HAL
open science

Conrad's and Stevenson's Logbooks and "Paperboats": Attempts in Textual Wreckage

Nathalie Jaëck

To cite this version:

Nathalie Jaëck. Conrad's and Stevenson's Logbooks and "Paperboats": Attempts in Textual Wreckage. Linda Dryden; Stephen Arata; Eric Massie. Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad. Writers of Transition, Texas Tech University Press, pp.39–51, 2009, 978-0-896-72653-6. hal-01542238

HAL Id: hal-01542238

https://hal.science/hal-01542238v1

Submitted on 22 Oct 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Nathalie Jaëck, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, CLIMAS

Conrad's and Stevenson's logbooks and "paperboats": attempts in textual wreckage.

The sea is evidently a privileged literary setting for both Conrad and Stevenson: it is indeed, more widely, a *topos* of contemporary adventure novel, from Kipling to Verne, from Defoe to Dumas, away from domestic spheres and naturalist cities, a distinctive element of exoticism and deterritorialisation. Yet, be it in *Lord Jim* or *Treasure Island*, the sea is much more than a picturesque background, or even a major ingredient of adventure. Conrad and Stevenson use it as well and above all as a formal model, as a literary horizon: the sea arouses in them a major formal inspiration, and explicitly presents them both with a literary challenge, that of importing in their novels the formal characteristics of the sea. More than a subject matter then, the sea becomes literary material; it becomes, to reword a key sentence by Jacques Rivière, "the form of fiction, rather than its matter" (Rivière, 2000: 69)[1], and it does it in two major ways.

The sea is first an intermediate space that adequately materialises the transitional literary position they find themselves in, in between two literary continents, realism on the port side and modernism on the starboard side, in between then two closely referenced literary axiomatic systems, in a kind of neutral space that is often analysed as the slack waters of literature. The sea thus provides them with a positive, intense natural twin for their literature: it powerfully highlights the formal possibilities of transit, and demonstrates that the middle is a valid and fertile methodological space that both writers decide to explore and to settle their literature in, in between, "out of sight of land – all in the blue" (Sandison, 1996: 36).

So the transitional quality of the sea legalises to some extent their literary position: but it is also explored by Stevenson and Conrad as a formal ideal, as the perfect surface they would like their literature to become. Characterised by infinity, multiplicity, indeterminacy, horizontality, "neutrality" as Barthes defines the notion, the sea materialises a closely-related space, in which progression is essentially random, in which

[1] « L'aventure, c'est la forme de l'œuvre plutôt que sa matière » is the exact quotation.

identities are blurred, in which what is at stake is not the static result, but the dynamic course. The sea offers the methodological model of an open, blank space, ordered by no paradigm, organised along no overhanging structure, a model in which topology replaces typology, a working metaphor for their "paperboats", as Conrad adequately put it[1].

In a very consistent way, Conrad and Stevenson thus stage what we could call the "becoming-sea" of their texts, a kind of textual effusion that enacts the wreckage of the realist text: I would like to argue here that, lying in ambush within the novels, apparently harmless literary stowaways eventually board the main text, and totally scupper it, opening serious leaks into its integrity. The most efficient of these literary pirates are Captain Flint's logbook in *Treasure Island*, and Kurtz's journal in *Heart of Darkness*, but Jim's abortive final letter or Jekyll's long repressed manuscript play exactly the same dissolving role. These literary "Hydes" constitute the real loot of the texts, more than ivory or doubloons, their actual literary treasures: bearing the physical mark of the sea, these sweeping sub-versions radicalise the principles of the main texts, they are uncompromising drafts of Conrad's and Stevenson's literary ideal: unfinished, with no beginning and no ending, neutral opaque blank surfaces to be explored in a random variety of ways.

***

It is thus first as an inspiring natural metaphor for their literary position that I would like to consider the sea. Conrad and Stevenson, it seems to me, consciously settle in a valid space of their own in between realism and modernism, they explore and exploit the literary possibilities of the transitional, undefined liminal space they historically occupy. Far from being insufficient precursors to modernism, they created a very reflexive type of literature, which actively, knowingly and joyfully occupies "the middle", a literature that *chooses* to be "transitional"[2], that explicitly makes the choice of transit, and

---

[1] In the preface to *The Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad*, when Conrad feels he has to return to the early years, "when I launched my first paper boats in the days of my literary childhood."

[2] In *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, Sandison seems to apologize for the fact that Stevenson does not come up with an

refuses crystallisation in any system: Conrad and Stevenson find their literary legitimacy and originality in such exploration of neutrality, in their claim that literature should be unreferenced, contingent ground. Stevenson is very explicit in a letter to Henley: "O the height and depth of novelty and worth in any art! And O that I am privileged to swim and shoulder through such oceans! Could one get out of sight of land – all in the blue. Alas not, being anchored here in the flesh and the bonds of logic being still about us. But what a great space and a great air there is in these small shallows where alone we venture!" (Stevenson 1997: 231). "Out of sight of land", in transit, this is where Conrad and Stevenson elect to work, in between two tidal literary waves, in the slack, and the sea provides them with the ideal metaphor. "Infini carrefour" (Deleuze, 2004: 104), "infinite crossroads", the sea materialises indeed the ideal in between space, the constant course, the absence of any fixed point where to settle, the idea that the bearings are always temporary, contingent.

Both writers constantly build the sense that what the reader gets is not a final result but a transitory text in progress, a contingent version, or even a diversion from the major text. Such is indeed the narrative starting-point in *Heart of Darkness*: the *Nellie* is waiting for the turn of the tide; her story is thus suspended and will remain a blank in the text, a virtual story, while Marlow engages in a textual deviation, in a seemingly improvised, transitory alternative text. Explicitly, the text of *Heart of Darkness* is thus there to fill in a blank before the actual text begins: a literary appetizer that eventually becomes all there is. The end of the novel replays and radicalises the same process: Kurtz's journals that Marlow protects so jealously from the several literary scavengers that want to share the remainders might be the wrong journals: "I was not even sure whether he had given me the right bundle. I rather suspect he wanted me to take care of another batch of his papers which, after his death, I saw the manager examining under the lamp."

---

achieved version of modernism: "But Stevenson is not writing in the age of Roland Barthes. He is a transitional writer." (p. 312) And yet we could say that Stevenson's taste for transit is precisely what makes him very Barthian, neutral in the sense Barthes and Blanchot developed, away from paradigms, systems and ideospheres.

(Conrad, *HD*: 120) The novel thus constantly challenges its own stable status: it toys with the idea that the text is a random version that might a decoy, and that there is always a textual remainder, another pending text.

In *Lord Jim*, the transitory nature of the narration is a structuring leitmotiv. First, Marlow is repeatedly very explicit about the fact that both the structure and the contents of the story are highly dependant on his own random meetings, as well as on his own unreliable, selective memory: had his course been different, had his memory worked in a different way, the story would have developed along other lines[1], and Marlow's narrative method is a perfect illustration of Deleuze's ideal writing, of his plea "for geography against history" (Deleuze, 1980*:* 243), of his idea that writing is not imposing a definite form on life, but exploring it randomly, opening divagating lines: "Ecrire n'a rien à voir avec signifier, mais avec arpenter, cartographier, même des contrées à venir" (Deleuze, 1980*:* 11). Second, the frame narrator also explains that Marlow's "yarn" has been told over and over again in several circumstances ("Many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail, and audibly. Perhaps it would be after dinner [...] "Oh yes. I attended the enquiry," he would say [...]" (24-25)), and the reader is thus aware that the final product he is given to read is essentially contingent and transitory, that the text is only one virtual occurrence, only an accidental composition, only a temporary, unstable solution. In *Lord Jim*, Conrad achieves the transitory ideal: the text is an instance of constant variation, it is not articulated towards a final, definite meaning, it is essentially oscillating: it never reaches any fixed, steady point. Even the most solid leitmotiv, "he was one of us", the most regular call of the text (pp.30,50,51,59,65,67,137,193,196,246), fails to anchor it: each occurrence is a mutation from the preceding one, repetition of the signifier becomes intensified by the difference in the signified, and even when it is the same, the text is different, its meaning is transitory. Marlow's narration constantly winks at the other ways it could have taken, it opens

---

[1] "I was informed a long time after by an elderly French Lieutenant whom I came across one afternoon in Sydney, by the merest chance [...]" (84)

innumerable lines of escape. As Marlow tells Jim's story, his memory very often deviates him to a side-track, triggering a random digression, bringing the reader on the brink of a text to be: "One voyage, I recollect, I tipped him a live sheep out of the remnants of my sea-stock: not that I wanted him to do anything for me – he couldn't you know – but because his child-like belief in the sacred right of prerequisites quite touched my heart. It was so strong as to be almost beautiful. The race – the two races rather – and the climate... However, never mind." (27) The many dashes, the suspension marks, that even within this divagation, inscribe further possibilities of escape for the text, make it essentially unstable, ready to break loose and change courses, a "free and wandering tale"[1] that is constantly tempted to stray, that refuses stabilisation. The bridge with *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is obvious: there as well, the final text, Jekyll's manuscript, despite Utterson's barricading efforts, is as unstable a solution as Hyde himself is. Running the constant risk of being imminently destroyed, it is written as an urgent, incomplete, hesitating text in which the first person narration is merely transitory, essentially oscillating: an empty shell with no stable referent. Jekyll's manuscript is another frail paperboat, and the adjective "full" in the title of the final chapter "Henry Jekyll's full statement of the case" is only an ironic decoy: the text ends in transit, in imminence, it ends on the threshold of its own ending, in wait of the final mutation from Jekyll to Hyde, but also from a tentative manuscript to an ever-evading authoritative version, and it is thus suspended in indeterminacy.

***

We reach here the essential formal characteristic Conrad and Stevenson borrow from the transitory sea, namely its indeterminacy, its neutral quality according to Roland Barthes's definition: "J'appelle Neutre tout ce qui déjoue le paradigme" (Barthes: 31), "all that eludes paradigms". Barthes is very clear about the fact that the neutral is in no way a lack of anything, it is on the contrary an intense activity, a divagation (39) the aim of which is to prevent meaning from setting: "Déjouer le paradigme est une activité ardente, brûlante" (Barthes: 31). As

[1] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, Auhtor's note.

an illustration, Gilles Deleuze argues that the sea is "the ultimate smooth space", "l'espace lisse par excellence" (Deleuze, 1980: 598), a natural incarnation of the ideal nomadic surface, in which points are subordinated to lines, in which the interval, the course matter more than the fixed point, in which the final destination is nothing more than a transient halt. Such a definition of the sea becomes an active working metaphor for Conrad and Stevenson, a very concrete and explicit source of literary inspiration, as Conrad explains to Angèle Zagorska: writing is "cette galère – where we are navigating whilst using pens by way of oars – on an ocean of ink – pour n'arriver nulle part, hélas!" (Ambrosini: 32). Yet, Conrad's expression of regret is clearly ironic here: none of his novels arrive anywhere, no more so than Stevenson's. The parallel endings of *The Strange Case* and of *Lord Jim* testify that there is no final destination, but indeed a continuous present of the course. Jekyll's manuscript ends on a question mark: "Will Hyde die upon the scaffold? Or will he find the courage to release himself at the last moment? God knows; I am careless." (97) just like Marlow's final paragraph: "who knows? He is gone, inscrutable at heart" (246). As *Treasure Island* makes clear, what matters is thus not where the text is bound for, but "the voyage out" (186).

In these sea-like texts then, a striking characteristic is that topology replaces typology: "la topologie des énoncés s'oppose à la typologie des propositions comme à la dialectique des phrases" (Deleuze, 2004 : 16). The notion of topology developed in contemporary mathematics, the term was coined in 1883 to define a type of analysis that wanted to get away from the logic of sets, and that developed the concept of adjacent, closely-related spaces, the idea of neighbouring progress. Indeed, Conrad and Stevenson explicitly rebelled against naturalist typification, and pleaded for texts that could create neighbouring zones of indifferenciation, that would constitute opaque surfaces, "all in the blue". Stevenson's famous outcry – "My two aims may be described as – 1st: War to the adjective. 2nd: Death to the optic nerve." (Stevenson 1997: 566) – echoes one of Conrad's maritime definitions of literature in *Lord Jim*: "The sheet of paper portraying the depths of the sea presented a shiny surface under the light of the bull's-eye lamp lashed to a stanchion, a surface as level and smooth as the glimmering

surface of the water." (17) Their literary manifesto unfolds in these two quotations. Conrad's sentence, saturated with the three occurrences of the word "surface", in quite a pleonastic formulation ("a surface as level"), highlights the fact that for him, a text is literally a topology, a map in which the reader can progress by connexion, horizontally. Stevenson's declaration of war against the adjective drives in the nail, and anachronically reminds the reader of Barthes's analysis: "[L'adjectif] est un contre-Neutre puissant, l'anti-Neutre même, comme s'il y avait une antipathie de droit entre le neutre et l'adjectif. [...] Il colle à un nom, à un être, il "poisse" à l'être" (Barthes: 85). The enemy is the naturalist apical, irrefutable vision, the morbid typifying adjectives that fix meaning. On Conrad's sheet of paper, even under the peering scrutiny of the overhanging lamp, the surface of the text remains "shiny", or "glimmering", it reflects only itself, just like the surface of the sea, it allows no vertical intrusion in the subject, no penetration of its secret, no assessment of its depth.

Likewise, in *Lord Jim*, Marlow's quite disordered, a-chronological collection of viewpoints can only be read horizontally, with effects of reverberations, echoes, but it cannot solve the ontological opacity of the character, who remains "inscrutable at heart". In the same way, Stevenson's texts are hodological, nomadic, they do not lead to a resolution, but rather to a dissolution of meaning: at the end of the textual course, after collecting many random and partial testimonies, Mackellar's epitaph, far from putting the text at rest, dissolves Mackellar's narrative position, and constitutes a blank space of interpretation; Jekyll's manuscript ends indeed on a succession of topological utterances, with no identifiable first person narration, while *Treasure Island* decides to leave the final word, or rather the final un-dialectical fragments to the parrot, this "two-hundred-year-old deconstructionist" (Sandison: 48).

The topological preference of these two authors has got a major dissolving influence on the key notion of the speaking subject. As Stevenson's flippant radical resort to the parrot demonstrates, there can be no final word, no ultimate truth, no destination for a text, and there can be no autonomous narrator either. The parrot is a kind of narrative sponge, an undifferentiated origin of speech; it is a neutral subject of

enunciation: to some extent, "it speaks" in him. Once more of course, the notion of indifferenciation is directly borrowed from the sea, which contests the notions of identities, of separate bodies: it seems as if the whole texts were experiencing a king of "oceanic feeling"[1], a sense of limitlessness, of formlessness and exchange, of general effusion. As the limit example of the parrot shows, the subject in Conrad's and Stevenson's texts very often becomes essentially mobile, a random variable whose voice cannot be taken as the stable warrant of discourse. There is no primordial "I" which is the undisputable or even independent source of speech. In *Lord Jim* for example, Marlow's voice incorporates in an often undifferentiated way all the voices he heard, Jim's included, so that the text is marked a constant oscillation or hesitation of the narrative origin, and becomes indeed a "damaged kaleidoscope", where the several fragments undergo a kind of general effusion, and the subject, or the several subjects, become variables of the utterances, they seem to derive from them rather being their origin. Here as well, "it speaks" in the text, speech becomes collective, neutral, and the utterances divagate autonomously in this narrative ocean. "He was one of us", the origin of which is lost, becomes a drifting iridescent echo, and the subjects of enunciation are dissolved in this collective, undifferentiated utterance; dialectical discourse, instead of being warranted by a stable subject of enunciation, becomes what Foucault calls "un grand bourdonnement incessant et désordonné du discours." (Deleuze, 2004: 62). The final narrative destination of all these texts then is not a first person narration as it could seem: *The Master of Ballantrae*, *The Strange Case*, *Lord Jim*, *Heart of Darkness*, all stage in a spectacular way the dispossession of the omniscient third person narrator, that occupies the narrative ground in the beginning, and that is forced to give way to a first person narrator, in a staged and ritual wreckage of the realist favourite narrative standpoint. But they go a step further, since their first person is not stable, it is extremely porous, as of course the floating "I" of Dr Jekyll makes clear[2]. The effusion of the self

---

[1] A phrase that Freud borrowed from Romain Rolland, and which he develops in *Civilisation and its Discontents*.

[2] For a full analysis of the double process of dissolution in Stevenson's and Conan Doyle's texts, see Nathalie Jaëck, "Pathologie de la dissolution:

brings about an effusion of speech and an eventual neutralisation from the grammatical point of view: the "I", the "he" become interchangeable and equally inadequate, the subject of enunciation becomes a random variable, an empty grammatical wreck. In this respect, I think the French Lieutenant's testimony in *Lord Jim* may be read as a very ironical instance of self effusion, and thus of textual oscillation. Though the French Lieutenant seems to be a solid figure of speech, though Marlow cannot resist his apparently final arguments and cutting verdict – "Hang the fellow! He had pricked the bubble." (91) – a whole network of dissonant clues is built by Conrad to present him as a very unstable, in-between hybrid. There is indeed a strong suspicion that this character, who staunchly defends the idea of a stable identity, who repudiates any wavering of the self on the grounds of honour, might be the most fluctuating, the most incoherent impostor of the novel. In between land and sea, he may easily pass as a grotesque avatar of the stereotype of the drunken retired sailor, always ready to blab away with strangers in port taverns, so that the Gospel truth he dispenses to Marlow, "looking more priest-like than ever" (89), might amount to nothing more than an alcoholic mania. "Sitting drowsily over a tumbler half-full of some dark liquid" (85), "without raising his eyelids" (89), he keeps "taking up his tumbler" (89), and "putting down the glass awkwardly" (89) throughout the interview, "drinking carelessly..." (89), "draining his glass" (90). Such physical dissolution is doubled by his speech that is at times totally incoherent as well, precisely characterised by the erratic effusion of the two languages he mixes up, French and English. His jarring translations, his random shortcuts result in a kind of linguistic magma, with French disguised as fake English. Two stable axiomatic linguistic systems are then mixed up and deterritorialised, to result in random fanciful, divagating utterances, with no stable subject of enunciation, and no stable code either: "I have rolled my hump (*roulé ma bosse*)" (89) or "One's courage does not come of itself (*ne vient pas tout seul*)" (90) he first says, thus signalling the gap, formally separating

---

échappatoires chimiques et musicales chez le Dr Jekyll et Sherlock Holmes", in *R.L. Stevenson & A. Conan Doyle, Aventures de la fiction* (Ed.) Gilles Ménégaldo et Jean-Pierre Naugrette. Rennes: Terres de Brume, 2003, pp. 59-74.

the two systems through translation; but then the effusion is more erratic and may go unnoticed: "This is always to be seen" (89), which does not mean much in English, but is a word-to-word translation of "C'est encore à voir", i.e. "Nothing is settled yet"; or "I have made my proofs", another effusion in English of the phrase "J'ai fait mes preuves", which should in proper English be "I proved myself, I showed my ability". The stability of the subject is shaken further through the French Lieutenant's highly symptomatic use of the neutral pronoun "one": "One is always afraid. One may talk but. . .", [...] One talks, one talks.", "One does not die of it", "One puts up with it", "One's courage does not come of itself", "At my age, one knows what one is talking about". Rashly borrowed from the French impersonal "on", and lavishly spilled on the text, the neutral pronoun, used in an improper way ridicules the Lieutenant's attempts to define himself as a reference, and results in a massive neutralisation, an active dissolution of the "I" pronoun as the reliable warrant of speech – the more so ironic since it contaminates the apparently staunchest viewpoint in the novel, Marlow's most reliable narrative compass.

***

But Conrad and Stevenson go a step further: they radicalise these processes in a kind of submarine way, through apparently negligible inner texts, that seem very transitory, but that eventually board the frame texts. I have established elsewhere the process of inner textual proliferation that ritually takes place in these novels[1], the sense of textual effusion that is present in both writers, as if they were eager to open numerous and rhizomatic lines of escape, so that the text could never be a solid, coherent, finished product, but always, as we have already seen, a transitory process, with many possibilities of inner divagations, many ways out. In a fascinating way, Conrad and Stevenson thus clandestinely introduce in their novels textual stowaways that constitute intra-textual prototypes, concentrates of Stevenson's and Conrad's ideal literary form. They are the ultimate aims of the texts, their embedded solution and literary aspiration, and I will concentrate on a few of these

[1] I developed the point in a paper at the Gargnano Conference on Stevenson, 2002: "Stevenson's stories as textual greenhouses".

uncompromising literary divagations, namely Jim's final letter, Jekyll's manuscript, and above all the two logbooks, Kurtz's journal and Captain Flint's papers, whose form is literally conditioned by the unpredictable, irregular progress of the boats on the river or on the sea.

These inner doubles constitute the actual loot of the text: in Stevenson's novels, Jekyll's or Mackellar's manuscripts are very carefully preserved, at the very bottom of chests, dutifully guarded by lawyers, preciously packed and sealed. In *Treasure Island*, the bundle of papers found in the chest totally eclipses the canvas bag that gives "the jingle of gold" (22). In *Heart of Darkness*, ivory is only the screen treasure, and Kurtz's journal is the true object of everyone's desire. No less than four literary scavengers try to plunder the remnants of Kurtz's journals: "A clean-shaven man, with an official manner and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, called on me one day, and made enquiries, at first circuitous, afterwards suavely pressing, about what he was pleased to denominate "certain documents". I was not surprised because I had had two rows with the manager on the subject out there. I had refused to give up the smallest scrap out of that package, and I took the same attitude with the spectacled man." (115) He manages to go away with a meagre mutilated report: "I offered him the report on the "Suppression of Savage Customs", with the postscript turn off." (115). Then one of Kurtz's cousins tries his luck, and does not leave empty-handed either: "bearing off some family letters and memoranda without importance" (116). Eventually, a journalist gets another fragment: "[I] forthwith handed him the famous Report for publication, if he thought fit. He glanced through it hurriedly, mumbling all the time, judging "it would do", and took himself off with his plunder. Then I was left at last with a slim packet of letters and the girl's portrait." (16)

At the end of the process, two elements are clear: first, Kurtz's journal constitutes the actual stake of the novel, just like its fellow literary stowaways, and it is an experimental, ever-evading centre: indeed, Marlow explains that he is not sure he was given the right bundle of papers: "I rather suspected he wanted me to take care of another batch of his papers which, after his death, I saw the manager examining under the lamp" (120). What the episode of the papers thus forcefully

demonstrates, in a final twist of deconstruction, is that a text is never a finished product, but always a transitory version, always a fake, always a manipulation, that there is always an irreducible remainder, always a way out. Even more radically that *Heart of Darkness* as a whole, this inner concentrate is characterised by an accelerated tendency to dissemination, by a process of emptying, of escape, of wandering, by a total loss of integrity. Kurtz's journal, both loot and efficient pirate, empties *Heart of Darkness*, leaves it with mere scraps, with fragments that might even be fake, with a transitory impostor that annuls the frame text: " 'We have lost the first of the webb', said the director, suddenly." (120), so that the story of the Nellie will for ever remain suspended, and the ideal of the open, transitory text will have been fulfilled.

Second, the vocabulary used by Conrad is so close to that used by Stevenson for Captain Flint's papers that one wonders whether the scene is not a tribute to *Treasure Island*. In both cases, "a bundle of papers" is found, in both cases, it is "tied" along with a flat, panoramic surface, a map in the first case, a photograph in the second, in both cases, they are referred to as "scraps" and "fragments". Without a doubt, this hidden logbook is the other pirate of the text, Long John Silver's literary twin. The literary solution it proposes[1] totally scuppers Jim's text, it radically accelerates some of its more daring tendencies: the topological juxtaposition of Jim's and the doctor's viewpoints, both written in an unassuming first person, constituted a celebrated effort at horizontality, expressed a wish to flatten the text, seen "from the level of a nursery-fender". Stevenson also deliberately inserted blank spaces in his textual map, unreferenced, escaping fragments left for the reader to explore, as when Jim swoons on the boat and leaves the text missing. Yet, Captain Flint's logbook is much more uncompromising: here horizontal progression is the only way through the closely related fragments that compose it, and that can be read randomly. The course through the logbook is utterly free, there is no beginning and no ending, none of the traditional narrative

[1] For a full analysis of Captain Flint's papers, see Nathalie Jaëck, "*Treasure Island*: l'immanence de la surface contre l'aplomb naturaliste", in Conférence on "La Surface", Chambéry: 2003.

compasses: no chronology, no identifiable system of narration or narrative structure, an extreme opacity of language ("I can't make head or tail of this" (33)), and above all no referenced narrator that could act as guide. All the utterances are fragmentary, 'No more rum', 'Off Palm Key he got itt', the reader progresses by mere random juxtaposition, the neutral forms colonise the text ("I could not help wondering who it was that had 'got itt,' and what it was that he got'" (32)), with no narrative beacon at all. Stevenson both pays a tribute and totally pirates the literary venerable form of the diary here: instead of an ever-present first person narrator, Stevenson proposes a non-person, a neutral absentee that rules nothing, that merely records some transitory traces of his journey. The Captain opens irreducible leaks in the archetypal form of the diary, literally wrecks and floods the text, as what the reader finally gets is indeed a successful logbook, a crossbreed that situates itself within the literary tradition, but bears the mark of the sea as well, an open, infinite, shapeless, nomadic textual surface that has actually been transformed into a maritime map: "the name of a place would be added, as 'Offe Caraccas;' or a mere entry of latitude and longitude, as '62° 17' 20'', 19° 2' 40''.'" (33). The final section, "a few bearings of places noted in the blank leaves towards the end" (33), pushes to a theoretical extreme Stevenson's literary ideal, and thus uses as a very efficient textual weapon the sea metaphor. Dissolution and eventual neutrality of the viewpoint, dispersion and effusion of the text lead to the eventual creation of a maritime opaque surface, containing only directions, opening random ways. Jim's abortive final letter, his "sheet of greyish foolscap" (201), just like the blank pages of the logbook, contains a spatial bearing, "The Fort, Patusan", but no temporal situation, topology one more replaces ordering chronology "no date, as you observe" (202), and consists of two "lines of escape", two intensive dimensions that lead nowhere before the paper is flooded by spluttering ink: "'An awful think has happened,' he wrote before he flung the pen down for the first time; look at the ink blot resembling the head of an arrow under these words. After a while he had tried again, scrawling heavily, as if with a hand of lead, another line. 'I must now at once...' The pen had spluttered, and that time he gave up." (202) Thus dissolved in ink, Jim's final letter, just like

the Captain's blank textual map, place the reader where the authors wanted him to be, in a very Deleuzian intensive middle space: Conrad and Stevenson give substance to transit, and find their literary power there, "all in the blue".

REFERENCES

Ambrosini, Richard. 1991. *Conrad's fiction as Critical Discourse*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
Barthes, Roland. 2002 (1977-1978). *Le Neutre. Cours au collège de France (1977-1978)*. Paris : Seuil.
Conrad, Joseph. 1996 (1900). *Lord Jim*. New York & London : Norton & Company.
Conrad, Joseph. 1995 (1899). *Heart of Darkness*. London : Penguin Books.
Deleuze, Gilles. 1980. *Mille Plateaux*. Paris : Minuit.
Deleuze, Gilles. 2004 (1986). *Foucault*. Paris: Minuit.

Ménégaldo, Gilles; Naugrette Jean-Pierre (Ed.). 2003. *R.L. Stevenson & A. Conan Doyle, Aventures de la fiction*. Rennes: Terres de Brume.
Rivière, Jacques. 2000 (1943). *Le roman d'aventure*. Paris : Editions des Syrtes.
Sandison, Alan. 1996. *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Mehew Ernest (Ed.). 2001 (1997). New Haven & London: Yale Nota Bene.
Stevenson, Robert Louis. 1998 (1881). *Treasure Island*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Stevenson, Robert Louis. 1979 (1886). *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Stories*. London: Penguin Books.