antecedent of cancelling, had his name prohibited from ever being uttered again after he sought out eternal fame by burning down the Ephesian Temple of Diana.

Whereas Bill Engel examined the implications of the anthology for canonicity, I will tease out some of the ramifications of the exemplum, another genre engaged with excerpting books.

Working on the death arts anthology reminded me that we do not inhabit a post-canonical world, contrary to what Peter Robinson has suggested (1). All acts of scholarly endeavor and critical investment, in my way of thinking, presuppose a canon, whether or not we choose to recognize it. Canonicity is thus an unavoidable precondition of researching and teaching in the humanities. But that does not mean a proposed list of texts constitutes a monolithically prescriptive closed system in which a judge has for once and for all ruled on what should be included and excluded. A canon, outside of religious contexts, never purports to being complete. As the work of Wendell V. Harris has admirably demonstrated, canons, even those traditionally conceived, are not concerned with imposing authority and enforcing hegemony but with making a selection along with the reasons behind that selection. And just as there are many different sets of criteria for selecting and not selecting texts, there are numerous canons actual and potential, each established for the purpose of representing something, whether a period, society, group, or theme. We expose ourselves to justifiable criticism of political and ideological uniformity when we fail to present reasons for our selection—when we naturalize our decision-making as though we were the self-appointed adjudicators of universal values in our culturally heterogeneous world. Scholars can no longer assume an unquestioned pantheon of classic works "symbolized" by the ten editions and many reprints of the Norton Anthology of English Literature, Major Authors Edition, which, by the way, dropped the subtitle after 2018. One's selection of texts demands an argument and just as significantly evidence for that argument.

That is why self-reflection, even of the metacognitive kind, can go only so far in allaying self-doubts over selected excerpts. Although our editorial team considered amongst ourselves several hundred passages and texts and generated from these four main categories or headings (Preparatory and Dying Arts, Funereal and Commemorative Arts,

Knowing and Understanding Death, and Death Arts in Literature), we hardly read the entire archive—were that ever possible—in coming up with our final selections (see Engel, Loughnane, and Williams 44). I for one feared gaps in coverage, for example, missing an exemplary work by a little-known writer, overlooking a series of texts that might have problematized how effectively the four headings represented the period, and misproportioning the groupings toward certain arts, such as commemoration, without accounting for others. The fear of not realizing adequately enough our purpose of choosing texts that represent the period's death arts arose less from ideological insensitivity than from the limitations of the inductive method, what we and most scholars strive to practice when compiling a canon. (My assumption is that scholars proceed through a dialectic between deduction and induction, whereby they use critical sources to obtain general guidance, which they eventually modify and expand with their own exploratory forays into the archive.) Induction never delivers bullet-proof certainty, because in moving from specific observations to general principles we can always defer our conclusion until we conduct more observations, collect more evidence. Most assuredly, it is an asymptotic exercise in which one can never state without a doubt whether or not important material has been left out of the inferential reasoning process.

And yet, despite the inherent problem with the inductive method, the digital age enables scholarship to obtain a degree of rigor and thoroughness not available to earlier scholars who had to rely solely on the analogue resources of large research libraries. We should support our argument for selecting a canon with as much evidence as possible. Should we not? Now that a substantial portion of the English archive (1475-1700) is machine-readable, we can delimit the parameters of a specific corpus of texts, out of which a canon may be drawn. As Katherine Bode helpfully elucidates, there are three major areas that should be kept distinct: "'the published' (all literary works in history), 'the archive' (the portion of what was published that has been preserved and is now increasingly digitized), and 'the corpus' (the segment of the archive selected for a particular research question)" (83). The EEBO-TCP

(the Early English Books Online and the Text Creation Partnership) has produced approximately 60,000 fully-searchable, SGML/XMLencoded texts from the 125,000 digitized images of microfilmed works (see EEBO). By conscientiously working with the EEBO-TCP corpus, scholars can lend precision to their claims of representing some aspect of the early modern period and in their searches, or, rather, inductive inquiries, can define the specific data set from which they select the "representative" texts for their anthologies and other publications. Indeed, large-scale digital humanities projects, such as those by Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser and by Mikko Tolonen et al., have qualitatively and quantitively analyzed large archival swathes of the early modern digital corpus the relative popularity of early modern books. As important and exciting as these projects are, there is not—as I have been contending—one single macro, mega, or meta canon "to rule them all," so to speak. And thus to take advantage of the early modern digital corpus for establishing, studying, and teaching smaller, targeted canons, one need not be an expert in big-data analytics or have a mammoth project that manages a team of computer scientists.

By way of a case study from my latest work, I set out to compile what I call, for lack of a better phrase, a "digital inventory." My inventory addresses the question of how early modern book history manifests the cancelling of Herostratus. Of course, Herostratus's story still arrives in the Renaissance, having been passed down from classical authors, some of whom, like Valerius Maximus (8.14.ext. 5), recount his deed and punishment but omit his name, while others, like Strabo (14.1.22), also mention his name. I searched for all appearances of his distinctive name in the EEBO-TCP corpus—a task slightly complicated by the fact that Herostratus also went by "Erostratus" and its variants in England as well as Europe (Borowitz x). With the data, I wanted to ascertain the extent to which early modern English books gave him the fame he sought for. The inductive inquiry yielded no matches from the members of what Alastair Fowler terms the "Official Canon," that is, the literature "institutionalized through education, patronage, and journalism" (98): in the poetry and/or plays of Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe,

Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton—as well as searches in their print concordances—the name of Herostratus does not appear at all; the biggest exception in prose is Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial* (75). Nevertheless, I found 318 matches in 295 separate works from a wide range of subject categories, predominantly in "Politics and History" and "Religion." (For my calculations, I counted only one digitized issue or edition of each work.) The six categories with which I tagged the books with Herostratus' name are the ones Farmer and Lesser use in their essay on the *Short Title Catalogue*: Religion, Politics and History, Science and Mathematics, School and Language Instruction, Poesy and the Arts, and Society and Conduct (28-29). "Politics and History" and "Religion" together account for two thirds of the matches and the next four categories account for the rest.

The inventory, a heuristic for inductive inquiry, enabled me to discover a significant rhetorical pattern: 75% of the matches appear in an exemplum, whereas 25% leave out the story, functioning at best as an allusion. The exemplum—or example (paradigma)—is basically a device that illustrates a point by means of a brief narrative, and, since ancient times, was, along with the enthymeme, a fundamental type of argument in an orator's arsenal for persuading an audience on the grounds of probability (Lyons 8). This device underwent a revitalization under Renaissance humanism, which deployed it extensively to teach virtue ethics and ultimately held it up as a vehicle for commemoration and fame. Humanist education—I argue at length in my essay, "The Exemplum, Posterity, and Dramatic Irony in Antony and Cleopatra"—incentivized the reading of history for the cultivation of virtue on the basis that exempla could preserve a person's name more lasting than any physical monument could (87-89). The discovery that Herostratus was recruited as an exemplum in early modern books led me to consider the question of whether or not there were other English exempla, which following Valerius Maximus, omitted Herostratus' name altogether. A second inductive inquiry, much harder to conduct because of the need to sift out irrelevant material, revealed over hundred such exempla. My parameters of this subsequent searching emphasized

what I have deemed to be the core event of the exemplum: the combination of "burning" with the "temple," identified as either "Ephesus" or "Diana." Obviously, such arduous searching could never render the certainty a name search could. The examples of my second inventory were proportionately distributed through the same subject categories as those of the first inventory, namely, through "Politics and History" and "Religion." It appears that, since many books comparable to the ones that mentioned "Herostratus" have omitted his name, their authors, one can infer, appear to side with the Ephesian prohibition of damnatio memoriae. Does the context furnished by the second inventory then suggest that the writers in the first are actually complicit with Herostratus by giving him the fame he craved for? Close to 60% of the total of writers seem to memorialize him through his wicked deed or, at the very least, express indifference toward the ethical import of commemoration. Further investigation into the first inventory, however, demonstrates that this is not the case at all. Early modern books operate within a humanist discourse of infamy that exploits the inclusion of the name to remember the ignominious—not for the sake of commemoration but for the sake of debasement and defamation.

My digital inventory minimizes the scholar's fear of misrepresenting the period or leaving out marginal voices. It sets definitive parameters within which researchers can confidently work. An inventory drawn from the early modern corpus will, of course, always provide incomplete data insofar as the archive, once fully digitized, still won't correspond to what was published during the period (see Bode 83). Nonetheless, an inventory maximizes the accessible extant resources at a given moment in scholarly production so that text-selection as much as possible does not obfuscate its own partiality. For example, no female writers in print—with the exception of the seventeenth-century woman Elizabeth Cellier (6)—mention Herostratus, and if I were to create a canon of his exempla, I could proceed without fearing I missed an important voice. With respect to class stigma, Herostratus is, strangely enough, referred to as a shoemaker in a few sources, most notably by

Thomas Deloney in *Jack of Newbury*, where the character Cardinal Wolsey insults the admirable Jack in front of the King by comparing him to "Herostratus the Shoomaker, that burned the Temple of Diana, onely to get himself a name" (F<sup>r-v</sup>). The ascription of this trade to the arsonist is, by the way, not historically correct: Deloney may have made the mistake from misreading a passage of *The French Academie* (Ii4<sup>r</sup>), in which La Primaudaye recounts the exemplum while explaining how even common people like a tailor or shoemaker desire their names to be immortalized with physical memorials. Whatever the case, Deloney flags this particular exemplum as a cynical tactic of denying non-gentlemen recognition for their social achievement.

Notwithstanding their defined parameters, digital inventories do not presuppose a static state of affairs. When selecting extracts for the death arts anthology, we had qualms of appearing to champion a fixed list of authors and works. But because inductive inquiries are theoretically open-ended, digital inventories encourage us to accept and implement the productive provisionality and fluidity of research projects—a position, as mentioned, we arrived at in our thinking about the critical anthology: canons are always subject to further change, refinement, and qualification as new questions and new information emerge. That is how the process unfolded with my project on Herostratus. My investigation started off with an inventory on his name, which led me to look into the additional parameter of the "exemplum." This second inventory directed me, in turn, to search for exempla that omitted his name, furnishing me with the scaffolding for locating numerous texts that actually, rather remarkably, could be said to cancel Herostratus. One can thus build upon the scaffolding of earlier digital inventories. The work that I have done naturally feeds into bigger projects, which may involve other famous and infamous exemplary figures, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Mark Antony. As large scale digital projects come online, scholars can profit from their fields and tagging to improve and develop inventories with refined or alternatively defined parameters. For example, Alexa Zildjian's database of dedications that

draw upon 98,263 British books between 1641 until 1700 will make possible answers to questions about the strategic use of exempla in book history. Herostratus, I found, serves at times as an admonitory device in this particular paratext, known for its promotion of the exemplarity of patrons—as Michael Ullyot has recently explored in "dedicatory epistles for Essex and Henry, from 1577 to 1612" (19).

I do not mean to suggest that generating a digital inventory would have necessarily improved our death arts anthology at this point in time. For a research area as large as the death arts establishing a single corpus poses serious challenges; the parameters of our anthology's excerpts span various subjects and genres. More significantly, the anthology rallied around an enabling yet nebulous conceptual amalgam—circumscribing at once an assemblage of practices or techniques and a complex family of ideas. No doubt multiple interrelated inventories would be required to cover the terrain, and even then the conceptual amalgam of the "death arts," unlike a linguistic datum such as a simple proper name, evokes many cognate terms and phrases. So much of the inductive inquiry into the EEBO-TCP requires putting in place an accepted meta-language and applying that language systematically to the entire corpus.

Despite such long-term challenges, my project on Herostratus has taught me that the inductively oriented digital inventory is an effective heuristic tool for disclosing alternative ways of thinking about canonicity and text-selection. The belletristic categories of "author" and "title" need not be hallowed premises or anchor points of text-selection when it comes to representing the period. These anchor points belong more to the "official" vernacular literary canon, which really only "blossomed" in the eighteenth century anyway (Harris 113). The field of the USTC subject classification in the metadata of EEBO-TCP should, instead, guide our inquiries when we compile new digital inventories. Unfortunately, the current state of categorization leaves something to be desired for scholars who look twice at the labels for any given titles, since books we all know inevitably occupy different categories (Farmer and Lesser 29), while the USTC subject categories do not misjudge

works infrequently. But with the development of AI technologies, the future no doubt holds out the promise of allocating more precise and consistent descriptors. Until this problem is entirely eliminated, scholars with their manageable digital inventories can recategorize subjects and genres or create their own relevant meta-data for analyzing texts.

Inventories, in effect, dissolve the rigid boundaries of the magisterial work, by allowing the scrutiny of patterns across paratexts, sayings, rhetorical figures, and other divisions. As the rich practices of collecting, managing, and modifying commonplaces attest (see Victoria E. Burke 153-77), the Renaissance did not consume and produce books only to enjoy a wholistic aesthetic experience of reading but to capture meaningful and pragmatic fragments that could be recycled by others through the compositional strategies of imitatio, amplification, and copia. The gathering and framing of extracts from classical literature into commonplace books, Mary Thomas Crane argues, shaped and controlled individual subjects and indeed "most forms of literary and political discourse in sixteenth-century England" (4). English readers searched specifically for exempla—to collect, remember, and repurpose them in their own writing. During the period the commonplace book, by the way, offers a historical antecedent of the micro-canon that I am arguing for insofar as it also derives from selecting texts on the basis of criteria, that is, according to particular predetermined subject headings.

By focusing on a single exemplum, my inventory registers the ways in which many little-known writers from different quarters use and abuse this story about Herostratus for different rhetorical, ethical, and political purposes. The anchor field of an "exemplum" opens up connections outside the typical canonical anchors of "author" and "title," which often assume literary history to be a great dialogue between great artists. A relatively small percentage of the inventory's examples falls within the subject category of literature, and overall the examples are located throughout a range of subjects (including travel, medicine, and cosmology) and all sorts of formats, from ephemera to folios. What is also surprising, given Peter Burke's emphasis upon the secularity of Renaissance exempla (54), is that religious writers marshal Herostratus'

exemplum to elucidate the difference between fame and infamy, especially within commentary on the building of the Tower of Babel (Holden 2) and Judas's betrayal of Christ (Ward 363). This awareness of Herostratus' exceptional ignominy and vainglory helps to explain why throughout the period many religious controversialists and political pamphleteers weaponize his name to defame their opponents. In the earliest mention of Herostratus in English, the Reformer John Bale compares Edmund Bonner, the notorious Catholic bishop of London, to the vain-glorious arsonist (L7<sup>r</sup>), and many controversialists will simply call their enemies or traitors a "Herostratus." My specific inventory highlights print culture's investment in spreading infamy, countering the assumption—as with the large-scale work of Lesser and Farmer and Tolonen—that word- and text-frequency betoken fame or popularity. Print recalls the notorious for the purposes of defamation and counter-intuitively encourages readers to forget them and their crimes. That is, the period's books did not just enshrine paragons for the sake of posterity—a traditionally canonical move to say the least but also materialized a grey zone for the ignominious, actively pushing them to the edge of oblivion.

Historical research into the early modern corpus goes beyond verifying the representative and exemplary texts of a culture: what a culture apparently wants to remember and reproduce. An illuminating outcome of the digital inventory's inductive method is the canonical exception: what a culture forgets. A digital inventory can thus help scholars retrieve the non-representative, the obscure within the early modern corpus. In a response to Michael Gavin, who celebrates abstract data analysis and the death of the document heralded by digital technology (10), Peter C. Herman articulates the benefits he has received by "the movement from print to catalogue to microfilm to EEBO and now to EEBO-TCP" (208). The corpus "has allowed for greater and greater concreteness and historical specificity," providing Herman with "a finer grained understanding of the past" (208, 214). Despite agreeing with Herman's recuperation of the EEBO-TCP for elucidating history,

I hesitate to isolate the specific from the general, especially of the historical kind. It is only with a clear understanding of the abstract forces and dominant patterns shaping a corpus that we can seek for and appreciate the significance of obscure exceptions. In revealing representative texts, digital inventories go far in identifying the non-representative. As I have stated, my digital inventory of works that mention "Herostratus" has just one female writer. Against this background, the achievement of Hester Pulter, the seventeenth-century poet, becomes even more significant because of its anomalous status: her wonderful recently discovered manuscript presents the only early modern English poem I know of devoted to Herostratus ("Vain Herostratus"). Where did she come across this exemplum, and what does she mean by turning it into a poem? How does gender inform her enshrinement of male infamy, for as that inveterate exemplum-collector Richard Brathwaite notes, "None ever of their Sex committed so foule a crime, as to burne Diana's Temple, and that was done by the masculine spirit of an Herostratus" (41-42)?

My widening of canonicity to any kind of representative text selection may seem for some too relativistic. But that's my point. Text selection occurs all the time and at all stages of research and in all projects big and small. It manifests itself overwhelmingly in early modern writing, where compositions were created out of selecting and managing exempla—as well as many other types of textual fragments. No longer do scholars need to fear accusations of ideological distortion and politically motivated exclusion when they can make the effort to conduct an inductive inquiry within existing digital resources. The digital inventory can transparently set the parameters around one's own canon formation, providing more precise evidence for the contingency of their text selection. Furthermore, the digital inventory is a heuristic tool for delving into the EEBO-TCP, escaping the comfort zone of remaining bound to the official canon. It need not be restricted, either, to equating the culturally or historically significant with the notion of the representative, either the popular or the famous. As I have argued by means

of my recent project on Herostratus, the non-representative—the infamous, the almost forgotten, and the rare—can be a source of text selection for illuminating the conditions of early modern rhetoric, book production, and print culture.

Carleton University
Ottawa

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## For a More Comprehensive Approach: A Response to Thomas Kullmann's "Anthologizing Shakespeare's Sonnets"

ROLAND WEIDLE

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## **Abstract**

Responding to Thomas Kullmann's model of communicative modes to explain the popularity of why some of Shakespeare's sonnets have been preferred over others in anthologies, this article proposes expanding Kullmann's approach into a more comprehensive model that also takes into consideration the sonnets' thematic, aesthetic, formal, and rhetorical features. After summarizing Kullmann's main arguments, the response addresses what I believe to be some of the model's problems in its interpretation of data, its methodology, and argumentation. Based on a more sustainable interpretation of Kullmann's data, a more comprehensive approach is suggested that also focuses on a sonnet's thematic concerns, its stylistic sophistication, and whether and how it communicates emotional states and experiences that readers can relate to. Of equal relevance to a sonnet's popularity is its place in the sequence and the question whether it continues an argument from a previous sonnet or can be understood as a stand-alone poem. Lastly, the degree to which a sonnet exhibits "passionate rationality" (Burrow 91) is also a significant factor in its popular appeal.

## 1. Introduction

To answer the question why some of Shakespeare's sonnets appear more often in anthologies than others, Thomas Kullmann in his article "Anthologizing Shakespeare's Sonnets" proposes that, instead of focusing on ideological or purely aesthetic reasons—like a society's views on gender or "literary eminence" (65) in terms of composition and imagery—, one should look at the different communicative situations the dramatis personae of the sonnets are placed in, and the predominant function of language in each sonnet.

Kullmann's approach adds yet another way of dividing the sonnets into meaningful groups to the various models suggested in the past. One of the oldest and most enduring of these was undertaken by Edmond Malone in his 1780 edition of the *Sonnets* when he suggested that we should organize the poems according to addressee, with the first 126 sonnets being directed to a male youth while the remaining ones refer to a mistress (see 579). Other classifications focus on the sequence's plot (cf. Pequigney 1985, Rudenstine 2015), or its lack thereof (Burrow 2002, Schiffer 2007, Edmondson and Wells 2013, Weidle 2025), recurring keywords (Monte 2021), numerological patterns (Duncan-Jones 2010, Booth 2000), themes, as, for example, jealousy (Pequigney 1985) or proximity to death (Cousins 2011), character constellations and configurations (rival poets- or love-triangle sonnets, cf. Paterson 2010 and Duncan-Jones 2010), and so forth.

In the following, I will first briefly summarize Kullmann's model, then address what I believe to be some of its problems, and finally suggest expanding his focus on communicative modes by also considering the sonnets' thematic, aesthetic, formal, and rhetorical qualities to explain why some of them have been more popular than others.

#### 2. Communicative Modes

To state his case, Kullmann begins by focusing on sonnet 2 ("When forty winters shall besiege thy brow"), a sonnet that, although very

popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is included in only three of the altogether 33 anthologies published after 1861 that Kullmann takes into account. Why, he asks, has this sonnet fallen out of favour although it indubitably possesses literary merits? It presents a "clear-cut argument," abounds in "original images, organized in coherent conceits or image clusters," is "rich in imagery," provides "an intricate and unusual point of view" (70), and is characterized by "formal perfection" (71). The answer, according to Kullmann, lies in its mode of communication. Comparing sonnet 2 with the often-anthologized sonnet 30 ("When to the sessions of sweet silent thought"), he notices that the speaker, who in the former sonnet does not refer to himself at all and whose "messages are [all] second-person messages" (72), in sonnet 30 "provides a chain of first-person messages" (72). Similarly, when comparing sonnet 2 to sonnet 116 ("Let me not to the marriage of true minds"), Kullmann ascertains that the latter does not contain many first-person messages, that the "message is more abstract" than in sonnet 2 and that it "does not involve an addressee" (72). So, while these sonnets "reach the highest standards of poetic excellence" (72), they each foreground different functions of language as identified by Roman Jakobson in his seminal essay "Linguistics and Poetics" from 1960. Kullmann concludes "it is obvious that in sonnet 2 the conative function predominates, as opposed to the emotive function in sonnet 30, and the referential function in sonnet 116" (73). In applying Jakobson's model to all the sonnets in Shakespeare's sequence, Kullmann identifies 26 sonnets with a predominant emotive mode, 33 sonnets which privilege conative statements, 22 sonnets in which the referential function predominates, 14 sonnets that are self-referential (Jakobson's metalingual function), nine sonnets dealing with the speaker's triangular love relationships that "cannot easily be classified as either predominantly conative or referential" (74), and 50 sonnets with a combined "I-andthou mutuality" (89). In this last group, the emotive and conative functions are "subtly intertwined with one another" (75). In fact, Kullmann argues that this interweaving of first- and second-person messages is a

general feature of the *Sonnets* and that the conative function is rarely completely absent from the poems.

To substantiate and correlate his hypotheses about the preference of emotive and referential over conative sonnets with empirical data, Kullmann went through an impressive list of 38 anthologies and selections of sonnets that were published between 1783 and 2023. In the 45 sonnets that were anthologized between five and nine times, and in the 27 sonnets included ten or more times, Kullmann notices a "strong bias in favour of first-person message and non-personal pronouns" (77). According to Kullmann, this practice of including sonnets with first-person and non-personal messages began in the second half of the nineteenth century with the collection by Palgrave (1861). Of the 20 sonnets included in this anthology, more than half focus on first-person messages and "non-personal wisdom" (78). For Kullmann, Palgrave's predilection for emotive sonnets corresponds to the strong influence Romantic notions of poetry still held over the Victorians, i.e. the belief that poetry should express the speaker's "suffering caused by the ways of the world and the human condition" (78). Referring to collections published in Poland, Germany, and India, he suggests that the (basic) tendency towards anthologizing first-person sonnets has continued up to the present and "transcended national boundaries" (79). New trends, however, have emerged in some of the more recent anthologies. For example, in the Bedford Anthology of World Literature (2004) Kullmann identifies a decrease in first-person sonnets and a heightened focus on self-referential and non-personal sonnets while he also states that in some of the more recent editions we find a reduction of I-and-thou sonnets.

## 3. Some Problems

As promising as Kullmann's focus on the communicative modes in the sonnets may be, his argument that from mid-nineteenth century onwards anthologies have shown an increased preference for sonnets with an emotive, referential, and metalingual focus, while conative as

well as combined emotive and conative sonnets have largely been neglected, does not fully convince me. There are, I believe, some inconsistencies and incongruities in his argument that warrant closer inspection.

First, I am not too sure whether the empirical data Kullmann provides does represent enough evidence to substantiate the main argument. He finds that, of the 45 sonnets anthologized five times or more, thirteen are first-person messages and seven express non-personal reasoning. According to him, this is indicative of a "strong bias in favour of first-person message and non-personal poems" (77). This, however, seems to be reading too much into these numbers. I am also not quite convinced that the fact that merely 14 of the 27 sonnets listed in ten or more anthologies are first-person or non-personal messages is sufficient evidence to corroborate Kullmann's claim.

Apart from the equivocal validity of the data provided, I also see a few problems in the methodological approach. While it may prove productive to classify the sonnets according to their mode of communication based on Jakobson's model (emotive, conative, referential, metalingual, etc. functions), I have some doubts about the final categories Kullmann comes up with, since they combine Jakobson's functions of language with grammatical and thematic criteria. I wonder, for example, how productive it is to subsume the sonnets referring to someone "in a third person," to abstract concepts, and to "a mythological story" (74) under the referential category. Similarly, how meaningful is it to create separate categories for the sonnets dealing with "triangular relationships" (89) and "I-and-thou mutuality" (74), and how do these groups relate to Jakobson's functions? I also think that, if one applies Jakobson's model to the analysis of the sonnets, one needs to differentiate between those poems with a dominant metalingual function and those with a prevalent poetic function since there is a difference between sonnets thematizing the code (language and writing) and those thematizing the message itself (poetry). Compare for example the "Sonnet letters" (Edmondson and Wells, All the Sonnets 28) 26 ("Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage") and 77 ("Thy glass will show thee how thy

beauties wear") or the notebook sonnet 122 ("Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain"), all three of which thematize language and writing in more general terms, with those sonnets on the writing of poetry which are therefore much more "self-referential" (Kullmann 74; cf. the sonnets that I grouped in the theme cluster "writing" in Weidle, ch. 5).

At times, Kullmann himself seems to realize that his mode-based model may not be able to fully explain the popularity of specific sonnets throughout the ages. While arguing that sonnets with a predominantly emotive and referential function are preferred over others, he at the same time somewhat paradoxically concedes that there are sonnets that appeal to the reader because of their thematic concerns: sonnets 73 ("That time of year thou mayst in me behold") and 116, for example, have remained popular with teachers because of "their unexceptionable messages about ageing and true love, and avoidance of the issues of sexuality and the young man's beauty" (69), and sonnets 20 ("A woman's face with nature's own hand painted") and 129 ("Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame") have attracted heightened interest precisely "for the opposite reason: 'Sex sells'" (69). In the end, Kullmann seems to undercut his own argument and findings about the impact of communicative modes on a sonnet's canonicity when he says that "[c]hanges in the canon are rather due to the impact of cultural movements like Romanticism or a more recent interest in iconoclasm and non-heteronormative sexuality" (83).

## 4. A More Comprehensive Model

To arrive at what I believe to be a more sustainable model, I suggest to use Kullmann's "List of Sonnets Found in Anthologies" (84-88) and focus only on those sonnets that have been included *considerably* more frequently in collections than the rest. This may allow us to expand Kullmann's focus on communicative modes to also include thematic, formal, stylistic, and structural features to explain a sonnet's popularity.

On Kullmann's list there are 19 sonnets that stand out from the others since they appear in at least 15 collections: sonnets 18, 29, 30, 33, 55, 60, 64, 71, 73, 94, 97, 98, 104, 106, 116, 129, 130, 138, 146. Of these sonnets, almost one-third belongs to Kullmann's category of "non-personal reasoning" (89) on abstract concepts, such as sonnet 60 on "maturity and decay" (Duncan-Jones 230), sonnet 64 on "the operation of time" (238), sonnet 94 on beauty's "obligation to behave virtuously" (298), sonnet 116 on "true love" (342), sonnet 129 "[o]n lust" (Edmondson and Wells, All the Sonnets 29), and sonnet 146 on the "poet's soul" (28). Other sonnets, such as numbers 18, 55, 106, and 130, reflect on the functions and limitations of poetry, and sonnets 30 and 73 are characterized by a high degree of formal and rhetorical sophistication, the former exhibiting the "exactness of Shakespeare's psychological portraiture" (Vendler 167) and featuring a dense phonetic structure with multiple instances of polyptoton and "moany Os and sighing sibilants" (Paterson 91), and the latter being widely regarded as one of the most accomplished sonnets of the sequence (see Paterson 210). In other sonnets from this group, the speaker communicates experiences and emotional states readers can readily relate to, as in sonnets 97 and 98 on being separated from a beloved person, in sonnet 104 on unwavering affection in the face of time and age, or in sonnet 138 on "mutually dependent self-deception" (Duncan-Jones 390).

This means that most of these 19 sonnets that have appeared most frequently in anthologies since George Kearsley's *The Beauties of Shake-speare* from 1783, the earliest anthology consulted by Kullmann, are on abstract concepts, poetry, and/or relatable states and experiences, and/or they are characterized by a high degree of formal and stylistic sophistication. Notwithstanding the fact that some of these qualities are also connected to a referential and emotive communicative mode, as pointed out by Kullmann, I believe that it is above all these qualities and thematic concerns that have been responsible for these sonnets' ongoing appeal.

What most of these often-quoted poems also have in common, is that they are "stand alone sonnets" (Edmondson and Wells, *Shakespeare's* 

Sonnets 33), which is to say that they do not need the context of neighbouring poems or additional context for readers to fully understand them. While sonnet 45, for example, a poem that is not included in any of the 38 anthologies consulted by Kullmann (see "Appendix I"), continues an argument on the four elements from the previous sonnet ("The other two, slight air, and purging fire," 45.1), sonnets 116 on constant love and 129 on lust, although being very different in tone and outlook, are self-sufficient, impersonal, and abstract reflections on human experiences and desires that strike a chord with most readers because, as Stephen Booth remarks in his commentary on sonnet 116,

abstract general assertions do not feel any truer than their readers already believe them to be [...]. The attraction of abstract generalizations is the capacity they offer us to be *certain o'er incertainty* (115.11), to fix on a truth that allows for and cannot be modified by further consideration of experience or change in our angle of vision. (387)

I have argued elsewhere that the long-lasting appeal of Shakespeare's Sonnets derives from a combination of formal, thematic, and structural features that together create their "passionate rationality" (Burrow 91). The sonnets, to varying degrees and due to their "antithetical form" (Tetzeli von Rosador 578; my translation), are characterized by logical reasoning: they develop their argument by means of a syllogistic structure with two propositions followed by a conclusion (see also Weidle 17-18). Often, however, this conclusion turns out to be flawed or selfdefeating, which has to do with the other, passionate side of the collection: the sonnets deal with a range of intense and contradictory emotions, states, and phenomena, such as love, sex, hate, guilt, blame, jealousy, rivalry, friendship etc. In many of the sonnets grouped by Kullmann in the emotive or referential group (and thus belonging to the more popular sonnets) the speaker's struggles in rationalizing his conflicted desires and feelings are more pronounced than in the other sonnets.

Kullmann's application of communicative modes to the *Sonnets* is innovative and promising. I find, however, the empirical evidence provided so far not fully convincing. Moreover, I suggest that instead of

relying solely on communicative modes to explain a sonnet's popularity, one should also take into account qualities such as abstractness, self-reflexivity, relatability, stylistic sophistication, stand-aloneness, and a high degree of "passionate rationality," all of which we find in many of the most often-quoted sonnets.

## Ruhr Universität Bochum

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# A Footnote to Lesley Graham "'Scott's Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht' and Intertextual Transmission"

## RICHARD DURY

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This response is a contribution to the debate on "'Scott's Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht' and Intertextual Transmission"

(http://www.connotations.de/article/lesley-graham-scotts-voyage-in-the-lighthouse-yacht-and-intertextuel-transmission/). Further contributions to this debate are welcome; contact <a href="editors@connotations.de">editors@connotations.de</a>.

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#### **Abstract**

This note offers further examples of Stevenson's awareness of disappearing Scottish culture and his desire to record examples of it in another remote area of the country.

Lesley Graham's article suggests that the three authors linked in Stevenson's 1893 article were all motivated by an awareness of social transformations and a desire to document and preserve the traditions of a remote area of Scotland.

A similar motivation lies behind Stevenson's walking tour of southwest Scotland made in January 1876 and recorded in the unfinished essay "A Winter's Walk in Carrick and Galloway" written shortly afterwards, and in the preparatory Notebook covering the whole walk. The transcription of the Notebook will be published in the near future in Essays IV: Essays 1868–79 (New Edinburgh Edition, Edinburgh UP).

Stevenson was attracted to the area, he says, by "a curious interest" (Letters 2: 170). It was indeed a relatively remote region of Scotland with many distinctive and historic features: its associations with Burns (whom he had recently been studying for various projects), with the Covenanters (a constant interest of his), and with the Picts and their 'heather ale' (recorded on his page of preparatory notes in the notebook); its typical speech (recorded in his notebook); and such cultural features as make the country around Girvan "one of the most characteristic districts in Scotland," features including speech, architecture and even "a remnant of provincial costume" ("A Winter's Walk" 182). In the earlier "An Autumn Effect" (1875), where he is the detached aesthetic observer, conversations on the road are all in indirect speech; here he records direct speech for the whelk gatherer and the young men at the inn at Maybole, and his Notebook contains a number of other transcriptions and snatches of local conversation in Scots, including annotations of local pronunciation.

The same passionate personal involvement in maintaining a tradition that seems destined to dissolution can be seen in Stevenson's publication of poems in Scots. In "The Maker to Posterity," the introductory poem to the second part of *Underwoods* (1887) devoted to poems in Scots, he predicts a day will come when the words he is writing will no longer be understood and replies to a future puzzled reader that this is Lallans, and that the meaning of the poems "aince braw an' plain" has now been completely lost "Like runes upon a standin' stane / Amang the heather" (101).

Università degli Studi Bergamo

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