

OLIVER S. BUCKTON, Boca Raton, FL

**"It touches one too closely:"
Robert Louis Stevenson and Queer Theory**

In 1886, shortly after the publication of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, his friend John Addington Symonds – the art historian and poet – wrote him a letter responding to the horrific tale of duality:

At last I have read Dr Jekyll. It makes me wonder whether a man has the right so to scrutinize "the abysmal deeps of personality" [...]. The fact is that, viewed as an allegory, it touches one too closely. Most of us at some epoch of our lives have been on the verge of developing a Mr Hyde. (Symonds 1969, 120-121).

Symonds was living a double life, being married with four daughters, while secretly engaging in homosexual relationships with a variety of working-class men, including British soldiers, a Venetian gondolier, and a Swiss peasant. Symonds – who had come to know Stevenson while both men were convalescing in Davos in the Swiss Alps – evidently picked up on the parallels between Jekyll's situation and his own. As Jeffrey Weeks observes, Symonds – along with Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter – "set the tone for most of the discussion concerning homosexuality in liberal and left-wing circles, and through their work [...] was transmitted much of the most progressive of European thought on sexual matters" (Weeks 1990, 48).

In this letter to Stevenson, however, Symonds discloses a more personal response to the possibility of sexual revelation. Indeed, Symonds's letter is the first in a series of interpretations of Stevenson's story that have focused on its representation of concealed and fractured queer desires. Recently biographers have suggested that Stevenson himself was involved in relationships with other men that we would today term queer: Clare Harman wonders whether

perhaps this mesmeric, magus power over other men arose from a desire in Stevenson himself, not necessarily a conscious one. Stevenson could have been in much deeper denial than someone like Symonds, with his forthright image of "the wolf leaping out" when he saw a homosexual graffito, or Gosse, who spoke of his true self being "buried alive," while "this corpse [...] is obliged to bustle around and make an appearance." (Harman 2005, 214).

Harman asserts that Jekyll and Hyde "dramatizes both men's dilemmas very accurately" (214) – but the issue of which "both men" she refers to is unresolved.

Literary critics have also argued that *Jekyll and Hyde* functioned as a homosexual code: Elaine Showalter, for example, claims that "Some men, like Symonds and Wilde, may have read the book as a signing to the male community" (Showalter 1990, 115) that expressed the painful self-division of homosexual men. Given this critical history of the story, it is perhaps inevitable that a discussion of Stevenson's work in the light of queer theory should begin here, with narrative that has dominated the readings focusing on same-sex eroticism.

The place of *Jekyll and Hyde* as a queer text has been established by readings of the late-Victorian gothic of which it is a prime example. Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985) provided a critical framework for discussing features of gothic narrative

Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies 23.2 (September 2012): 51-60.

that indicate a paranoid queer desire, projecting disavowed desires onto 'doubles' that take on a sinister and violent aspect. While Sedgwick did not discuss *Jekyll and Hyde* in detail, her work traces "emergent patterns of male entitlement, friendship, and rivalry" (Sedgwick 1985, 1) that clearly apply to the novella. Sedgwick's discussion of the male paranoid gothic created the conditions for later readings and points to a vocabulary of the Gothic genre that serves a double-function as a language of queer desire:

One of the most distinctive of Gothic tropes, the 'unspeakable,' had a symptomatic role in this series of shifts. Sexuality between men had, throughout the Judaeo-Christian tradition, been famous among those who knew about it at all precisely for having no name [...] Of course, its very namelessness, its secrecy, was a form of social control. (Sedgwick 1985, 94)

This "defining pervasiveness in Gothic novels of language about the unspeakable" (94) can be found in *Jekyll and Hyde*, in the vows of silence made between the male characters, for example when Gabriel Utterson reproaches himself for speaking of Mr Hyde: "Here is another lesson to say nothing [...] I am ashamed of my long tongue. Let us make a bargain never to refer to this again" (Stevenson 2003, 12). Utterson, we are told in the story, "was embarrassed in discourse; backwards in sentiment" (7) and it is this secretiveness that leads Showalter to designate him as a "Jekyll manqué," whose "demeanor is muted and sober" (Showalter 1990, 109).

The all-male cast of central characters leads Sedgwick to include the story in her discussion of the later-Victorian "bachelor literature" in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) – a form in which the "paranoid gothic" finds a new incarnation as "male homosexual panic was acted out as a sometimes agonized sexual anesthesia that was damaging to both its male subjects and its female non-objects" (Sedgwick 1990, 188). However, the difference that provokes transgressive desire in *Jekyll* is less that of gender than that of class.

This connection between queerness and class transgression has been observed in perhaps the most influential interpretation focusing on queer desire in Stevenson: Elaine Showalter's chapter, "Dr Jekyll's Closet," in *Sexual Anarchy*. Showalter notes, "Jekyll's apparent infatuation with Hyde reflects the late-19th-century upper-middle-class eroticization of working-class men as the ideal homosexual objects" (Showalter 1990, 111). Hence Hyde's status as what Showalter terms "a loutish younger man, who comes and goes as he pleases" (111), is precisely what might make him attractive to an upper-class gentleman such as Jekyll.

Similarly to Sedgwick, Showalter takes note of a gothic language of the unspeakable in Stevenson's novella, linking it to both sexual and class transgression: the potent combination that would be the cause of Oscar Wilde's downfall in 1895. As Showalter notes:

The reaction of the male characters to Hyde is uniformly that of "disgust, loathing, and fear," suggestive of the almost hysterical homophobia of the late 19th century. In the most famous code word of Victorian homosexuality, they find something *unspeakable* about Hyde "that gave a man a turn," something "surprising and revolting." (Showalter 1990, 112; original emphasis).

As an example of the paranoid gothic, Stevenson's story nonetheless eludes Sedgwick's triangular structure in which "it is the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men"

(Sedgwick 1985, 25-26). For *Jekyll and Hyde*, as is well known, contains almost no women. Commenting on the various adaptations of the story, Showalter writes "not one tells the story as Stevenson wrote it – that is, as a story about men. All of the versions add women to the story and either eliminate the homoerotic elements or suggest them indirectly" (Showalter 1990, 115-116).

Focusing on the exclusively male context of the story, Showalter examines in cultural terms "the shadow of homosexuality that surrounded clubland and the nearly hysterical terror of revealing forbidden emotions between men" (Showalter 1990, 107). Showalter's emphasis on male sexual secrecy proves compelling in its attention to key textual details, as she notes "Jekyll cannot open his heart or his breast even to his dearest male friends. Thus they must spy on him to enter his mind, to get to the bottom of his secrets" (110). Showalter established a pattern in which same-sex desire finds uneasy representation in imagery of doors, penetration, darkness and secrecy. Thus, those features of landscape and climate in the text that contribute to the gothic atmosphere, are read by Showalter as signs "suggestive of anality and anal intercourse. Hyde travels in the 'chocolate-brown fog' that beats about the 'back-end of the evening'" (113). As these quotations indicate, Showalter's reading of queer references in *Jekyll and Hyde* is sometimes lacking in subtlety, and also depends at times on stereotypes of male homosexuality, such as the narcissism associated with the mirror which she terms "an obsessive symbol in homosexual literature" (111). No less problematic is her conflation of male homosexuality and other fin-de-siècle public concerns such as disease, syphilis in particular.

Showalter's argument is not biographical in focus. Nonetheless, the male clubland of Jekyll's environment does mirror Stevenson's circle in some intriguing ways. Like Jekyll, Stevenson had a circle of close male friends, finding himself at the center of currents of male desire. His friend and fellow-author Andrew Lang observed that Stevenson "possessed more than any man I ever met, the power of making other men fall in love with him" (cited in Harman 2005, 213). Jekyll exudes a similar magnetism, as when he "gave one of his pleasant dinners to some five or six old cronies, all intelligent, reputable men and all judges of good wine; and Mr Utterson so contrived that he remained behind after the others had departed" (Stevenson 2003, 19). One detects here a reminder of the possessiveness and jealousy over Jekyll's friendship that Lang refers to concerning Stevenson.

Such biographical parallels raise the possibility that *Jekyll and Hyde*, rather than being an exception or aberration in Stevenson's work in its portrayal of tortured sexual duality, actually forms part of a larger pattern of representations of queer desire. For example, the bitter struggle between the Durie brothers, James and Henry, in *The Master of Ballantrae*, replays the dual personality in the context of a sibling rivalry. James Durie also resembles Hyde in the threat he poses to the conspiracy of silence that maintains the homosocial order: "I have still one strong position – that you people fear a scandal, and I enjoy it" (Stevenson 1996b, 140). The sibling rivalry flares up no less significantly in a memorable duel by torchlight in which Henry apparently fatally wounds his older brother. The miraculous or supernatural reanimation of James, suggests that Henry Durie – like his earlier namesake Jekyll – has tried to destroy desires that cannot be eliminated but recur as an uncanny "return of the repressed:" as he later tells the family servant Mackellar about his brother,

"He's not of this world [...] I have struck my sword throughout his vitals [...] I have felt the hilt dirl on his breastbone, and the hot blood spirt in my very face, time and time again [...]. But he was never dead for all that" (Stevenson 1996b, 209).¹

The violent penetration and quasi-orgasmic violence of the duel is suggestive of a diverted sexual desire. Sedgwick argues that the Gothic novel typically features "one or more males who not only is persecuted by, but considers himself transparent to and often under the compulsion of, another male" (Sedgwick 1985, 91). Stevenson's gothic male doubles – such as Jekyll and Hyde, and the Durie brothers – strongly illustrate this theme, with Henry's refusal to believe in James's death serving as a manifestation of his paranoia, "the psychosis that makes graphic the mechanisms of homophobia" (91).

The Master may be included in the Scottish Gothic tradition discussed by Sedgwick in her chapter on James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Even after moving to Samoa in the South Seas, however, Stevenson maintained his interest in the dynamics of male attraction and conflict in these exotic contexts. Such is the case with the ambivalent relationship between John Wilshire – a British trader – and his rival Case, in "The Beach of Falesa" (1892). Initially friendly, the two traders become bitter enemies and the climax of the story occurs in the High Woods where Wilshire discovers Case's secret lair – from which he has been manipulating the superstitions of the native islanders to secure a monopoly on trade. Wilshire's final, triumphant dispatch of Case using a knife involves a violent penetration that recalls Henry's duel with James Durie, and connects it with the queer gothic tradition of Jekyll and Hyde:

I drew my knife and got it in the place. "Now," said I, "I've got you; and you're gone up, and a good job too! Do you feel the point of that?" [...] With that I gave him the cold steel for all I was worth. His body kicked under me like a spring sofa; he gave a dreadful kind of a long moan, and lay still [...]. I tried to draw the knife out to give it him again. The blood came over my hands, I remember, hot as tea. (Stevenson 1996a, 67-68)

The ejaculatory gushing of blood echoes Henry Durie's recollection of spilling James's blood in *The Master*, emphasized here by the word "came," suggesting an orgasm of violence. As Ralph Parfet argues, in Stevenson's work "Narratives of violence become in a sense a substitute for narratives of sexuality [...]. Thus attention is steered quite explicitly away from sex to violence [...]; the knowledge of violence is eroticized" (Parfet 2006, 196). Yet one of the purposes of queer theory is to reverse this process, steering attention back to the displaced representation of transgressive sexual desires. An apt illustration of Parfet's claim that Stevenson's South Seas writing "involves the recognition that violent transactions may be informed by powerful libidinal desires" (197), the scene is disturbing in its blending of intimacy and murder.

The queer intimacy of white men in the South Seas recurs in *The Ebb-Tide*, the third and last collaboration between Stevenson and his stepson Lloyd Osbourne. In this narrative, the drifter Robert Herrick is recognized by Attwater, the colonizer of the Pearl Island, as being of equal class and education, despite his evident decline. The growing intimacy between the two men – Attwater says to Herrick "you are at-

¹ In his essay "The Uncanny," Freud forges a link between repressed desire and the uncanny, arguing that "every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety," such that "the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny" (Freud 2010, 833).

tractive, very attractive" (Stevenson 1996a, 205) – is marked by Herrick's imagining a scene of Attwater's death that is strangely eroticized: "the thought of him lying dead was so unwelcome that it pursued him, like a vision, with every circumstance of colour and sound. Incessantly, he had before him the image of that great mass of man stricken down in varying attitudes and with varying wounds" (208).² The gaze between men does appear to be "lustful" (Parfet 2006,191), as when Herrick admires Attwater's manly appearance: "they were able at last to see what manner of man they had to do with. He was a huge fellow, six feet four in height, and of a build proportionately strong." Herrick notes his "eye of an unusual mingled brilliancy and softness, somber as coal and with lights that outshone the topaz; an eye of unimpaired health and virility" (Stevenson 1996a, 191). These scenes powerfully figure the role that violence plays in representing conflicted or repressed desire between men in Stevenson's South Seas fiction.

Following the pioneering work of Sedgwick and Showalter, critical attention to the gothic violence and uncanny scenes of male doubling has certainly been at the forefront of queer readings of Stevenson. More recently, however, a radically different approach to queer theory has emerged, helping us to recognize the emergence of same-sex desire in contexts of tenderness and intimacy, rather than rivalry and violence. A good example is Holly Furneaux's *Queer Dickens* (2009) which challenges what the author terms the "anti-social" school of theorists, claiming "a queer theory that rejects domestic and familial possibilities impoverishes the field of enquiry" (Furneaux 2009, 12).

Furneaux's interpretations emphasize the tender, domestic, and positive queer energies of Victorian fiction, rather than violence, aggression, and despair, which have often been viewed as the chief symptoms of a suppressed queer desire. As Furneaux argues, there has been "a long-held critical bias towards moments of violence in queer readings [...]. Under this thinking of the homosexual as the antisocial, that which must be aggressively repudiated in order for homosociality to be maintained, critical attention has focused on instances where same-sex desires energetically break out as acts of destruction and violence" (Furneaux 2009, 207). One can learn from Furneaux's example in order to attend to the more tender and positive connections between men in Stevenson, signs that the tragic outcome of Jekyll and Hyde is not the only available narrative for characters involved in same-sex passion.

In *Kidnapped* – published the same year as *Jekyll* – there is an extended example of an affectionate male relationship, in the companionship of David Balfour and Alan Breck. Despite deep differences of political affiliation and temperament – Alan is the hotheaded Jacobite, David the cautious Loyalist – a bond of intimacy is forged between the two men in their "flight through the heather." Linked by being joint suspects in the Appin murder and forced to take flight together, their bond is confirmed by the wanted posters: "It seemed it was noised on all sides that Alan Breck had fired the shot; and there was a bill issued for both him and me, with one hundred pounds reward" (Stevenson 2001, 187).

Crucially, at the point at which the relationship threatens to turn into violent antagonism – when David rashly challenges Alan to a duel – the crisis is avoided by

2 See chapter 8 of Buckton (2007) for a fuller discussion of the relationships between Herrick, Attwater, and Davis.

Alan's deep affection: "drawing my sword, I fell on guard as Alan himself had taught me. 'David!' he cried. 'Are ye daft? I cannae draw upon ye, David. It's fair murder'" (Stevenson 2001, 221). Avoiding the gothic crises of *The Master*, *Kidnapped* emphasizes the passionate attachment between men that is not driven by paranoia: as Alan tells David, "For just precisely what I thought I liked about ye, was that ye never quarreled; – and now I like ye better!" (223). Alan's tenderness towards David is further illustrated by his care for him when the younger man is unwell, which nicely illustrates Furneaux's point that that "male nursing, as well as wider forms of restorative male tactility [...] have tended to get under a critical radar more attuned to acts of masculine aggression" (Furneaux 2009, 177). Perhaps most tellingly, David's reaction to being separated from Alan discloses a passion that the narrative has not fully confronted at this point, is all the more emphatic for occurring at the end of the novel:

Neither one of us looked the other in the face, nor so long as he was in my view did I take one back glance at the friend I was leaving. But as I went on my way to the city, I felt so lost and lonesome that I could have found it in my heart to sit down by the dyke, and cry and weep like any baby (Stevenson 2001, 276).

It may be significant that Alan, at his parting from David, "held out his left hand" (276) – associated with queer desire in the late Victorian period – suggesting what Showalter terms "the Victorian homosexual trope of the left hand of illicit sexuality" (Showalter 1990, 115). The shame at such "illicit sexuality" – the novel being written just after the Labouchere Amendment criminalizing "gross indecency with another male person" (Weeks 1990, 14) – is reflected in the refusal of each man to meet the other's eye, and is also connected to David's subsequent "cold gnawing in my inside like a remorse for something wrong" (Stevenson 2001, 277).

Stevenson's comic writing represents another significant context in which queer desire circulates in Victorian literature in ways that have sometimes evaded critical scrutiny. As critics such as Christopher Craft have demonstrated, Oscar Wilde's verbal wit embeds allusions to sexual inversion and sodomy, and similar displacements of sodomitic desire also occur in Stevenson's comic masterpiece, *The Wrong Box* (1889), co-authored with his stepson Lloyd Osbourne (Craft 1994, 119).³ Stevenson's morbidly humorous fantasy revolves around the concealment of a corpse – that of Joseph Finsbury – in order to prevent the loss of a valuable tontine fund. In the course of the narrative, the corpse is concealed in a water butt and a grand piano, among other containers, and becomes a disruptive figure for masculine desire. In a key scene, Michael decides to bury the corpse in the back garden of William Dent Pitman, one of the corpse's reluctant recipients. Michael's words suggest an unspeakable sodomitic desire, as he notes "I tell you we should look devilish romantic shovelling out the sod by the moon's pale ray" (Stevenson 1995, 65). "The sod" doubles as a term for earth and an abbreviated word for "sodomite" – installing the corpse as a queer secret in the text, which Pitman suggests "you might put [...] in the closet there – if you could bear to touch it" (65).

In a similar fashion to Wilde's pun on "Bunbury," Stevenson's text invokes an absurd context for the emergence of a criminal sexual impulse. The hostile critical re-

³ Craft does acknowledge a darker side to such sodomitic representations, noting an "allusion to the thanatopolitics of homophobia, whose severest directives against disclosure only too axiomatically ensure that what finally gets disclosed will be, as in *Dorian Gray*, a corpse, homicide or suicide" (Craft 1994, 118).

ception that *The Wrong Box* provoked, was ostensibly focused on Stevenson's promiscuous collaboration with Osbourne: as the reviewer in the *The Scotsman* anxiously remarked, "It bears the name of a collaborator, Mr Lloyd Osbourne. What Mr Osbourne's share in the story may be it is hard to determine" (Maixner 1981, 337). Yet the charge made by the *Pall Mall Gazette* that Stevenson "ought to be ashamed of himself" for having chosen "so repellant a subject" (Maixner 1981, 336) indicates more serious misgivings about the transgressive sexual meanings of the text. The claim that the novel presents "a kind of ghastly game at hide and seek with a dead man's body" (337) reveals a critical distaste for the extended sodomitic pun about burying an object in the back garden. One reviewer's remark that the plot "is run through with sufficient rapidity to prevent the olfactory nerve discovering the whereabouts of the concealed carcass" (337) further indicates sensory disapproval at the unsavory subject.⁴

The critical discussion of the comic possibilities and manifestations of queer desire in Stevenson is sparse – particular in comparison to the rich interpretive discourse on Wilde. Yet it offers a potentially vital field for investigation, and reminds us that queer representation in Stevenson does not always take on a gothic, tragic form. Such comic forms also draw our attention to the fact that queer energies surface in Stevenson's texts across genres and modes, and are not restricted to the kind of paranoid gothic narratives addressed by Sedgwick and Showalter. In addition to causing "gender trouble" through their challenges to dominant Victorian definitions of masculinity and femininity, Stevenson's texts also promote "genre trouble," by confounding cherished distinctions between literary forms and styles. A neglected yet nonetheless significant example of how gender and genre are both contested and disrupted by Stevenson, is the novel *Prince Otto* (1885).

Occupying an unstable ground between historical fantasy, romantic adventure, and political critique, *Otto* was the object of intensive labor by Stevenson, yet he had doubts as to its likely popular appeal, writing to his friend and mentor, W. E. Henley: "'Otto' is, as you say, not a thing to extend my public on. It is queer and a little, little bit free; and some of the parties are immoral; and the whole thing is not a romance, nor yet a comedy; not yet a romantic comedy; but a kind of preparation of some of the elements of all three in a glass jar" (Maixner 1981, 176).

The protagonist Otto is an ineffectual and passive head of the imaginary State of Grunewald – as unlike the Machiavellian Prince as one could conceive – who is also dominated by his wife, and the novel also inverts the traditional Victorian gender roles by fashioning the Princess Seraphina as the active political force in the relationship. In a clear subversion of the Victorian hierarchy of husband and wife, Otto subserviently praises Seraphina as "in all things my superior" and refers to his "love, slavish and unrect" (Stevenson 1907, 219). Indeed the novel is punctuated by numerous references to Otto's impotence, emasculating him both politically and sexually. As Otto himself states, "I did not believe this girl could care for me; I must not intrude; I must preserve the foppery of my indifference. What an impotent picture!" (58–59). Otto's self-lacerating verdict of "impotence" finds an echo in the observations of Sir John Crabtree, the English traveler who records his opinions in a manuscript in which Otto is described as having "the mark of some congenital deficiency,

4 See chapter 1 of Buckton (2007) for a more detailed discussion of the comic representation of queer desire in narratives including *The Wrong Box* and *New Arabian Nights*.

physical or moral" with his "mouth a little womanish" (65). In this language Stevenson suggests the "type" of the homosexual, anticipating – in Foucault's terms – "a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself" (Foucault 1980, 43). It is this "kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul" (43) that Stevenson incorporates in his portrait of Prince Otto, thus creating what we have come to recognize, following Judith Butler, as "gender trouble" in the novel.

In *Jekyll and Hyde*, as we have seen, Stevenson draws attention to a late-Victorian crisis in masculinity, disclosing with the dissolution of Jekyll's persona the lack at the center of the Victorian gentleman. *Otto* – published the year before *Jekyll* – achieves a similar effect but in a very different mode. Otto's failure to live up to the expectations of the Victorian male subjects him to the contempt of his subjects: as the narrator comments in the opening chapter, the Grunewald people "looked with an unfeigned contempt on the soft character and manners of the sovereign race" (Stevenson 1907, 12). As Harman argues, "*Prince Otto* is most interesting now for the gender anarchy it portrays" (Harman 2005, 250). Indeed, the novel's inversion of gender roles is an apt illustration of Butler's argument that "gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real" (Butler 1999, xxviii) as Otto's transgression "destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates" (xxviii).

Otto's violation of the hierarchy of gender roles – based on the binary of masculine/feminine – consists of subversive bodily acts that attract hostility from critics both within and outside the text. As in the case of *The Wrong Box*, reviewers attacked *Otto* for its undermining of Victorian conventions of sexual propriety, but with the added slight on the hero's masculine identity. The *Saturday Review* noted of Otto: "He tries by fits and starts [...] to pluck up a little manhood" but "[t]he Prince of Grunewald is a fool and a wittol who leaves affairs of State to his wife and her alleged paramour, Baron Gondremark" (Maixner 1981, 184). In contrast to the hyper-masculine bravado of characters such as Alan Breck, James Durie and Attwater, Otto demonstrates a far more ambivalent view of gender roles and records the circulation of queer desires. The hostility and neglect that has been suffered by *Otto* is an indication that its dissident sexual meanings were not embraced by the critical establishment, and that it therefore failed to secure a place in the literary canon.

This discussion so far has remained focused on Stevenson's fiction, reflecting the strong preference for the treatment of fictional genres in queer theory's approach to literary texts. Yet Stevenson, as we have noted, also wrote and published extensively in non-fictional genres, in particular travel writing. Indeed, Stevenson's literary career began in earnest with two volumes of travel writing – *An Inland Voyage* (1878) and *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879) – before Stevenson dedicated his energies to writing a successful novel, which resulted in *Treasure Island*. By way of concluding this discussion of queer theory and Stevenson, I want to suggest that certain elements of queer desire and the contesting of conventional gender roles are already apparent in Stevenson's early travel writing, using the example of *Travels with a Donkey*.

This work has sometimes been read within the context of Stevenson's troubled romance with his future wife, Fanny Vandergrift Osbourne. Richard Holmes, in an influential reading of *Travels*, notes Stevenson's reference to the donkey Modestine, reminding him of "a lady of my acquaintance who had formerly loaded me with kind-

ness, and this actually increased my horror of my cruelty" (Stevenson 1992, 141). Holmes points out that Stevenson's journey in the Cevennes began in the month that Fanny returned to California, apparently terminating her fledgling romance with the author. Indeed, for Holmes the journey "brought out his intense sexual loneliness and longing for Fanny Osbourne" (Holmes 1996, 56). Holmes also argues that Stevenson censored his own journal for publication, "deleted or generalized the amorous reflections that were originally written with Fanny in mind" (64).

Yet Stevenson's role in the narrative is not that of heterosexual lover, but of the controller of Modestine's sexuality, as we witness when she meets another donkey: "I had to separate the pair and beat down their young romance with a renewed and feverish bastinado" (Stevenson 1992, 141). The phallic symbol of the "bastinado" suggests that Stevenson – like Modestine's previous owner, from whom he tries to distance himself – "had a name [...] for brutally misusing the ass" (136). The sodomitic implications of "misusing the ass" are hard to ignore, and Stevenson's guilt is palpable in the term "horror" and his prayer that "God forbid [...] that I should brutalise this innocent creature" (139). Despite the sexually proper associations of her name, Modestine has the power to invoke forbidden desires in Stevenson, and his repeated punishing of her is at once a displacement and acting out of those impulses. Stevenson's focus of his violence on Modestine's "rear" (138) or "stern-works" (139) indicate the sodomitic aspects of this desire, and he notes his "secret shame" (138) at his conduct.

Later in the narrative, Stevenson introduces and curiously identifies with the notorious "Beast of Gévaudan" – a legendary wolf in the Cevennes that preys on women and children. In some ways reflecting Stevenson's own flight from conventional heterosexual domesticity, the Beast becomes an object of admiration for the young author: "What a career was his! He lied ten months at free quarters in Gévaudan and Vivarais: he ate women and children" (Stevenson 1992, 150). Stevenson, himself at the beginning of what he hopes will be a great "career," admires the beast's "free quarters" to roam the landscape, trampling or destroying the weaker beings that stand in its path. As Mr Hyde embodies the suppressed queer desires of Victorian patriarchy – the unspeakable impulses that bind the clubbable men together in shared secrecy – so the Beast reminds us of Stevenson's outlaw status, and his sense (anticipating Jekyll's) that his bond with the Beast – which proves to be "a common wolf" (150) – may be permanent.

Such uncanny associations between Stevenson and bestial impulses return us to the anxious appeal of Symonds to Stevenson in his letter about Jekyll, with which we began this essay. Symonds's letter expresses the concern of a secret homosexual about the protection of his own identity, but also a fear that Stevenson may have entered dangerous territory in exploring "the abysmal deeps of personality." As Harman notes, "Symonds was clearly also shocked by how self-revealing Stevenson had been in his 'strange case'-history" (Harman 2005, 214). This solicitous concern of one man for another – "Jekyll seems to me capable of loosening the last threads of self-control in one who should read it" (Symonds 1969, 121) – may be less significant as a fear of recognition and exposure, than as an eloquent expression of a desired intimacy between men that evades compulsory heterosexuality. Throughout his career – in his writings, his travels, and his friendships – Stevenson discovered forms and techniques with which to articulate a dissident view of Victorian gender roles and sexual desires,

while also forging a profound challenge to the conventional forms and moral assumptions of Victorian narrative. In this respect, the "queerness" of Stevenson is ultimately textual no less than sexual.

Works Cited

- Buckton, Oliver S. *Cruising with Robert Louis Stevenson: Travel, Narrative, and the Colonial Body*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Craft, Christopher. *Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850-1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction. Volume 1*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1980.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2010. 824-841.
- Furieux, Holly. *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Harman, Claire. *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography*. London: HarperCollins, 2005.
- Holmes, Richard. *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*. New York: Vintage, 1996.
- Maixner, Paul. *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.
- Parfet, Ralph. "Violence in the South Seas: Stevenson, the Eye, and Desire." *Robert Louis Stevenson: Writer of Boundaries*. Eds. Richard Ambrosini and Richard Dury. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006. 190-198.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- . *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. New York: Penguin, 1990.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Prince Otto and The Wrong Box*. 1889. The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson. Pentland ed. Vol. 7. London: Cassell, 1907.
- . *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes and Selected Travel Writings*. 1879. Ed. Emma Letley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- . *South Sea Tales*. 1893. Ed. Roslyn Jolly. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996a.
- . *The Master of Ballantrae*. 1889. London: Penguin, 1996b.
- . *Kidnapped, or the Lad with the Silver Button*. 1886. Ed. Barry Menikoff. New York: Modern Library, 2001.
- . *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. 1886. Ed. Katherine Linehan. New York: Norton, 2003.
- and Lloyd Osbourne. *The Wrong Box*. 1892. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Symonds, John Addington. *The Letters of John Addington Symonds*. Vol. 3. 1885-1893. Eds. Herbert M. Shueller and Robert L. Peters. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. Rev ed. London: Quartet, 1990.

