"ANCIENT APPETITES": ROMANCE AND DESIRE IN ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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In "Lay Morals," an unfinished work of didactic philosophising written in 1879, Robert Louis Stevenson set forth a critique of British consumer culture which may be productively aligned with his aesthetic of masculine romance as it was developed in the 1880s. Stevenson indicted at length the practices of consumption followed by what he called the "easier classes":

> At the present day, we, of the easier classes, are in a state of surfeit and disgrace after meat. Plethora has filled us with indifference; and we are covered from head to foot with the callosities of habitual opulence. . . . We squander without enjoyment. . . . We do not keenly enjoy or eagerly desire the presence of a luxury; we are unaccustomed to its absence. And not only do we squander money from habit, but still more pitifully waste it in ostentation. I can think of no more melancholy disgrace for a creature who professes either reason or pleasure for his guide, than to spend the smallest fraction of his income upon that which he does not desire; and to keep a carriage in which you do not wish to drive, or a butler of whom you are afraid, is a pathetic kind of folly. . . . [I]n a world where money is wanting to buy books for and food and medicine for pining children, and where a large majority are starved in their most immediate desires, it is surely base, stupid, and cruel to squander money when I am pushed by no appetite and enjoy no return of genuine satisfaction. (202-03)

Stevenson argues that consumption among the "easier classes," characterised by too easy access to a "surfeit" of commodities, is not motivated by desire but in fact constitutes the death of desire; the jaded "squandering" of these classes, which provides such an obscenely asymmetrical contrast with the want endured by the "large majority," is directed not by "appetite" but by a fashion for "ostentation." In accord with Thorstein Veblen's famous argument regarding the role of conspicuous consumption in a competitive and emulative jostling for social status, Stevenson writes that:

> Life at any level among the easy classes is conceived upon a principle of rivalry, where each man and each household must ape the tastes and emulate the display of others. One is delicate in eating, another in wine, a third in furniture or works of art or dress; and I, who care nothing for any of these refinements, who am perhaps a plain athletic creature and love exercise, beef, beer, flannel shirts, and a camp bed, am yet called upon to assimilate all these other tastes and make foreign occasions of expenditure my own. It may be cynical: I am sure I shall be told it is selfish; but I will spend my money as I please and for my own intimate personal gratification, and should count myself a

> nincompoop indeed to lay out the colour of a halfpenny on any fancied social decency or duty. (204-05)

Obeisance to the "principle of rivalry," which dictates that consumption should indicate the "refinements" of high social status, is opposed by an ethos of individualist and pointedly unrefined masculinity embodied in a "plain athletic creature" with which the authorial voice is identified. Refusing the imperative of consumption as "social decency or duty," the "expenditure" of this "creature" is a means only to his "intimate personal gratification." Happy with the simple pleasures of physical exercise, the outdoors, beef, beer and flannel shirts, his life stands as a model of satisfied desire which favourably contrasts with the desireless automatism of the easier classes.

Earlier in the essay Stevenson offers another account of the proper use of money to set against the excoriated "squandering" of the leisure class: "Money, being a means of happiness, should make both parties happy when it changes hands; rightly disposed, it should be twice blessed in its employment; and buyer and seller should alike have their twenty shillings' worth of profit out of every pound" (203). Ostensibly a description of the exchange relation, albeit the ideal version of that relation, this passage, which fantastically allots monetary profit to both buyer and seller, in fact points to Stevenson's own desire for a social relation outside exchange. There is no disparity, no loss, involved in this account of exchange; instead both parties gain—a metaphorical rendering of the mutual satisfaction which the exchange relation, "rightly disposed," entails. The reciprocal, equal profit enjoyed by buyer and seller paradoxically figures a social relation without profit, without surplus: the structural disequilibrium of capitalism is replaced by an equilibrium of satisfied desire.[1] Stevenson, who is much concerned, not just in this passage but throughout the whole of "Lay Morals," with criticising the "doctrine" of "Profit" (190) which organises modern society, gives here an account of money which in fact renders money irrelevant and which transmutes exchange value into use value. That is to say, Stevenson's fantastic account of the ideal form of the exchange relation effectively renders exchange as a barter of strictly equivalent use values, implicitly constituting use value as the authentic ground of the social—a line of argument rendered familiar through a tradition of romantic critiques of capitalism.[2] The incessant desires for profit (more money) and for consumption (more goods) which propel capitalism are cancelled in Stevenson's utopian figurations of satisfied desire. The "plain athletic creature's" relation to goods, although it too is an account of "expenditure," also figures a fantasy of use value, of consumption immune to the exigencies of capitalism. There is no mediation, no complicating interference or influence between the athletic creature's desire and its object. His relation to goods is wholly volitional, an expression of individual will.

The oppositions mapped in these passages from "Lay Morals"—between a stultifying commodity culture characterised by "plethora," and an alternative, parsimonious state of satisfied desire, aligned with an athletically embodied

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[1] My argument about the relation of literary representation to the desires incited by and supportive of capitalism in Stevenson's work is indebted to Walter Benn Michaels's discussion of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (31-58).

[2] See Spivak, who notes that in "romantic anti-capitalist discourse" it is "the place of use-value (and simple exchange or barter based on use-value) that seems to offer the most secure anchor of social 'value' in a vague way" (161).

masculinity—recur in Stevenson's discussion of literary aesthetics in "A Gossip on Romance," an essay published in 1882. The correspondences between these two works point to ways in which the conditions of late nineteenth-century consumer culture inflect Stevenson's theory and practice of fiction. While Stevenson's work does not demonstrate a consistent, explicit critique of consumer culture along the lines developed in "Lay Morals," it seems that such a critique is consistently implied in Stevenson's much-noted anti-modernism. In this article by examining "A Gossip on Romance" and the novel *Treasure Island*, this paper will consider how Stevenson's poetics of textual immediacy, simultaneously and collaterally with its explicit project of aesthetic commentary, articulates a politics of cultural conservatism, an opposition to Britain's expanding mass society.

"A Gossip on Romance" is a key theoretical text in the so-called "romantic revival," a much-publicised literary movement which reached the peak of its publicity in the mid-1880s. A response to the diversification and expansion of the literary marketplace in the 1880s, as well as to more general social pressures, the revival of "romance"—meaning the novel of adventure or the fantastic generally aimed at an intergenerational male audience—was presented by its promoters, who included along with Stevenson such prominent men of letters as Andrew Lang, H. Rider Haggard and George Saintsbury, as a means of reinvigorating and re-masculinising a national literary culture regarded as having been rendered effete and effeminate by the excessive influence of realism. Criticising realism for its lack of "story," its preoccupations with the minutiae of contemporary bourgeois and ruling-class social life and/or the vicissitudes of consciousness, the romancers valorised an alternative aesthetic which emphasised the representation of "action" or "stirring incident" (Lyall 532). As an antidote to realism's concerns with the privatised, feminised spaces of the domestic interior (the drawing room and the bedroom) and the psychic interior—concerns which are characterised as either nugatory or indecent—the romancers proselytised for and offered narratives which described and were metaphorically aligned with a robust male physicality abstracted from contemporary social conditions. They were concerned with, in Stevenson's words, "the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence in clean, open-air adventure, the shock of arms or the diplomacy of life" ("Gossip" 142).

Proponents of romance defined it both synchronically and diachronically: as a kind of hypostatised tradition of story which, as Haggard put it, spoke "to all time and humanity at large" (180), and as the modern adventure novel which was the contemporary manifestation of that tradition. Realism, on the other hand, was typically constructed as both an epiphenomenon of, and a deviation from, this authentic mainstream of fiction. According to Saintsbury, for instance, "the romance is of its nature eternal and preliminary to the novel" (for Saintsbury, "the novel" denotes the tradition of the novel of manners or realism) and the realist novel "is of its nature transitory and parasitic on romance" (416). This argument about primacy and secondariness was reinforced by accounts of the differently gendered genealogies of genre: romance was presented as continuous with a tradition of "great" narratives of "incident" by male writers which included such disparate figures as Homer, Bunyan and

Defoe, while the tradition of realism or the novel of manners was identified as having an almost exclusively female line of descent.[3]

Supposedly concerned with the generalities of human existence, romance was typically figured with tropes of naturalism, concreteness and transparency; frequently, it was described as meeting a primal desire or need. Haggard wrote that the "love of romance is probably coeval with the existence of humanity . . . like the passions, an innate quality of mankind" (172). The putative primality of romance was often conveyed through the deployment of two discursive stereotypes generally understood as analogically corresponding: primitive man and the child. The deployment of primitivism is exemplified by Lang who wrote that romance appealed to the "savages under our white skins," to the "natural man within" (689). This notion of the appeal of romance as atavistic, managed by an account of the primitive "within" civilised man, is paralleled by Stevenson's description in "A Gossip on Romance" of the appeal of romance to the child within the man. In this essay Stevenson polemically seeks to establish romance as the highest kind of literary achievement by way of an account of reading as, and like, a male child; the value of romance in the essay's argument depends upon, and is articulated through, a construction of the male child as a locus of natural, spontaneous experience. Romance's primality is also conveyed through a metaphorics of male embodiment (including the reference to "the body" engaged in "clean open air adventure" given above) and figures of corporeal sensation and appetite.

The desire for adventurous incident, Stevenson writes, is "one of the natural appetites with which any lively literature has to count. The desire for knowledge, I had almost added the desire for meat, is not more deeply seated than this demand for fit and striking incident" (144). The claim that the desire for romance or a literature of incident is a "natural appetite" equivalent to the bodily need for food is reinforced elswhere in the essay by invocations of the male child and his appetites. Combining the motifs of eating and infancy, Stevenson writes that in the "bright, troubled period of our boyhood . . . eloquence and thought, character and conversation, were but obstacles to brush aside as we dug blithely after a certain sort of incident, like a pig for truffles" (140). The experience of reading romance for the adult reader is marked as identical both with this childhood experience of reading as an addiction to "incident," and with the male child's supposed unself-conscious absorption in play: "Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child" (151). Romance which "equally delights the schoolboy and the sage" (145) renders generational distinctions irrelevant, entailing for the adult male reader a kind of reversion to boyhood. In reading romance both adult and child "play . . . at being the hero" (150), entering into a spontaneous, enraptured identification with the text in marked contrast to the detached, "critical" interest of the "spectator," which Stevenson claims is elicited by realism or "character-studies" (151).

Stevenson tropes romance as a happy experiential plenitude: the "epoch-making scenes" of romance "fill up, at one blow, our capacity for sympathetic pleasure" (145). Defined by their "right[ness]" (144), such "scenes" are described as drawing the reader into the text—thus effecting the identification which characterises romance—and leaving impressions on "the very bosom of our mind that neither time nor tide can efface or weaken," impressions which are eminently visual—they are "printed on the mind's

[3] A particularly developed version of this genealogical argument, which is implied in most pro-romance polemics, can be found in Lyall (532ff).

eye for ever"—and extralinguistic in form: "we may forget the words, although they are beautiful; we may forget the author's comment, although perhaps it was ingenious and true" (145). Textuality is erased in this account of romance as a direct transmission of concrete, visual impressions.

Stevenson proffers Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as the pre-eminent exemplar of this valorised textual transparency. In this he follows a significant tradition, famously exemplified by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, of reading Defoe's text as "able to transcend the discursive separation of subject, word and world," as "able to perform a process of erasure upon its mode of signification" (Loxley 7).[4] Stevenson then goes on to allot artistic success or failure to three successor-texts to *Robinson Crusoe* ("Robinsonades") by measuring their rendition of a single narrative component—the "treasure-trove"—against the example of the ur-text. In *Robinson Crusoe*,

> every single article the castaway recovers from the hulk is "a joy for ever" to the man who reads of them. They are the things that should be found, and the bare enumeration stirs the blood. I found a glimmer of the same interest the other day in a new book, *The Sailor's Sweetheart* by Mr. Clark Russell. The whole business of the brig *Morning Star* is very rightly felt and spiritedly written; but the clothes, the books and the money satisfy the reader's mind like things to eat. We are dealing here with the old cut-and-dry, legitimate interest of the treasure trove. But even treasure trove can be made dull. There are few people who have not groaned under the plethora of goods that fell to the lot of the *Swiss Family Robinson*, that dreary family [in the novel by Jean Rudolph Wyss]. They found article after article, creature after creature, from milk kine to pieces of ordnance, a whole consignment; but no informing taste had presided over the selection, there was no smack or relish in the invoice; and these riches left the fancy cold. The box of goods in Verne's *Mysterious Island* is another case in point; there was no gusto and no glamour about that; it might have come from a shop. ("Gossip" 149-50)

In these examples the crucial element of the "fit and striking" is presented as an elegant sufficiency of the artefact. By contrast with the rightness of "every single article" which Robinson recovers ("the bare enumeration" of which "stirs the blood") and the haul of Russell's book (which, in a reintroduction of the appetitive motif, "satisf[ies] the reader's mind like something to eat"), the salvaged cargoes of *The Swiss Family Robinson* and *The Mysterious Island* are characterised by a stultifying excess and tainted with the mundanity of commercial transaction ("consignment", "invoice," "might have come from a shop"). Again, words are marked as ancillary, indeed as ultimately irrelevant to the experience of reading. Stevenson writes of Russell's book: "The whole business . . . is very rightly and spiritedly written; but the clothes, the books and the money satisfy the reader's mind like things to eat." The syntactical structure of antithesis inscribes the textual rendition of the treasure trove in Russell's book as separable from and subordinate to the concreteness of the impressions left on "the

[4] Rousseau's reading of *Robinson Crusoe* is given in *Emile* (1762).

reader's mind." In Stevenson's account of romance there is no gap between sign and referent and no mediation between reader and text. Romance, like the ideal of "expenditure" in "Lay Morals," is a locus of immediate experience and satisfied desire.

The centrality of contrasted modes of consumption to Stevenson's calibration of aesthetic value in "A Gossip on Romance" indicates a further intimacy of this essay's argument with the argument of "Lay Morals." The aesthetic of parsimony which Stevenson finds to be embodied in true romances like Defoe's and Russell's, and which he articulates through an account of satisfied bodily appetite, is opposed to the textual excess, the surplus of the object in *The Swiss Family Robinson*, which suggests the proliferation of consumer articles in mass society. Both Wyss's and Verne's novels are aligned by Stevenson with the artifice of modern commercial culture, while authentic romance, by way of its identification with the child and the appetencies he exemplifies, is distanced from that culture. In other words, the parsimonious, empiricist aesthetic which emerges from Stevenson's essay—in which textuality is erased, rendering reading a process of the absorption of concrete, visual impressions—may be regarded as encoding a fantasised state in which the incessant desires incited by capitalism come to rest.

The anti-modernism articulated by Stevenson here was of a piece with that of the pro-romancers in general. For its proponents, romance was simultaneously transcendent and redemptive of modernity: as Haggard put it, romance constituted a flight from the "prose of a somewhat dreary age" into the "calm retreats of pure imagination" (180). This fantasy of the transcendence and redemption of market culture was managed by the implicit construction of romance as uncommodified artefact. While writers like Haggard dilated on the worrying effects of the "over-production" of fiction, and attacked overtly commodified forms of fiction like the railway novel (Haggard 173), romance's own implication in modern mass society—its own status as commodity and its effect on the literary market—was generally occulted by means of an account of romance's timelessness, its embodiment of literary tradition. Through its repetition of tradition, as Saintsbury put it, romance "part[ook] of eternity . . . the more faithful the repetition the surer the success, because the artist is only drawing deeper on a perennial source" (416).

Stevenson's own version of the Robinsonade *Treasure Island*, completed shortly before the publication of "A Gossip on Romance,[5] was regarded by the romancers as the founding text of the romantic revival. With *Treasure Island*, Lang wrote, Stevenson "restored Romance" (690). In this book Stevenson might be seen as carrying out his own aesthetic ideal of emulating the putative economy, transparency and timelessness of *Robinson Crusoe*. Certainly, the dominant critical tradition has read *Treasure Island* as intrinsically, yet inexplicably, "great." The novel has in the main been presented as self-evident, as relating its simple tale of treasure hunt so compellingly and so concretely that the reader is "caught up" in the narrative. In fact, as these characterisations suggest, much of the interpretation of *Treasure Island* simply rehearses Stevenson's construction of romance as it is set forth in "A Gossip on Romance," reading Stevenson's practice through the lens of his own theory. The historically dominant view of *Treasure Island* also follows the pro-romancers' identification of it as a watershed, but concentrates on its elements of novelty rather than its restoration of tradition. Typically, the novel's

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[5] *Treasure Island* was serialised in the boys' magazine *Young Folks* from October 1881 to January 1882, and published in book form in 1883.

indebtedness and allusiveness to earlier generic forms of adventure narrative and children's fiction are noted only in order to emphasise the thoroughness with which *Treasure Island* improves upon those forms. An anonymous contemporary reviewer in the *Graphic* provides an early example of this view, writing that "under Mr. Stevenson's masterly touch" the "resuscitated" tale "of buried treasure in the Spanish main . . . becomes new" (qtd in Maxiner 140-41).[6]

Paradoxically enough, for all its supposed transparency *Treasure Island* is, as Joseph Bristow puts it, a "remarkably self-conscious fiction" which thematises its own project of "telling a good story" (112). This self-consciousness is first signalled in the poem entitled "To the Hesitating Purchaser" which prefaces the text proper. In this extradiegetic and metanarrative moment, Stevenson explicitly advertises the narrative which is to follow through invocations of the tropes of repetition and natural appetite which I have argued structure pro-romance discourse:

> If sailor tales to sailor tunes,
> Storm and adventure, heat and cold,
> If schooners, islands and maroons,
> And Buccaneers and buried Gold,
> And all the old romance retold
> Exactly in the ancient way,
> Can please, as me they pleased of old,
> The wiser youngsters of today:
>
> —So be it, and all on! If not,
> If studious youth no longer crave,
> His ancient appetites forgot,
> Kingston, or Ballantyne the brave,
> Or Cooper of the wood and wave:
> So be it, also! And may I
> And all my pirates share the grave,
> Where these and their creations lie! (xxx)

Here, the construction of the literary genre of romance as uncommodified object managed by its association with bodily appetite is ironically reversed in the poem's self-conscious positioning of the text as commodity. By situating "ancient appetites" in the

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[6] Diana Loxley provides a stringent account of the criticism of *Treasure Island*, writing that the novel has "proved fertile ground for the development of . . . [a] high empiricist criticism which will attempt to account for the nature of the text by resort to mystificatory notions of 'creation,' literary 'value,' 'quality,' 'appeal,' 'mastery'" (137). As in the account of romance in "A Gossip on Romance," *Treasure Island* has been seen as securing for its (male) adult readers a recovery of childhood: as offering access to the child and/or effecting the opportunity to read *like* a child. George Meredith spoke early on for this view in one of his letters to Stevenson, designating the novel "the best of boys' books and a book to make one a boy again" (qtd in Stevenson *Treasure Island* ix). In the twentieth century J.R. Hammond has claimed that *Treasure Island* offers an unmediated "insight into the mind of a child" (103); and Robert Kiely, in a reintroduction of the topos of athletic physicality which also informed Stevenson's conception of romance, asserts that this "unhampered" book gives the adult reader "the perennial thrill of tossing away his books on the last day of the terms or the youth flinging off his sticky clothes for the first swim of the season" (69).

context of commodity consumption—a solicitation of the "hesitating purchaser"—the poem points to the determination of such notions as the "ancient" and the "natural" by consumer culture; more precisely, it points to their status as selling points, as attributes pitched at a certain type of consumer or market sector. Such attributes as "naturalness," as Rachel Bowlby argues in her Baudrillardian analysis of contemporary commodity culture, "make sense to the consumer not in some primary, self-evident way, but rather because the quality is presented as different from, an improvement on, 'artificiality'" (25). The poem's framing as advertisement, then, indicates that the quality of the "ancient"—that which is posited as outside modernity—is in fact an effect of modernity: an attribute caught within a network of commodity-signs which only make sense in relation to one another. Although the subsequent narrative of *Treasure Island* attempts to maintain romance's distance from consumer desire, consumer desire in fact structures that narrative, as it structures "To the Hesitating Purchaser," albeit less obviously.

In concordance with Saintsbury's characterisation of romance, the prefatory poem promises the subsequent narrative as the repetition of a tradition already in place—as "all the old romance, retold / Exactly in the ancient way"—a tradition specifically identified with Kingston, Ballantyne and Cooper. (The "revival" which *Treasure Island* inaugurates is also, of course, a figure of repetition; the anti-modernist nostalgia of the romance movement is paralleled in the narrative's own nostalgic backward glance, its setting "in the year of grace 17--"). A structure of repetition also serves as the text's narrative motor. Reflexively exemplifying Stevenson's theory of romance as predicated on identification, the novel inscribes the consumption of romance as a form of mimetic desire.[7] Representations of romance—story-telling, fantasies and daydreams—incite or elicit the characters' desire for adventure, and induce in the characters a mimicry of those representations. Jim, the child hero and narrator, describes himself, before the adventurers set sail, as "full of sea-dreams and the most charming anticipations of strange islands and adventures," imagining islands "thick with savages" and "full of dangerous animals" (36); and the sight of the quays at Bristol, from where they embark, induces in him another "delightful dream" of "going to sea . . . with a piping boatswain, and pig-tailed singing seamen; to sea, bound for an unknown island, and to seek for buried treasure!" (40). Like Jim, the leaders of the treasure-hunting expedition, the gentlemen Dr Livesey and Squire Trelawney, are inspired by a love of romance. Trelawney writes excitedly to Livesey from Bristol where he is making preparations for the voyage: "Seaward ho! Hang the treasure! It's the glory of the sea that has turned my head" (38). In designating love of romance or desire for adventure as the motivation for Jim's and the gentlemen's treasure hunt, Stevenson seeks to differentiate them from the pirates who are motivated by a base desire for financial gain. Trelawney cries contemptuously: "What [are] these villains after but money? What do they care for but money? For what would they risk their carcasses but money?" (32).

This adventure undertaken for adventure's sake, rather than for the sake of treasure, is legible as a kind of leisure activity analogous with the reading of literature. It

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[7] The concept of mimetic desire is Girard's. He postulates that desire is not primarily oriented by its ostensible object but is instead always mediated by the desires of others and, ultimately, motivated by prior structures of representation. See Girard, particlarly Chapter 1, and Borch-Jacobsen, who departs from analysis of interpersonal triangulations of desire—to which, according to Borch-Jacobsen, Girard "limits his attention for the most part" (27)—to provide a more wide-ranging account of desire as always "mobilized by a 'model' to which it conforms (with which it identifies)" (26).

repeats at the narrative level the romancers' notion of the reading of literature as an activity which occupied or indeed supplied a space "outside" the market. The text thus inscribes within its own narrative strategies the disavowal of commodity culture which subtended the literary ideology of romance. The crossing of these fictional and theoretical strategies of occultation or disavowal is made clear in another of Trelawney's exclamations which works to sanitise the pursuit of wealth even as it celebrates it. When Jim and the gentlemen first discover the maps that lead to the treasure, Trelawney cries: "We'll have . . . money to eat—to roll in—to play duck and drake with ever after" (34). The hyperbolic figure of wealth—money to eat—reintroduces the equation of the commodity with bodily need which Stevenson used in "Lay Morals" and "A Gossip on Romance" to figure a state of satisfied desire which evades the dynamic of commodity culture, a state which, in his theory of fiction, the genre of romance embodies. The other part of Trelawney's exclamation applies to the treasure the infantilising effect which Stevenson applied to the romance: playing "duck and drake" with the money recalls the notion of play-acting, the reversion of men to boys which romance effects. Casting the pursuit of treasure in terms of necessity and innocence, this moment in the text provides a fictional reinforcement of the theoretical terms of Stevenson's definition of romance.

However, as Bristow notes, Trelawney's disavowals do not mean that the gentlemen and Jim do not recover (and profit from) the treasure (Bristow 113-14). It is crucial to emphasise such an apparently obvious point, given the text's diffusion of disavowal: its insistence that monetary gain is not the "point" of the narrative.[8] In an essay which demonstrates the tendency of critic to take the insistence of the text on its own innocence at face value, but which also has the insight to identify the recovery of the treasure as narratively crucial, Leslie Fiedler writes: "There is an astonishing innocence about [*Treasure Island*]—a world without sex and without business—where the source of wealth is buried treasure, clean gold in sand, for which only murder has been done, but which implies no grimy sweat in offices, no manipulating of stock, none of the quiet betrayals of capitalist competition" (83). As Fiedler notes, *Treasure Island* presents a fantasy of instant wealth abstracted from the machinery of capitalism. However, this machinery is not simply absent, as it is in Fiedler's account, but rather subjected to an ideologically efficacious process of repression and that for all the forcefulness of that repression, the machinery of capitalism cannot help but return in a text whose telos is the appropriation of treasure. The return of this repression, appropriate enough in a text structured by various modalities of return and repetition, takes the form, in fact, of a verbal figure of repetition, the repetend: the parrot's cry of "Pieces of eight." Bristow notes that the parrot, in ceaselessly repeating "Pieces of eight," "enshrines the whole economy upon which the novel bases itself. *Treasure Island* can only repeat a desire to find treasure . . . without question. The phrase 'Pieces of eight' comprises the risk of adventure itself. Once learned by heart, it can only be uttered again and again, sustaining a lust for material goods" (115).

Treasure Island turns out to be suffused with a textualised version of the modern consumer's incessant desire for more goods, undermining its own project of providing

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[8] For an instance of critical concurrence with the text's self-presentation see Fowler, who argues that because the treasure hunt only "takes up two chapters of thirty-four" it is less narratively and thematically salient than the series of "contests for power" which the text recounts (111).

an escape from, and an alternative to, that desire.[9] The repetitive structure of consumer desire embodied in the book stands as an inverted mirror image of the notion of tradition as repetition which, in pro-romance discourse, figures romance's transcendence of consumer desire and modernity. Moreover, in its supersession of an older romance tradition, in its newness paradoxically predicated on a reworking of archaic generic conventions, *Treasure Island* discloses its status as an effect of the so-called "Western European fashion pattern" (McKendrick 41), the dynamic of a constant production of novelty in commodities, or constant remodelling of commodities, which sustains consumer culture.

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[9] As Bristow notes the parrot's cry also indicates the implication of "adventure" in the British imperialist project. The parrot, Long John Silver tells Jim, "may be two hundred years old" and has been present at many of the major scenes of mercantile imperialism: "She's been at Madagascar, and at Malabar, and Surinam, and Providence, and Portobello. . . . She was at the boarding of the Viceroy of the Indies out of Goa" (54); "if anybody's seen more wickedness, it must be the devil himself," Silver declares (54). The relation of the text's "innocent" treasure-hunt to the "wickedness" of imperialism is a complex one; for a compelling discussion, see Loxley 159-69. While *Treasure Island* does not present an overtly "imperialist" narrative in the way that other Robinsonades do in that its treasure-hunting expedition does not involve colonisation or conquest, it may be regarded, in its presentation of the plucky Jim, as promoting the "fighting-fit" middle-class masculinity required by the imperialism recognised by contemporary commentators. The editors of Stevenson's letters note that a leader in the *Daily News* of 28 November 1883 "praised *Treasure Island* as one of the 'stirring, wholesome narratives of adventure' in the tradition of Marryat, Kingsley and Henty which helped 'to make boys manly, inventive and independent' and encouraged the 'spirit of enterprise which drives our race all over the world'" (Stevenson *Letters* 4: 212 n1). In an essay of 1899 Edmund Gosse set out an account of the development of the adventure novel, relating it to the "undaunted" (14) readiness for battle over the spoils of imperialism which, he claimed, had characterised Britain from the 1880s on. The "besieged attitude of Great Britain among the European nations," Gosse wrote, "has been accompanied by a certain literary movement," the revival of romance or "the literature of action," a movement which Gosse, like the pro-romancers, dates to the publication of *Treasure Island*. Gosse argues that *Treasure Island*, which "habituated" the British public (15) to "violent death and breathless incident" (16) spoke to the putative enthusiasm of that public for imperial war: "Our incessant 'little wars' were followed with a sympathy which had constantly been denied to them in the mid-Victorian period. . . . At the same time there began, and flowed over the country like a wave, an unexampled enthusiasm for every kind of athletics" (16). In Gosse's account, the late nineteenth-century preoccupation with athletic and imperial strength—with the "training and development of the muscles, individual or politic" (16)—is embodied in and (to use Gosses's own term) "foster[ed]" (15) by Stevenson's text.

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