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‘The worst dreams that ever I have’: Capitalism and the Romance
in R. L. Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*

While in recent years there has been a slow accumulation of research exploring the links between Robert Louis Stevenson’s work and capitalism, there remains a sense that this is still only an interesting byway when reading him, rather than a central route. Partly, this can be explained by this research having tended to focus on individual texts attached to specialised or circumscribed contemporary frames – the gold versus silver standard debate, for instance, or Victorian economic theory.¹ As revealing as these localised contextualisations are, their connection to the rest of Stevenson’s oeuvre, and to the wider operation of late Victorian capitalism, can be somewhat opaque. More broadly, the neglect of this aspect of Stevenson’s work can be seen as the continuing legacy of his status as writer and theorist of romance, a fictional mode still often associated with a childish escapism and reactionary politics – despite recent work by Julia Reid and Glenda Norquay showing how Stevenson must be distinguished from fellow romance revivalists such as H. Rider Haggard, Andrew Lang and G. A. Henty, to whom such epithets more properly apply.

In this essay I focus on Treasure Island (1883) to show how profoundly the Stevensonian romance could register the impact of capitalism. While there has been a recognition that money and greed play important parts in the novel, the breadth and depth of its engagement with such matters is yet to be fully compassed.² In Treasure Island late Victorian capitalism is registered as an uneasy but deadly alliance between professionalism and high finance. Stevenson’s dislike of the former has been noted before,³ but his treatment of the latter has received scantier treatment, and to better establish its importance to Treasure Island I briefly reprise its presence elsewhere in Stevenson’s oeuvre, from his essays to letters, short stories to novels. Finally, I trace how narrative features identified by Stevenson

as proper to the romance are used in Treasure Island to register the traumatic effects of such capitalism – notwithstanding the polemic associations with boyish “delight” that the mode also possesses in his essays (‘Gossip’, 87). Literary criticism has tended to see the nineteenth century romance as an escapist alternative to capitalism, creating enchanted spaces separate from and yet linked to the metropole and Western modernity;⁴ or as bodying forth straightforwardly profitable adventure.⁵ While Treasure Island inherits many of these associations, the positive romance of carefree adventure seems to have died at some point in its internalised history. Instead, it uses narrative features such as the transcending of the realistic bounds of characters, and the articulation of meaning through externalities and movement in space, to reveal how a romance of innocent play is compromised by the covert links between professionalization and speculative finance, profit and violence.

The Romantic Past and Professional Present

The first step towards recognising how Treasure Island responds to these forces is reconceiving how its cast of characters divide up. Previous readings have generally accepted the most immediately available categorisation – good and bad, cabin party and pirates – before noting that this division is complicated by the shared desire of both parties to gain the treasure. Naomi Wood, for instance, identifies the division between “gentlemen born” and “gentlemen of fortune”, attaches them to the merits of gold versus silver as they featured in contemporary debates, and concludes that Treasure Island demonstrates “the fundamental similarities between the two [while] also accounting for gold’s domination” (62-3).⁶ While none of this is wrong, exactly, it misses another key division: that between a carefree past and a ruthlessly purposive present.

On one level – with the crucial exception, as we will see, of Long John Silver – the pirates are distinguished by their brutality; on another, by their dilettante carelessness. They flout the practicalities of economy and geography, camping in a spot where they will inevitably grow sick, while Jim notes their profligacy and “entire unfitness for anything like a prolonged campaign” (163; ch. 31). The pirates have obviously not been exposed to the emphasis on practical ability, discipline and self-improvement which informed the reshaping of Victorian institutions from the army and medical profession to the civil service and household. Wendy R. Katz has noted how a woodcut Stevenson later produced for the Davos Press makes the satiric point that a retiring pirate will be respected for being rich (xxxvii). However, the retiree’s defining quality is that he is ‘industrious’, unlike the pirates of Treasure Island. Their ship might jump “like a manufactory” (71; ch. 13) but they abscond from it, and for this dereliction they are eventually killed. The weird arithmetic of the novel’s romantic past, by which Flint could go ashore with six seamen and mysteriously do away with all of them, is replaced by the grim accounting of the novel’s present, whereby the cabin party pick off the pirates using rifle, sword, scientific rationality (don’t camp in a swamp) and the appropriation of resources (they gain a supply of fresh water and all the food). As Christopher Parkes has noted, their victory is the result of “administrative control” as much as “military might” (86).

The periodization which is normally both inbuilt into the romance and invisible – the past, the setting for adventure, as better than and separate from a present against which it is implicitly opposed – thus gains a reflexive power in Treasure Island, as representatives from past and present are made to stand against each other. This becomes clearer if we examine the pirates’ unexpected affiliation with one half of a cabin party that is normally read as a single, unified body, but which also divides into two groups. The first consists of the seamen, Smollett and Gray, and the doctor, Livesey: nineteenth-century professionals in everything

but name.⁷ The second consists of Squire Trelawney and his feudal attendants, products of an older, pre-capitalist age that is doomed to extinction just as surely as the pirates. Stevenson's revisions to the serial version of the novel accentuated this split, heightening the doctor's rationality and dropped his buffoonish characteristics, thus levering him away from the squire (Hardesty, Hardesty III, and Mann, 1-22). It is Trelawney, that gentleman born, who declares pride in Flint, gentleman of fortune, as a fighting Englishman; and who recruits Silver and the other mutineers, thinking them "fellows ... of the most indomitable spirit" (43; ch. 7), while feeling an instinctive dislike for Captain Smollett's grim rationalism. By the end of the novel all the squire's feudal retinue have been killed, whereas Gray has not only survived but been "smit with the desire to rise", and, through his share in the treasure and by having "studied his profession" (182; ch. 34), has duly done so. Treasure Island is undoubtedly informed by the class dynamic described by critics such as Robert Irvine, in which the "authority of the gentleman" is jeopardised by developments such as "the extension of the franchise, and the rise of autonomous working-class organisations such as trades unions" (29); however, the novel is also shadowed by another dynamic, in which both the feudal aristocracy and the lower class roisterers have been displaced by the new professionals. It is telling that the outdated distinction between "gentlemen of fortune" and "gentlemen born" is pressed most strongly by the crazed Ben Gunn, who has been out of the world for years and whose squandering of his money at the novel's end, as well as his subsequent employment in the squire's service, suggests he is not in a position to understand the new dynamic. He is, in this sense, a shambolic reversal of Robinson Crusoe, that castaway proto-capitalist (and proto-realist) par excellence.

The shadow dynamic linking squire and pirates is powered by Stevenson's romantic ethos. In many of his essays the romance is linked to carefree childhood play, and it is notable that both lapse close to this state. Indeed, part of the pirates' problem seems to be that

they are children faced with adults in the game of Treasure Island. Once released from Smollett's discipline they go from being "gloomy" to "shouting at the oars like children" (100; ch. 19), while their naïve delight at finally gaining the map prompts "childish laughter" (155; ch. 29) and they revert to a childlike docility before the doctor's "ordinary professional visit" (158; ch. 30). When Israel Hands attempts a more complex strategizing it is so inept "a child could have told that he was bent on some deception" (134; ch. 26). This romantic pleasure in play is antagonistic to the kinds of utilitarian discipline imposed by the professionals. Much of the pirates' hostility arises from their being subjected to hard work and authoritative discipline; indeed, even the "honest hands" (74; ch. 13) are indistinguishable from the genuine pirates in this state. Jim, too, "hated the captain deeply" (55; ch. 9) for being made to work. The squire is as carefree as the buccaneers, declaring "Hang the treasure!" (43; ch. 7) as soon as he is engaged in the adventure, dressed up and imitating a sailor's walk. He also has a sociable propensity for "blabbing" (52; ch. 9) and his largess with drink and pleasant food mirrors the pirates' tendency to "eat and drink like fighting cocks" (62; ch. 11). Such extravagance belongs to what Eric J. Evans has called the "expansive, bucolic and roistering culture" of the eighteenth century (48), while neither squire nor pirates seem to have read Samuel Smiles' bestseller Self-Help (1859), whose chapter on the "use and abuse" of money declared alcohol "incompatible with economy, decency, health, and honest living" (188).⁸ The doctor, meanwhile, keeps a piece of Parmesan cheese in his snuff-box ("very nutritious", 102; ch. 19) and is the first to convert the squire's romantic portrayal of Flint to something more practical ("But the point is, had he money?", 36; ch. 6); and as double professional – doctor and "old soldier" – is aware throughout that "There is no time to dilly-dally in our work" (88; ch. 16). Smollett, likewise, is focused on how "treasure is ticklish work" (52; ch. 9). The shadow dynamic of

Treasure Island also connects Silver to the professional cabin party: unlike the pirates, who “‘liked a bit o’ fun’”, he was always “‘a kind of a chapling’” (64; ch. 11).

Of course, the cabin party display appealing virtues – they are brave and honourable – while the pirates are by no means lovable victims. However, it is as if this polarity has tried to rearrange a deeper structuring, more natural to Stevenson, which still retains its magnetic pull, whereby the romance is synonymous with a realm of carefree play that is partly defined by its opposition to an age of professional, economically driven utility. This deeper structuring is more clearly visible in an essay like ‘The English Admirals’ (1878), where dramatic, blithe and often self-destructive action – such as the pirates and the squire, in their own ways, reproduce – is valorised for escaping the ability of “‘a Benthamite arithmetician” to “‘calculate” it (‘Admirals’, 153). Susan Colón has identified a dialectical balance between a Benthamite, materialist rationality, and a more idealistic, vocational rationality, in treatments of the professional ideology in mid-Victorian literature. In Treasure Island Stevenson can be seen as planting his thumb on the scale of this balance: with the link between professionalism and a market-oriented self-interest showing through beneath the cabin party’s virtues.

High Finance

While this split between a blithely romantic past and a pragmatically professional present has not previously been detected in Treasure Island, Stevenson’s antipathy towards the rise of professionalization – especially with regard to his own work as author – is relatively well established. However, a close reading of Treasure Island also shows how Stevenson was just as much concerned with the high financial realms of late Victorian capitalism, despite them having an apparently less pressing bearing on his own occupation⁹ – indeed, the novel traces the dubious and covert links between professionalism and such realms. Before going on to

examine this, however, it is worth establishing just how consistently and persistently the world of finance acted as antagonist and stalking horse for Stevenson throughout his life, as this has received relatively little critical attention.¹⁰

Lloyd Osbourne would later recollect, of the artist's colony at Grez where the twenty-six year old Stevenson stayed:

It was the custom of them all to rail at the respectable and well-to-do; R.L.S.'s favourite expression was "a common banker", used as one might refer to a common labourer. 'Why even a common banker would renig at a thing like that' – 'renig' being another favourite word. I got the impression that people with good clothes, and money in their pockets, and pleasant, big houses were somehow odious, and should be heartily despised. They belonged to a strange race called Philistines, and were sternly to be kept in their place [...] R.L.S. always said he hoped to die in a ditch. (82)

Two years later, in some of his earliest essays, Stevenson was busily engaged in satirising the "rites of the god of Mammon" in the Paris Bourse ('Paris', 88), and describing how "[in 1877] the bald and peak-faced banker, sitting humped up in a brougham and two, is, for most practical purposes, stronger and more beautiful than Hercules or Apollo" (quoted in Howitt, 144). In an unpublished early essay, 'On the Choice of a Profession' – which champions vocational freedom and the necessary penury accompanying it – the essayist takes "a banker" as his archetypal opposition ('Choice', 255-6). Similarly, 'The Lantern Bearers' (1888) depicts the clergyman as "winning battles" in his daydreaming "spare hours", while "the farmer [is] sailing ships"; however, it is "the banker" who doubles Stevenson's own field, "reaping triumph in the arts" ('Lantern', 264). The bluff English undergraduate who cannot understand an impoverished guitarist in the story 'Providence and the Guitar' (1878) is

“going to be a banker” (the musician’s response: “‘ [...] do not say so. Not that. A man with such a nature as yours should not derogate so far’”, 444). More substantially, the repellent father of the heroine in ‘The Pavilion on the Links’ (1880) is a banker turned criminal absconder; while Seamus O’Malley has described how the trickery of Case in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ (1892) “highlight[s] the instabilities in any invisible ‘financial’ process” (74), such as those worked by the City of London. Stevenson’s most striking treatment of finance occurs in The Wrecker (1892), which he described as “full of the need and the lust of money” – though it is notable, given the connection between violence and money in Treasure Island, that he also finished by describing it as ‘blood-bespattered’” (Wrecker, 596; epilogue).

While it might be tempting to dismiss Stevenson’s criticisms as the épaté le bourgeois posturing of a subsidised bohemian, this is belied not only by their persistence through his life, but by his having tried to live up to them. In 1879, at the age of twenty-eight, he mixed with steerage passengers while crossing the Atlantic (“I was anxious to see the worst of emigrant life”; Amateur, 101) and ended up penniless in California – a poverty that must have been all the more frightening given his chronic ill health and the potentially lethal effects of such hardship. Later, in 1888, he swapped a life of metropolitan orthodoxy for the South Seas – though these travels by no means brought the escape he might have wished. According to Fanny Stevenson, he had to give up “South Sea Trading” on finding that “he must necessarily do many things contrary to the dictates of his conscience” to make it a success (Van den Grift, 13). These attitudes can partly be explained by his idiosyncratic Christianity: despite quarrelling with his strictly Presbyterian father, Stevenson retained a principled commitment to the values he found in the Gospels. As David Daiches has observed, even in his supposedly radical student days Stevenson “saw himself as a Bohemian Jesus putting compassion and understanding above the letter of the law”, while “his deeply Scottish sense of morality troubled him all his life” (23). Stephen Arata and others have

rightly emphasised the distress Stevenson's poverty brought him, and his tortured happiness at beginning to earn some money with successes like Treasure Island. Nevertheless, he remained largely true to the words he drafted in his early twenties: "for my own part, I want but little money, I hope; and I do not want to be decent at all, but to be good" ('Lay Morals', 219). Whatever Stevenson's occasional longing for cash, his hostility towards late Victorian capitalism never wavered.¹¹

In Treasure Island the conflation of the financial realms of advanced capitalism with the rise of professionalization and corporatisation is represented by the uneasy partnership between the professional cabin party of Smollett, Gray and Livesey, and the slippery, charming and murderous Long John Silver.¹² While critics have noted how some of the latter's traits muddy the dividing line between bad and good, outsider and insider (he has property, a wife, an education, and a bank balance), his kinship with the financial villains of Victorian fiction has not been noted – despite it gleaming suggestively from his very name.¹³ Silver's dangerously superficial charm, elusiveness (he disappears at the end), hypocrisy and protean affiliations (he ends up "doubly a traitor" with "a foot in either camp", 164; ch. 31) align him with what Mary Poovey has called the 'mysterious circulation' (3) of capital, whose worth and even location can be treacherously uncertain. Like Trollope's George Vavasor from Can You Forgive Her? (1864), Augustus Melmotte from The Way We Live Now (1875) and Ferdinand Lopez from The Prime Minister (1876), Silver aspires to get into parliament. However, unlike them, he can pass himself off as an English patriot to the patriotic squire ("he lost [his leg] in his country's service, under the immortal Hawke", 42; ch. 7), and appears as big and blonde as any New Imperialist ideologue could hope for.¹⁴ Tamara Wagner has argued that alongside 'the eminently comforting narrative' of Victorian fiction described by Poovey, in which criminal financiers are expelled in order to stabilise a wider sense of the reliability of the market, there also runs "a much more disconcerting – yet

also more exciting – plotline that pivoted on the questionable indeterminacy of the speculator’s insider status itself” (24). The mercurial Silver, indeterminate insider and outsider, is a piratical translation of the speculating villains of Victorian fiction.

This identification can be strengthened by looking back to one of Stevenson’s earliest essays, the little-known ‘A Salt-Water Financier’ (1877), which satirises the role played in the Honduras loan scandal by one “Captain Bedford Clapperton Trevelyan Pim, R.N, F.R.G.S., ASSOC. INST. C.E., .M.P., Late Special Commissioner for Honduras”. The article sternly endorses the sailor’s innocence and deplores the complex rapacity of the financial world in which he was an unwitting tool; all the while making it very clear that Pim was a knowing conspirator: “Only, why did he trail his pig-tail through all the narrows and shoals of Foreign Loan Finance? What an incongruity, what an anachronism was there!” (9). Just such an incongruity and anachronism is embodied by Long John Silver, of course. Caroline A. Howitt has noted the article’s idiomatic links to Treasure Island, with “old sea-dog”, “shiver his timbers!” and Admiral Benbow all mentioned. We might also note that it is Silver rather than the novel in general to which these links belong, and that both are also linked dubiously to honour and to Parliament; both are singled out as having twinkling eyes; and Stevenson’s designation of Pim as Long Tom Coffin (a character from Cooper’s The Pilot) obviously recalls Treasure Island’s one-legged charmer. Given this early equation of financial criminal and piratical seadog it is perhaps no surprise not only that Long John should have attracted more speculative dimensions to himself, but that almost a year to the day after publishing this essay Stevenson was enthusiastically finishing Trollope’s The Way We Live Now – which was probably also inspired by the Honduras loan scandal in which Captain Pim was implicated. Although Treasure Island is most commonly referred to the romance predecessors identified by Stevenson himself, the novel draws on intertexts that cut across generic boundaries.¹⁵

Embodying Trauma: Treasure Island as Romance

In order to see how Treasure Island actually registers the impact of late Victorian capitalism, and the professional and financial nexus it shadows forth, it is necessary to engage with its functioning as a romance. Key to this is Jim, the first person narrator. Like Silver, Jim's identity has been diagnosed as complex; though like Silver again, this complexity has not been anatomised or synthesised in such a way that his full role in the novel becomes clear.¹⁶ It is through Jim that Treasure Island registers the true cost of the pursuit of profit, for which childish innocence and imagination – equated by Stevenson with the romance – pays in full. As noted previously, the critical neglect of Stevenson's engagement with capitalism has partly been a consequence of his affiliation to the romance; it is striking, therefore, that a misconstruing of the importance of Jim, so central to this engagement, was also a point of origin for the definitive exchange in the late Victorian debate about the merits of romance versus realism. Henry James, in 'The Art of Fiction' (1884), contrasted Treasure Island with Edmond de Goncourt's Chérie by describing the former as concerning itself with 'the islands of the Spanish Main,' while the latter focuses on 'the moral consciousness of a child' (64). Stevenson then responded in turn with one of his most important theorisations of the romance, 'A Humble Remonstrance' (1884). However, in one sense Treasure Island had already answered James, if he had only had eyes to see it – in that the moral consciousness of the child, Jim, is central to its power.

The first, counterintuitive step to understanding Jim's role is to look immediately away to Billy Bones, who is father in everything but name of both Jim and the text. This twinning will later allow Jim's first person consciousness to register not only the personal trauma he suffers at the hands of the materialist forces at work in the novel, but also – and

simultaneously – the damage wreaked upon the romance itself. Bones is the portal by which the treasure enters the novel, and in this sense he brings it about: the way the very first sentence coils back to him after mentioning almost everything else in the text – the other characters, the island, the treasure, Jim, Jim’s writing and childhood home and father – subtly confirms this originary status. He is also, from the start, the novel’s prime romantic storyteller: “his stories frightened people worst of all” (11; ch. 1), while also simultaneously attracting them. In tandem with this narrative pre-eminence, Bones immediately supplants Jim’s father. His physical presence is attentively noted and his vivid speech transcribed in full, while Jim’s father’s is only reported indirectly before he disappears entirely from view.

It is often assumed that Bones is just another pirate villain, but he can more usefully be seen as the romance’s carefree past somehow survived – damaged and ailing – into the more prosaically unforgiving present that is Treasure Island, shortly to be acquired by Smollett & Co.¹⁷ As such he is more tragic than threatening. Jim “was far less afraid of the captain himself than anybody else who knew him” (11; ch. 1) and as Jim’s actual father is reported sick, so Bones sickens before our eyes, with the descriptions of his increasing weakness inspiring an unexpected pity, as he seems increasingly “shut up in his own thoughts and rather wandering”, piping up with “a kind of country love-song, that he must have learned in his youth before he had begun to follow the sea” (22; ch. 3). Part of the plangency of Bones’s death comes from its invocation of whole regions of possible narrative – youth, that country love-song – that are more suited to Jim’s childhood than the narrative he actually finds himself in: it gives the novel, before it has properly begun, a distinctly post-lapsarian feel. The union of the two paternal presences is sealed at the moment of Bones’s death:

But haste was all in vain. The captain had been struck dead by thundering apoplexy. It is a curious thing to understand, for I had certainly never liked the man, though of late I had begun to pity him, but as soon as I saw that he was dead, I burst into a flood of

tears. It was the second death I had known, and the sorrow of the first was still fresh in my heart. (24; ch 3)

Jim's true genealogical identity is completed through another piece of pasteboard dressing, when he returns to his childhood home for the last time to find another boy filling his place, just as his "father" had filled that position in lieu of Bones. This recalls Pip's discovery of a new Pip upon returning to his childhood home in Great Expectations, a novel for which Stevenson expressed qualified admiration¹⁸ – but whereas in the Dickens this discovery occurs at the end, as a bittersweet act of healing and renewal, in Treasure Island it is an uncompromising exile which precipitates the narrative that follows. As Jim leaves "one of [his] last thoughts" – though as far as we can see it is his last thought – is "of the captain" (44; ch. 7). Alan Sandison, in particular, has noted how Treasure Island is full of potential father figures (52-3), but it is crucial to recognise that Bones is Jim's true, originary source. Jim is of Bones's party before he has anything to do with either cabin party or pirates; he becomes "sharer in his alarms" (10; ch. 1) before he becomes a "share[r]" (84; ch. 15) in the treasure expedition, and where Silver and Smollett will later tussle over the title of captain, the first captain known to the novel is Bones, who is called that only by himself and Jim – despite being, in fact, a first mate.

So while Bones's most obvious bequest to the novel is the buried treasure, the romantic singularity from which it expands, the treasure's unacknowledged twin is Jim, the novel's first person narrator and apprehending consciousness. This accounts for much of the uncanny power of Treasure Island. As we have seen, the novel's different parties – amateur past, professional present, speculative Silver – battle for the bullion; however, they are also battling over and through Jim, the narrator, who is therefore split. Ostensibly Jim is of the cabin party, which is dominated by the professionals, Smollett and Livesey. However, before all this Jim is the successor to Bones, the (now deceased) romance of pre-modernity, against

which his cabin party companions are methodically engaged. This accounts for Jim's otherwise inexplicable desertions of those companions in ship and stockade; while the fact that these acts nevertheless lead directly to the cabin party's victory shows the futility of resisting that late Victorian concentration of power. "There is a kind of fate in this" (161; ch. 30), Livesey muses, contemplating the results of Jim's betrayals, and he might be right. It is as if the destiny of capitalism is writing the novel through Jim, possessing him as his nightmares will later possess him – and indeed, even on a circumstantial level his narrative is possessed by that future, as the first sentence tells us he is writing Treasure Island at the behest of "Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen" (9; ch. 1).

As Irvine has observed, Jim's lack of "moral heart-searching" resembles Stevenson's theorising of "spontaneous action" as a definitive quality of the romance (28). However, in Treasure Island this lack has been warped away from such positive associations. Jim's passivity before the "mad notions" (74; ch. 13) which are so crucial to the claiming of the treasure is more like the disassociation of a trauma victim or battle veteran. His explanations of his actions are – like his professions of grief for his father – feeble at best, and their descriptions have the curious air of an out of body experience, of Jim watching himself doing something whose consequences are still vividly with him – as we will learn they are at the end – but the enactment of which is distant and passive. "It occurred to me at once to go ashore. In a jiffy I had slipped over the side and curled up in the fore-sheets of the nearest boat, and almost at the same moment she shoved off" (74; ch. 13). This disjunction is most evident in the killing of Hands:

In the horrid pain and surprise of the moment – I scarce can say it was by my own volition, and I am sure it was without a conscious aim – both my pistols went off, and both escaped out of my hands. They did not fall alone; with a choked cry, the coxswain loosed his grasp upon the shrouds and plunged head first into the water. (139; ch. 26)

The disjunction is heightened by the contrast with those other occasions where Jim does exhibit an extreme reaction to events. One such is his fainting over the murder of the innocent Tom, a reaction which differs strikingly from his unfussed assistance in the medicinal shedding of blood in the second chapter. The novel knows the difference between medicine and murder: and either blips like a Geiger counter as violence comes near, or assumes a numb passivity, a shocked disassociation from itself.

Jim, then, is not just a young boy – a realist character as James might have understood him – but a sort of generic zone of consciousness, the romance thinking itself aloud in the face of late Victorian capitalism. This is heightened by Jim being physically nondescript, whereas the other characters can be notated – as if mnemonically, for easier imaginative realisation – by colour. The doctor is black and white (eyes and wig), the squire is red and worn (face), Hands is red and angry (face), Bones is brown (skin), Flint is blue (scarf and face – ““That was how the rum took him””, 169; ch. 32), Black Dog is pale (face), Pew is green (shade over his eyes), Silver is blonde (face). Jim, in contrast, is nothing. The perceptive, internal character of Jim’s narration is thereby heightened and he becomes more mobile, covering the island more comprehensively than any other character, as if freed from the restraints imposed by a more fully realised physical presence. Indeed, the only time we become strongly aware of Jim’s body is when he is wounded by Hands, which – given Jim’s ambiguous relationship to his own actions – might be read as a displaced registering of the enormity of his having killed a man: once that registering has passed Jim finds he has barely been wounded at all. David D. Mann and William H. Hardesty III have noted how Stevenson post-serialisation revisions deleted passages revealing Jim’s weakness, querulousness and childishness, and argue that this increases the empathy we feel for him. This might be true, but the removal of such marks of individuality, that interject between perception and event, also increases the air of passivity and transfixion possessed by Jim’s narrative.

The lack of any physical notation of Jim facilitates his use as another one of the novel's blank spaces into which the characters intrude – and in this sense he truly becomes the inheritor of Bones, coincident with what is both the setting for the romance and the romance itself (Treasure Island/ Treasure Island). However, the kind of narrative and/or island in which Bones and the pirates once adventured is no longer possible. The seductive abstraction that is the island depicted on the map is soon replaced by Jim's actualised perception of it: a realm constituted not of abstract markers of profit and adventure, but of bloodshed, betrayal and the systematic elimination of a condemned group. No wonder then that Jim is repulsed by the island, which is also the invested romance, which is also himself. He tells us that “from the first look onward, I hated the very thought of Treasure Island” (71; ch. 13), and at first the island's birds are used as a way of rendering its otherness: they rise up “wheeling and crying” (72; ch. 13), “flying and squalling” (74; ch. 13), “screaming and circling” (76; ch. 14) as the anchor is dropped, as the pirates cry out, as they stumble through the island. However, having used the birds to evoke the island's difference, Stevenson then links them with Jim's consciousness: first with his disturbance as he hears the cry of the first murdered crew member (“the whole troop of marsh-birds rose again, darkening heaven, with a simultaneous whirr”, 78; ch. 14); and then again as he faints upon witnessing Silver's first murder (“the whole world swam away from before me in a whirling mist; Silver and the birds, and the tall Spy-glass hilltop, going round and round and topsy-turvy before my eyes”, 79; ch. 14).

Physical setting and the perception of it enter into a chicken-and-egg state of connected existence that mirrors Jim's symbiotic connection to the romance: a weirdness that is only accentuated by the novel's undermining of the sort of linear chronology more commonly associated with the adventure romance. Jim seems to have both experienced the island before he sets foot on it – his hating it at first sight is so prophetic and so bizarrely

unjustified at that point – and also, in one passage, to still be upon it: as the text slips from the simple past tense (“I came forth into the open borders of the grove ...”) into the present perfect (“I have never seen the sea quiet round Treasure Island”, 117; ch. 22) in a way that is logically justified by the narrative being retrospective, but which also gives the brief, haunting sense that Jim is still upon its beaches. His nightmares also buckle the linear teleology normally embraced by the adventure romance, anticipating what has not yet been encountered and reanimating what is supposedly over. As a realist character Jim encounters the island and then leaves it; but as the apprehending consciousness he is also coincident with its totality, conceived of both as narrative (Treasure Island) and the space contiguous with that narrative (Treasure Island).¹⁹ Thus Jim, existing as a character on a par with Livesey and Smollet, might not have encountered the island at the start of the text, and have left it by the end; but as an expression of the romance itself he both knows the end at the beginning and is still enmeshed with the beginning at the end. As we shall shortly see, this tension between the realist (linear) and romance (holistic) experience of the text is also one that is transplanted to us as readers, in order both to implicate our material greed in the experience of the novel, and to disappoint it.

The Romance and Articulate Space

Action in space and visualisable movement had been key elements in Stevenson’s theorisation of the romance in ‘A Gossip on Romance’ (1882), which extolled “the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence”, “the plastic part of literature ... embody[ing] character, thought, or emotion in some act or attitude ... remarkably striking to the mind’s eye” (56). In Treasure Island such principles are put into action, though keyed to the novel’s particular contexts. We have seen how as the various groups battle for the romance locus that

is the treasure, they also battle through the medium of Jim, who is split between them. This dynamic is continued in the way the two parties inhabit two different kinds of space, with Jim acting again as the totalising force who experiences – and is split between – both.

Thus, the cabin party – including Jim – inhabit a succession of spaces which are clearly defined, enclosed, and, to varying degrees, defensible: the inn, the squire's house, the apple barrel, the ship's cabin, the island's natural harbour, the stockade, and Ben Gunn's cave. The pirates, in contrast – but also like Jim – swarm about the multifarious open. They come through the night fog to visit Bones; once on ship they exist outside the cabin, and upon reaching the island they go ashore as soon as possible. Once there, they wander through the open spaces without the straight-lined purpose of the cabin party, whose movement entails exact directions, destinations and timings: in the transfer to the stockade, in the doctor's rendezvous with Ben Gunn, and in the final transfer of treasure. The defined spaces in which the cabin party shelter are echoed by the succession of box-like constructs which are desired by both parties but never usefully possessed by the pirates. Bones's chest is opened by Jim's mother and the sewn-up map is unpicked by the doctor. The defensive value of the stockade is exhausted by the cabin party and only ceded to the pirates once those virtues have been replaced by the liabilities of its feverish location – and as Jim's simply wandering into it shows, by that stage it has also lost the contained qualities which it gained through association with the cabin party. Flint's treasure – packing cases buried in a hole in the ground, containment within containment – has also been breached by the time the pirates reach it.

In their unbound nomadism the pirates are a kind of island flâneur, not far in spirit from Stevenson's travel writing prior to this point.²⁰ The only difference is, on Treasure Island such flâneuring gets you killed. Conversely, the affinity between cabin party and defined space is analogous to the increasing emphasis throughout the Victorian period on

clearly delineated space at home and abroad. As Simon Gunn has noted, the “substantial reconstruction” of British cities between 1860 and 1890 meant that the “anonymous public spaces of urban modernity were classed and gendered in profoundly normative, if shifting, ways,” with ill-defined open spaces construed as a threat to middle class respectability (18). The emphasis on defined space, both physical and conceptual, was still more pronounced in the empire, whether this be in the British cantonments in India, or in the increasing prevalence of cartographic, ethnographic and bureaucratic mappings and categorisation.²¹ Space in Treasure Island is fluent in both the Stevensonian romance, where meaning is achieved through the choreographing of bodies within it, and in that romance’s historical context, whereby space was being brought to an unprecedented degree of enforced and visible order.

However, if the professional world dominates Treasure Island territorially, it says something for the fantastic power of speculative finance that it is Silver alone who follows Jim in permeating the very fabric of the romance, transcending his realistically embodied person. Silver appears in the novel before he has appeared in the novel, in a nightmare of Jim’s that turns out to be prophetically accurate (it is also inherited, as Jim inherits everything else, from fatherly Bones). And then, once the novel is over, Silver continues to exist in Jim’s nightmares. The teleological closure of the conventional romance is undermined, in a way that links suggestively with the financial intertexts for the novel: for if, as Mary Poovey has argued, the exposure and expulsion of speculator villains helped establish the financial system as reliable, then Silver is never really expelled, and his destabilising indeterminacy never resolved. Like Trollope’s George Vavasor, Silver’s exit in flight from the novel is to “Spanish America” – also the site, of course, of the Honduras loan scandal – but unlike Vavasor, Silver is not “vanish[ed] from our pages, [to be] heard of no more” (Trollope, 609;

ch. 72). Instead his “further wanderings” (182; ch 34) seem to continue – or have been continuing? – in our narrator’s dreams.

Similarly, if Jim’s consciousness is coincident with the island then Silver’s presence translates into the sea that surrounds it. Just as Silver haunts Jim, so it is the surf that bothers him throughout Treasure Island. His proleptic hatred of the island is connected with the sea’s “foaming and thundering on the steep beach” (71; ch. 13), and its sound and presence pursue him round it; his final nightmare, which closes the novel, combines the cry of Silver’s parrot with “the surf booming about [the island’s] coasts” (183; ch. 34). While Long John possesses no obvious physical similarities to the other characters his face does possess an unexpected kinship with the sea. As Jim ventures upon the ocean in the coracle it is described as “smooth” four times within the space of seven short paragraphs – and “smooth” (77; ch. 14) is one of the unexpected adjectives used to describe Silver’s face (both are also “great” and “big”). Once his mutinous character has been revealed he also dons “an immense blue coat” (105; ch. 20)²²; while his potential to move “as quickly as another man could walk” (57-8; ch. 10) recalls the current upon which Jim embarks in the coracle, “ever quickening, ever bubbling higher” (123; ch. 23). The similarity is fitting, as Jim’s relationship to Silver is not unlike his relationship to the sea: it is a massive, shifting, dangerous force upon which he embarks precariously, which dominates him, but upon which he manages, just about, to navigate and survive. The grammar of romance translates again into the historical context: because if speculative finance was increasingly replacing land as the measure of wealth, then in Treasure Island it can also be seen as troubling the land’s fixity and definition.

Conclusion: Violence and Profit

A discussion of the relationship between Treasure Island and late Victorian capitalism would not be complete without a consideration of its violence – a violence which is often sublimated in other fictional critiques of the period, but which Stevenson’s novel registers at every level. For the ‘good’ characters the bloodshed is figured as a kind of economics of slaughter, the disposition of lives in the rival parties being anxiously notated upon arrival at the island and then scrupulously tallied up at intervals, just as the treasure is counted and divided at the climax. Silver’s attitude to violence is similarly pragmatic; and for all that he is charming he stabs and breaks the back of a man who refuses – “like a hero” (78; ch. 14) in a boyish romance – to mutiny, and in doing so is compared to a “snake” and a “monkey” (78; ch. 14). More subtly, while Silver probably gets his name from Long Tom Coffin in Cooper’s The Pilot, it is striking how the deathly becomes straightforwardly converted, in Stevenson’s hands, into the economic – with Billy Bones gaining the more mortal name. The link between wealth and violent death is remade by Jim at the novel’s end:

Before a big fire lay Captain Smollett; and in a far corner, only duskily flickered over by the blaze, I beheld great heaps of coin and quadrilaterals built of bars of gold. That was Flint's treasure that we had come so far to seek and that had cost already the lives of seventeen men from the Hispaniola. How many it had cost in the amassing, what blood and sorrow, what good ships scuttled on the deep, what brave men walking the plank blindfold, what shot of cannon, what shame and lies and cruelty, perhaps no man alive could tell. (177-8; ch. 33)

Though Jim has, of course, struggled towards a telling of part of it. Such conjunctions suggest a closer kinship between Jim and the unwanted dead than the text’s ostensible sympathies would have us register – a hidden guilt expressed only tortuously in his narrative consciousness. Even the early death of the villainous Pew, welcomed by the squire as “an act

of virtue [...] like stamping on a cockroach” (36; ch. 6), is rendered in such a way that we might feel, as it occurs, some degree of horror: at Pew’s realising he is deserted, at his blind crying out for his departed comrades, at his “scream” and utter bewilderment before he is trampled by the horses, at the riders pulling up “horrified at the accident” (32; ch. 5).

And if Jim is not left unscathed, then we as readers are not left unimplicated in that damage. Immersive involvement in the romance was a key factor in Stevenson’s theorisation of its power and pleasures:

In anything fit to be called by the name of reading, the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our mind filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images, incapable of sleep or of continuous thought. (‘Gossip’, 52)

But Treasure Island begins by appealing not to such a sensuous impulse to delight, but to our material greed:

Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17— [...] (9; ch. 1)

The engendering of our greed is coeval with the engendering of the text itself: ‘the treasure not yet lifted’ becomes synonymous with the text not yet written or read. However our visions of profitable adventure lead to bloodshed as much as wealth: and as we “rise from the perusal” we surely do so as Jim, more than we do so as the enriched gentlemen readers who compelled him to write. To move from beginning to end:

The bar silver and the arms still lie, for all that I know, where Flint buried them; and certainly they shall lie there for me. Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island; and the worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts or start upright in bed with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: ‘Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!’ (183; ch. 34)

Our minds do indeed leave “filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images”, but if we are “incapable of sleep or of continuous thought” then it is because they have been well stocked with nightmares of financial Silver and his debased parroting of romance; with the grim realisation of what was a crudely alluring but hopelessly abstract map. The “treasure not yet lifted” which piqued our greed, and which was linked symbiotically with the creation of the text, is as far from us at that text’s end as it was at the beginning. “A good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader is a rereader,” Nabokov famously contended: in that such readers have overcome the obstacle of “space and time” that “stands between us and artistic appreciation” (‘Lectures’).²³ In this sense, Treasure Island’s “good reader” is the apprehender of its operation as romance, who can discern how the holistic being of Jim, coincident with the book, subsumes the realist character who bobs sequentially along inside it: how literal transcription gives way to dream vision. However, where Stevenson’s essays on the romance invariably stress the pleasures to be found in engaging with it, Treasure Island has opened itself to the forces of late Victorian capitalism, and its romantic existence gives us the truth of that encounter: “the worst dreams that ever I have”

NOTES

¹ For which see Naomi Wood and Kevin McLaughlin respectively. Janet Sorensen has also explored the contrast between the monetary and linguistic economies of the Highlands and Lowlands, principally in relation to Kidnapped (1886); while Seamus O'Malley has explored late Victorian financialization in relation to 'The Beach of Falesá' (1892).

² For money and greed in Treasure Island see also Bristow 113, Wood 69, Reid 38, Buckton 122.

³ See Arata 33-53, Wood 78-9, Buckton 122 et passim, Norquay ('Trading').

⁴ For instance, Fredric Jameson has linked the late Victorian romance to "daydreaming fantasies of the mass public", in a reading of Conrad that makes Stevenson a representative of "light reading and romance" (217, 206); while Laura Chrisman has explored how in Haggard's work "the operations of science and magic fuse within the romance to produce an authoritarian style of imperial legitimation" (6).

⁵ Francis O'Gorman has explored Haggard's "enthralled" depictions of risky adventure, and how they correspond to "the speculator and venture capitalist avant la lettre" (15). Daly conflates Stevenson with writers such as Haggard and Stoker whose novels more obviously lead to "material gain" (53, 61). Seamus O'Malley has related the late story 'The Beach of Falesá' to these contexts, but looking ahead to modernist poetry and with a focus on Stevenson's "adventure realism" (76).

⁶ For this similarity see also Katz xxxvi-xxxvii, Denisoff 290-1, Irvine 28.

⁷ An eighteenth-century Livesey would have gained his previous army post through non-medical patronage; as it is, he is clearly a portrait of a skilled nineteenth-century professional (see Ackroyd et al). Daly notes that medicine was the dominant model for new groups of experts aspiring to professional status in the Victorian period (45-6). Christopher Parkes

reads Livesey in the light of another paradigmatic late Victorian profession, as “the novel’s civil servant figure” (78).

⁸ For Stevenson’s own celebration of a bohemian salubriousness, see Albano.

⁹ For an overview of Victorian finance and literature, see O’Gorman.

¹⁰ Although Seamus O’Malley has recently noted that “Stevenson was no friend to bankers” – citing a medal he facetiously designed for himself after triumphing over some of them (71).

¹¹ Glenda Norquay has used a discourse of “value” to explore how later reflections on Treasure Island by Stevenson and his supporters sought to contain its links to “low” cultural value sources and to privilege its “high” literary context of originality (‘Trading’); a tension latent in Stevenson’s own hope that the novel had the potential to make “more coin” (Booth and Mayhew, 2: 224) than his other work. However, I read Treasure Island as simultaneously encoding a hostility to such motives, comparable to the “self-loathing” (45) Arata detects in Stevenson as he engages with these imperatives in Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde (1886).

¹² For the link between professionalization and corporatisation see Magali Sarfatti Larson.

¹³ For critical treatments of Silver see Harvie 120-1, Sandison 60, 73-77, Katz xxxiii-xxxv, Reid 40, Parkes 82-3. Wood concentrates on Silver’s “destabilizing effect” as analogous to that of populist silver upon the elite gold-standard, rather than evocative of a wider destabilization caused by financial speculation (70-1).

¹⁴ Though Stevenson makes even this detail strange, by transferring Silver’s bloneness to his face. Aspects of Silver’s character were inspired by that arch-imperialist (and Englishman) W. E. Henley.

¹⁵ Stevenson later wrote that Washington Irving’s ‘Wolfert Webber, or Golden Dream’ (1824) gave Treasure Island the “whole inner spirit” of its first chapters (‘First’, xxiv): a link often explained by the similarity between its ghostly buccaneer and Billy Bones, though just as important is Irving’s portrayal of the transformations forced upon the landed gentry and

the pirate figure of romance by modern urban mercantilism. A similar disillusionment informs the changes Treasure Island rings upon adventure romance predecessors such as R. M. Ballantyne and Frederick Marryat, as Marah Gubar has noted.

¹⁶ Indeed, Jim's complexity is usually treated in relation to Silver's more obvious ambiguity. See for instance Wood 74, Katz xxxiv-xxxv, Fowler 113-4.

¹⁷ Gubar, for instance, ropes him in with Silver: "From the start, duplicitous pirates like Bones and Silver are the ones who relate exciting sea yarns" (81). Given the divide identified in this essay between the romance and an unforgivingly utilitarian capitalism, it is also notable that Bones, the progenitor of romance, is very bad at paying his bills.

¹⁸ See his 17 March 1883 letter to his father (Booth and Mayhew, 3: 91).

¹⁹ This holistic correspondence connects with ideas of the organic whole expressed in several of Stevenson's essays: as in 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', where the emphasis on "the web" and "the pattern" (97) implies a totality; or 'A Note on Realism', which discusses "the proportion of one part to another and to the whole", the "organically necessary", the "general design" and "main design" (66).

²⁰ Oliver Buckton has observed that the "random structure and ... carefree approach to travel" in An Inland Voyage (1878) is "a refutation of the profit motive, a denial of the motive of late Victorian capitalism" (108). However, in his reading of Treasure Island he also contrasts such "unstructured journeys" with "the disciplined, profit-driven ventures of Jim Hawkins, Dr. Livesey, and Squire Trelawney, and of course the pirates" (111).

²¹ See, for example, King (1976) and Richards (1993).

²² He also thereby supplants the two main characters of anachronistic romance: Bones, who earlier wore a "soiled blue coat" (9; ch. 1), and Trelawney, who engaged with the adventure "dressed out like a sea-officer, in stout blue cloth" (45; ch. 7).

²³ Though Nabokov thought Treasure Island “poor stuff” compared to “the first-rate and permanent Jekyll and Hyde.” (*Letters*, 246).

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