

citing Robin Blackburn's 1988 *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, "the slave trade [was] a popular reform cause that expressed 'patriotic conceptions of English liberty [. . .] that did not necessarily entail application of similar ideals at home'" (72).

Beyond these narrow concerns, however, my broader complaint about this text is that it offers so very little in the way of literary criticism. Instead, in each chapter, Brantlinger singles out one or two literary texts that exemplify the specific region and historical moment of his discussion; these texts receive a cursory, glancing discussion that does not begin to approach a reading. Indeed, Brantlinger lays out more about his take on Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* in the introductory chapter to the book than in the chapter in which this text is actually discussed. Perhaps this is the trend now; but I haven't ceased looking to find new and wonderful texts to teach in my literature surveys as well as new ways to think about the standards.

Instead, Brantlinger's book covers mainly well-trod territory about predictable literary texts. In chapter three, "Vanishing Americans," for example, the interesting discussion of "proleptic elegy [. . .] the attempt to turn the Indians and their destiny [death, extinction] into poetry" (59) is cut short by a more obvious and less interesting discussion of *The Last of the Mohicans* focusing on the by now well-known argument about Cooper and his sentimentalising racism. By the end of the text, the discussion of the range of non-literary texts comes to feel as familiar as the scanty discussion of literary ones does. *Dark Vanishings* does not offer much in the way of textual complexity or surprises for established scholars nor offer many provocative nooks and crannies for new scholars to engage and explore.

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***Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination*, by Ann C. Colley. London: Ashgate, 2004. 228. ISBN 0 7546 3506 6. £45 (hardback).**

It seems to me that Professor Colley has a substantial point when she writes "The value of engaging the later part of Stevenson's biography is that it forces the careful reader to struggle with the tensions of actually living within the site of Empire and, therefore, to deal with its contradictions." And there is even more to be said for her contention that "To impose a concept like 'imperialism' on Stevenson's work tends to exclude, and, consequently, to exile or discard what does not fit into its space." A good dose of the empirical is a healthy corrective to some of the rarefied theorising which has a tendency to leave us with the bridle and the bit but not a sign of the bloody horse.

That said, it is important to acknowledge the place and function of theory (Stevenson explicitly did) not just as a means of identifying and clarifying these

same contradictions and ambivalences, but also as a means of bringing order and coherence to the work in hand. *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination* seems to me to lack the unity of perspective a more secure theoretical grounding would have supplied. Thus it can read at times like a biography, at times like an ethnographic essay or a political history of the South Pacific or an essay on commodity culture or on theocratic imperialism. All of these topics are areas of legitimate interest in a book with this title but to realise their potential significance more analytical stratagems have to be devised which cannot be done in the absence of a more unified intellectual matrix.

The result is that one is left with a feeling of cursoriness in the treatment of all of these subjects – something which is not helped by the chosen lay-out with its frequent (sometimes very frequent) sub-headings which interrupt the critical narrative and leave the reader pining for the argument to engage with these interesting possibilities at a more seminal intellectual level.

The tentative note struck now and then strengthens these feelings – for example, Stevenson returns “as if to refurbish his vocabulary”; his characters “seem to step out of the shadows onto the brightness of the page,” they emerge “as if from oblivion onto the brilliant text.”

The trouble is that a title like this one raises considerable expectations of an analysis of the “imperial imagination” and we do not get it. Instead, we get an account of Stevenson’s dealings with missionaries, island chiefs, consular officials and the like parties, which does not really take us far. In fact, there is more to satisfy us in this respect in Roslyn Jolly’s short introduction to *South Sea Tales by Robert Louis Stevenson* which she edited for World’s Classics (and which Professor Colley generously acknowledges).

A reader with high expectations of a chapter with the title “Colonies of Memory” will, I think, be a little disappointed. What is said is of interest in a discursive way: missionaries did indeed root out tribal practices and destroyed or carried off these islanders’ most venerated emblems, thereby helping to erode or displace memory. There is also the occasional sharp observation – for example, Carse in “The Beach of Falesa” being described as “a forger of memory” as he manufactures island curios, or his “awful gallery of puppets and tricks” being seen as “amounting to a parody of the LMS Museum in its early days”; but it is a highly complex topic which demands more sophisticated analysis and a greatly extended field of reference. It is tempting fate to call this chapter “Colonies of Memory” and then withhold deeper scrutiny in the context of Stevenson’s political imagination. I really don’t think St Augustine (from whom the phrase more or less derives) and Professor Colley are thinking of quite the same kind of colonies, though the allusion is a teasingly suggestive one.

Thus though the book is for the most part very well-researched with careful and copious notes and references (particularly in relation to missionary activity), this reader’s final response was one of frustration because so many of these interesting

avenues down which we were allowed a glimpse, were not in the end sufficiently explored. The book will not, I believe, commend itself particularly highly to the Stevenson scholar, many of whom might also wish for a more active engagement with some of Stevenson's fictional texts; but it may have more appeal to those who are interested in the political machinations of the missionaries in this area and who may well be surprised as well as enlightened by the surprising degree to which Stevenson responded to both the good and the bad consequences.

I cannot resist adding for the sake of the paperback edition that the Scots word "wame" does not mean home – at least it didn't when this member of the diaspora worked up a healthy appetite as a boy, roaming the beautiful but challenging hills of Aberdeenshire.

Alan Sandison

***William and Lucy: The Other Rossettis*, by Angela Thirlwell. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003. xiii + 377, 110 b/w illustrations + 30 colour. ISBN 0-300-10200-3. US\$45.00 (hardback).**

William Michael Rossetti's guiding principles for art criticism, probably written down towards the end of the century although certainly developed and adhered to throughout his career, provide a good starting point for this review. After urging the value of first impressions and advising the critic to express an individual opinion regardless of fad or fashion, he says finally, "Be prepared to admit the merit of any & every sort of painting, provided only it is a good thing *from its own point of view*" (122). It would be churlish not to abide by William's temperate and practical advice in critical practice generally. As Thirlwell points out, he "wrote with attitude, but not with cruel destructiveness" (123), and she points to his exemplary even-handedness as an expert witness in the Whistler vs Ruskin case (135). With this in mind therefore, I'll look first at the structure of this biography of "the other Rossettis," which is probably its most distinctive, and sometimes annoying, feature. Thirlwell explains her method at some length in the introduction: eschewing a "linear, chronological biography, I have chosen a 'spots of experience' structure" of thematic chapters which are intended "to build up an impression of both lives, by increments" (1). The obvious allusion to Wordsworth's "spots of time" of *The Prelude* is misleading, however, for Thirlwell does not isolate epiphanic moments which define what the writer is at a particular age. Rather she organises her material into defining aspects (or chapters) of William and Lucy which characterise them over much of their adult lives, such as the artist, the man of letters, the patient, radicals, and so on. In some ways it is exhilarating. I particularly liked the chapter which concentrated on William as the Victorian man with all the paradoxes implicit