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**Julie Gay**

**Title: The Island in R. L. Stevenson's *The Beach of Falesá*: Confluence(s) as Subversion**

**Titre: L'île dans *The Beach of Falesá* de R.L. Stevenson : confluence(s) et subversion**

**Abstract :** This article seeks to analyse, through the example of R. L. Stevenson's late novella entitled *The Beach of Falesá*, how the insular space allows for multiple forms of confluences, and to determine how subversive these confluences are, as well as how this spatial phenomenon affects the text and is conducive to the creation of a highly modern form of adventure. It first examines, at the diegetic level, the cultural, religious and linguistic confluences that are characteristic of the island, and how they potentially question the imperialistic ideal. Then, the article highlights the spatio-temporal duality of the island by highlighting its liminality, and the generic hybridity it leads to, as the novella oscillates between realism, romance and the fantastic, among others. Finally, it studies how this diversity affects the narrative itself, which is indeed highly polyphonic, underlining the extreme formal modernity of a text that stands at the crossroads of voices, languages and points of view.

**Résumé :** Cet article se propose d'analyser, en prenant l'exemple du court roman tardif de R. L. Stevenson intitulé *The Beach of Falesá*, en quoi l'île est un lieu extrêmement propice à diverses formes de confluences, et de s'interroger sur la dimension subversive de ces confluences, ainsi que sur la façon dont ce phénomène spatial s'inscrit dans le texte pour créer une forme moderne d'aventure. Il s'agit tout d'abord d'étudier au niveau diégétique les confluences culturelles, religieuses et linguistique dont l'île est le théâtre, et leur dimension potentiellement contestataire au regard de l'idéal impérialiste, pour ensuite s'intéresser à la dualité spatio-temporelle de l'île en tant qu'espace liminal, ainsi qu'à l'hybridité générique qui en résulte, avec une œuvre qui oscille notamment entre réalisme, *romance* et fantastique. Enfin, l'article s'attache à démontrer dans quelle mesure cette diversité affecte la narration même, dont la polyphonie témoigne d'une grande modernité formelle, à la croisée des voix, des langues et des points de vue.

**Biographical notice:**

Julie Gay is a third year PhD student at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne, under the supervision of Nathalie Jaëck, and among the research team CLIMAS. She holds the French 'Agrégation' and is currently a teaching and research assistant (ATER) at the Université de Bordeaux, after two years as an ATER at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne. Her dissertation is entitled: 'evolutions of the "desert island" motif in the British adventure novel: a generic mutation', and she studies insularity and adventure as places of literary renewal, especially at the turn of the 19th century in Britain, focusing on authors such as R. L. Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, and H. G. Wells. She has also co-organised a symposium on 'Vulnerability' within her research team, and is currently organising another symposium on 'Eccentricities' which is to take place in April. She gave presentations at various conferences, one at an international symposium entitled 'The Enclave' in Bordeaux, another at the SFEVE's workshop during the SAES Congress in Lyon, and her latest talk was at an international conference in Strasbourg entitled 'Borders and Areas of Contact in Anglophone Cultures, Literatures and Art'.

### Notice Biographique :

Julie Gay est doctorante en troisième année de thèse à l'Université Bordeaux-Montaigne, sous la direction de Nathalie Jaëck, au sein de l'équipe d'accueil CLIMAS. Elle est titulaire de l'agrégation d'anglais et occupe actuellement un poste d'ATER à l'Université de Bordeaux, après deux ans en tant qu'ATER à l'Université Bordeaux Montaigne. Sa thèse s'intitule : « Evolutions du motif de l'île déserte dans la littérature britannique d'aventure : mutation du genre », et elle s'intéresse à l'insularité et à l'aventure comme des lieux de renouveau littéraire notamment au tournant du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle en Angleterre, avec des auteurs tels que R. L. Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, et H. G. Wells. Elle a également co-organisé un colloque sur « La Vulnérabilité » au sein de son équipe d'accueil, et organise actuellement un colloque sur les « Excentricités » prévu pour avril. Elle a donné des communications lors de divers colloques, l'une lors d'un colloque international de jeunes chercheurs sur le thème de « L'Enclave » à l'Université Bordeaux Montaigne, l'autre au sein de l'atelier de la SFEVE au congrès de la SAES, et la dernière dans le cadre d'un colloque international à Strasbourg intitulé : « Contacts aux frontières dans l'espace anglophone ».

**Key words:** island; confluence; hybridity; genre; adventure; polyphony; Stevenson (Robert Louis)

**Mots-clés :** île ; confluence ; hybridité ; genre ; aventure ; polyphonie ; Stevenson (Robert Louis)

### The Island in R. L. Stevenson's *The Beach of Falesá*: Confluence(s) as Subversion

'Cartographic and spatial metaphors are both slippery and fluid . . . , and therefore continually able to open new conceptual spaces' (Phillips 14), as Richard Phillips notes in his seminal work *Mapping Men and Empire*. The concept of confluence is no exception, all the more so as it is doubly fluid, being an aquatic metaphor too, and proves to be a valuable tool for literary analysis. It first evokes, in a literal sense, the union and flowing together of two rivers, but can also allude to the junction of different maritime currents in the ocean, in which case the insular space is often the focal point of this phenomenon. The island could then be considered as the ultimate place of confluence, and this is especially the case in the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century adventure novel, where various forms of confluences are staged, be they literal or metaphorical. This might seem surprising, as in traditional representations islands are often seen as enclosed spaces set apart from the rest of the world, hence very difficult to reach. However, in Stevenson's late fiction, and especially in his novella entitled *The Beach of Falesá* which was first published in 1892, the island is on the contrary described as a port of call for travellers, missionaries and traders, within the island world or archipelago that the various characters roam. It is indeed presented as the place of confluence between different ethnic and religious groups, within an outpost that is in itself a trading platform and place of commercial exchange,

thus in keeping with the second meaning of the term ‘confluence’ as a numerous assemblage of people.

This evolution of the insular space, and passage from extreme separation to confluence and circulation, brings out the subversive nature of the notion of confluence, as the place where traditional dialectics are questioned and negotiated. I will analyse how this spatial phenomenon impacts the narrative at various levels, leading to the question of whether confluence results in unsolvable juxtaposition or in fecund merging. I will first examine confluence at the diegetic level, and analyse the new island of adventure as a place of cultural convergence where various communities cohabit, also leading to a linguistic melting pot. This ethnic hybridity is coupled with a generic one, as the realistic representation of this insular world contrasts with the fantastic genre and the romance motifs, which also brings about a confluence between various epochs, creating a modern, multi-layered form. Finally, I will explore how confluence also affects the very language and style of the work, where registers, tongues, meanings and even points of view mingle in a very intricate way.

The topos of the island in literature traditionally implies remoteness, enclosure and separation, even though in robinsonades and utopias a certain form of circulation is necessary for the characters to reach it and thus for the story to exist. However, this circulation is brought to a new level at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with authors like Stevenson or Conrad, who offer a more archipelagic representation of a space that has become pluralized (‘The Islands’, Stevenson 2008, 6). Most islands had indeed been discovered and colonised by then, and were part of a wider Pacific world. They had become commercial outposts where traders settled for a time and sold goods to natives while buying raw materials like copra from them, before moving on to the next island. This is precisely what Wiltshire, the main character of *The Beach of Falesá*, plans to do when he arrives on the island, having been sent there by his company. Falesá is characterised by in-betweenness and encounter of opposites from the very first glimpse he catches of it, as ‘it was neither night nor morning. The moon was to the west, setting, but still broad and bright. To the east, and right amidships of the dawn, which was all pink, the daystar sparkled like a diamond’ (Stevenson 2008, 3). At the confluence of night and day, east and west, moon and daystar, this island is indeed ambivalent from the start, ‘amidships’ of conflicting forces.

Moreover, contrary to the traditional myth of the insular space as a desert, virgin land waiting to be colonized, the island here is already occupied by various religious and ethnic communities, reflecting the progressive mapping of all the blank spaces which used to motivate adventurous explorations around the globe, by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among these communities are the natives of course, most of them Protestant, some white traders of mostly anglophone origins (American and British), a French Catholic priest, and a Protestant missionary who roams the island world. The boundaries between these communities seem at first to be well delimited, even spatially as white traders are metonymically referred to as ‘the beach’ (Stevenson 2008, 4), in reference to the place where they have their shops, which also underlines their marginal position on the threshold of the island, in-between the sea and the land, not quite belonging to the island world. Wiltshire’s first impulse is thus to trust the other white man he meets, named Case, who acquaints him with the island. And indeed when the former sets up shop, he realises that natives are ‘frightened’ and ‘won’t go near [him]’ (Stevenson 2008, 25), thus spatialising the absence of confluence between the two communities. Case then offers his help and calls it ‘a White Man’s Quarrel’ (Stevenson 2008, 22), the capital letters seemingly reflecting the superiority of their race, and thus apparently reinforcing imperial ideology: one cannot help but link it to ‘The White Man’s Burden’ principle, which Kipling later put to the fore in his famous poem, reminding white colonizers of their civilizing ‘mission’. This ideology is echoed later on by Wiltshire when, angry at being rejected by the natives, he says, ‘I’ve come here to do them good, and bring them civilisation’ (Stevenson 2008, 23). Moreover, the distance between the different communities is also a linguistic one, the characters having difficulties communicating, especially Wiltshire who understands neither native nor French and thus cannot exchange with the Catholic priest or most of the natives except through an interpreter.

However, this imperial mission seems to be undermined in the very terms of its definition, the term ‘quarrel’ referring to something remarkably less noble than what imperialists understood as their great civilizing mission in Kipling’s poem. Moreover, a certain fluidity between the races is introduced from the very beginning when the narrator explains to the reader: ‘for a negro is counted a white man, and so is a Chinese! A strange idea, but common in the islands’ (Stevenson 2008, 7). The missionaries are another example of the fluidity of these racial distinctions, as Wiltshire describes them as ‘partly Kanakaized’ (Stevenson 2008, 34), being closer to natives than to ‘other white men like themselves’ (Stevenson 2008, 34) which at first seems to shock Wiltshire: the past participle ‘kanakaized’ is quite revealing, as it

fluidifies the concept of race by making it a dynamic, mutable process, in a form of reverse assimilation. Moreover, the hero soon realises that his real enemies on the island are in fact the other white traders and especially his supposed friend Case, who actually plots to put him out of business by estranging the natives from him: Wiltshire thus ends all friendship with him using a spatial metaphor and an antithetic parallelism that materialise the end of their confluence, ‘Here’s my way, there’s yours’ (Stevenson 2008, 27). The ultimate example of racial confluence is Wiltshire’s marriage to a native woman, Uma, and their subsequent proximity and near fusion, as Wiltshire remarks, ‘I never had anything so near me as this little brown bit of a girl’ (Stevenson 2008, 29). Through this bodily and spiritual confluence, Stevenson represents miscegenation (or interracial union) in a rather positive light, although it was quite controversial in Stevenson’s time, thus highlighting the already postcolonial aspect of his work and the subversive dimension of confluence, which questions the traditional association between insular adventure narratives and the imperial ideology, especially in juvenile literature. Hybridity, as a cross between separate races and cultures, could therefore be understood as a form of racial and cultural confluence, in the sense of a coming together and merging of different identities and cultures. Confluence indeed results in a form of fusion that is precisely what hybridity encapsulates. This concept is moreover clearly associated to subversion and postcolonialism by Homi K. Bhabha in his seminal work, *The Location of Culture*,<sup>1</sup> being defined as the ‘third space’ in-between the coloniser and the colonised, that questions any form of ‘pure’ identity and subverts imperial power dynamics through fluidity, ambivalence and fusion. It is my contention that the insular space in *The Beach of Falesá* is precisely the location of such hybridity, and could be understood as an actualisation of this ‘third space’.

Indeed, the language Wiltshire and Uma use to communicate, called ‘Beach-de-Mar’ or ‘Beach-la-Mar’, that we access mostly through Uma’s voice, is the very illustration of the confluence between different cultures and languages, being a sort of ‘pidgin’ or ‘lingua franca’ that can be understood by every community: according to Roslyn Jolly this language ‘includes

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<sup>1</sup>In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha defines hybridity as subverting the ‘purity’ of the colonial identity: ‘Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the “pure” and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory – or, in my mixed metaphor, a negative transparency’ (Bhabha 112).

as many speakers as possible and erases distinctions between them' (Jolly xxiii). In addition to erasing linguistic differences, Uma also blurs the boundary between religion and superstition, as she exemplifies a form of hybrid faith that includes Christianity, paganism and even secular figures: in one of her discussions with Wiltshire, as she tries to describe to him the beliefs and legends of her people, she puts Queen Victoria, God, and Tiapolo (a demon in Polynesian folklore) on the same level: 'Victoreea he big chief . . . . All-e-same God and Tiapolo' (Stevenson 2008, 48), in her defamiliarising Beach-de-Mar style, through which she modifies the pronunciation of the Queen's name and even her gender, leading to a double process of hybridization. These defamiliarisation and displacement are underlined by Wiltshire when he answers using another spatial metaphor: 'your theology is out of its bearings' (Stevenson 2008, 48). As Christianity leaves Europe and is exported to remote islands, it cannot but be deterritorialised (to take up Deleuze and Guattari's term), to become something else or at least something quite different, decontextualised and appropriated in a different way. This metaphor highlights how spatial distance allows for confluence and fluidity between previously distinct categories, which is reminiscent of Bhabha's 'third space'. Wiltshire himself expresses the interchangeability of Christianity and superstition by referring to them in the exact same terms, calling them both 'old wives' tales' (Stevenson 2008, 34; 63), while native Protestants on the island start using the Catholic practice of the sign of the cross out of sheer superstition, and the tabooing practice is called 'regular excommunication' (Stevenson 2008, 31) by Wiltshire, highlighting the correspondences between the two sets of beliefs. The appropriation of Christianity and its merging with superstition is moreover defined by Bhabha as a sign of resistance to colonial power: 'Doubling repeats the fixed and empty presence of authority by articulating it syntagmatically with a range of differential knowledges and positionalities that both estrange its "identity" and produce new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power' (Bhabha 120), mentioning as an example the association of 'multiple and contrary beliefs' (Bhabha 120), which is precisely the case here.

In the novella, the confluence between Christianity and superstition is linked to that between civilisation and wilderness, which is characteristic of the insular space. Eric Fougère indeed argues: '*L'île se situe au point de convergence de la nature et de la culture*' (Fougère 136). 'Convergence' is often used as a synonym for confluence in the sense of a coming together of heterogeneous elements, although the former seems to be less dynamic and fluid, as it ends in a point rather than in a flow. The use of convergence might be justified here by the spatial stability of the island as a defined point on the map, although the phenomena

taking place on it introduce the fluidity linked to confluence. The convergence between civilisation and wilderness mentioned by Fougère is here materialised in the very spatial structure of the island which is divided in two parts: the civilised part, where all the communities live, situated near the beach of the first bay where Wiltshire lands, and the wilder part of the island. The latter is clearly ‘desert’ and cut off from the rest by clear boundaries, as ‘The beginning of the desert was marked off by a wall’ (Stevenson 2008, 47) that ‘cut the valley in two parts’ (Stevenson 2008, 45). The lexical fields of boundaries and of wilderness are similarly omnipresent in the following description: ‘at high water the sea broke right on the face of it, so that all passage was stopped. Woody mountains hemmed the passage all round; the barrier to the east was particularly steep and leafy’ (Stevenson 2008, 45), with an emphasis on the natural obstacles that check the passage from one space to the other. This in-between space, or space of convergence, is moreover characterised by a certain fluidity between humanity and animality which leads back to the concept of confluence, as when Uma went ‘too near the margin of the bad place’ (Stevenson 2008, 50) she apparently had an encounter with a hybrid creature, ‘a lean grey old boar’ which ‘seemed to think as it came, like a person’, and finally realised that ‘it was no boar, but a thing that was a man with a man’s thoughts. At that she ran, and the pig after her’ (Stevenson 2008, 50). The failure to grasp the creature’s essence is highlighted by the use of indefinite pronouns and nouns, and the constant alternation between substantives that have an animal or a human referent, thus underlining the duality and indeterminacy of such a place as well as of the creatures that inhabit it. This wild area, that is reminiscent of the classical desert island motif, is moreover clearly associated with superstition since according to the natives, it contains ‘too much devil’ (Stevenson 2008, 47), which is why they dare not go there. Accessing it is thus rendered difficult both by spatial and spiritual obstacles, yet there is a path and a link between the two spaces.

Therefore, one might associate this place to Victor Turner’s definition of a liminal space<sup>2</sup>, being a kind of no man’s land where indigenous superstitions take over civilisation, and even Wiltshire starts believing his wife’s ‘stories’ (Stevenson 2008, 47): he comments on this contagion of superstition by using a spatial and vegetable metaphor, saying ‘a superstition grows up in a place like the different kind of weeds’ (Stevenson 2008, 52), which underlines its uncontrollable and unpredictable propagation, and its link with wilderness. Moreover, the

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. . . . Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.’ (Turner 95)



liminal space is often the place where rites of passage take place, which is precisely the case in this novella, as Case takes young men who want to prove their manhood there at night, putting them to the test: ‘a young man scarce reckoned himself grown till he had... seen Case’s devils... It’s mighty like Kanakas; but, if you look at it another way, it’s mighty like white folks too’ (Stevenson 2008, 54). This final parallelism reinforces the proximity between natives and white men, through the almost anthropological analysis of the rite of passage tradition they have in common. It is also at ‘the edge’ (Stevenson 2008, 46) of this liminal space that Wiltshire starts to pray, and that he manages to first communicate with the natives, while beginning to understand Case’s stratagem: his spatial trajectory thus metonymically echoes his spiritual one, since penetrating the core of the island means being initiated to the island’s mystery, and cracking the ‘case’. In addition, he finally teams up with a native against their common enemy Case, thus completely subverting colonial dynamics. Wiltshire indeed stresses the civilised nature of the native chief by calling him a ‘gentleman’ (Stevenson 2008, 58), and comparing him to ‘the best white man in Europe’ (Stevenson 2008, 57). He moreover underlines his own confluence with the latter in his speech: ‘both he and I were in a tightish place’ (Stevenson 2008, 47). They are brought together through the parallel position of the two pronouns and the adverb ‘both’, added to the spatial metaphor foregrounding their closeness.

This liminal space also stages the encounter between various epochs, as Case stores a sort of ‘museum’ of ‘island curiosities’ (Stevenson 2008, 54) there, a collection of objects—such as masks—that are linked to the island’s more primitive, ‘long-forgotten’ (Stevenson 2008, 54) past, and that he uses to scare natives by toying with their superstitions and fears. This confluence of different temporalities and modalities is underlined by Stevenson himself when he writes in one of his letters, ‘The Pacific is a strange place; the nineteenth century only exists there in spots; all round, it is a no man’s land of the ages, a stir-about of epochs and races, barbarism and civilisation, virtues and crimes’ (Stevenson 1924, iii 261), with the interesting confluence of space and time through the first image (‘land’/‘ages’), and the use of the term ‘stir-about’, in an iconic sentence that is itself a paratactic jumble. It can moreover be linked to Foucault’s definition of heterotopias and heterochronias<sup>3</sup>, in that it exemplifies the superimposition of incompatible spaces and eras: Foucault mentions museums as examples of

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<sup>3</sup> ‘L’idée de constituer une sorte d’archive générale, la volonté d’enfermer dans un lieu tous les temps, toutes les époques, toutes les formes, tous les goûts, l’idée de constituer un lieu de tous les temps qui soit lui-même hors du temps, et inaccessible à sa morsure . . . , tout cela appartient à notre modernité’ (Foucault 752).

these heterotopias, which is clearly in keeping with Wiltshire's description of the wilder part of the island, being a sort of museum of desert island motifs. Foucault finally links this confluence of different spaces and eras to modernity, thus underlining the subversive nature of Stevenson's representation of the insular space.

The passage from one space to another, and hence from one temporality to another, is also linked to a form of generic hybridity, since as soon as Wiltshire plans to cross the boundary into the wilderness the rhythm of the narrative quickens, and it clearly switches to adventure, as action and movement replace stasis, added to the sense of fear and danger, and the quick succession of events that characterise this genre: 'the next day, with my gun and a good knife, I set off upon a voyage of discovery' (Stevenson 2008, 51). We are presented with the traditional attributes of the adventurer, coupled with the evocative and romantic terms 'voyage' and 'discovery', and the active phrasal verb triggers the beginning of action. This transition is also marked by the passage from a realistic account to a more fantastic one, the place being described from the start as 'queer', while it 'seems to be alive and looking on' (Stevenson 2008, 51). The switch to the aoristic present is a way to underscore the atemporality of such a place, as well as the rupture with the timeframe of the rest of the island and even the rest of the story. This temporal and generic hybridity is key to the subversive nature of the adventure novel, as Lauric Guillaud argues: '*[il] abolit les frontières des genres (naturel/surnaturel; réalité/fiction; rationnel/irrationnel; sacré/profane). Il offre une tératologie littéraire, un "sang-mêlé" des écritures susceptible de générer du sang neuf*' (Guillaud 150). The fantastic hesitation between the rational and the supernatural explanations to the strange phenomena that Wiltshire witnesses is indeed present at first, along with numerous romance motifs, as the narrator remarks, 'I had made up my mind to see an *aitu*' (Stevenson 2008, 52), an *aitu* being a demon in Polynesian folklore. Wiltshire's rational mind has almost been taken over by superstition, although he still attempts to find a rational explanation to these phenomena. Yet a few lines later, the fear and fantastic hesitation are completely deflated through Wiltshire's anticlimactic and comic realisation that what scared him was actually completely staged, and created by Case in order to frighten the natives and to establish his superiority over them: 'with a box of tools and a few mighty simple contrivances he had made out to have a devil of a temple' (Stevenson 2008, 55). This stress on Case's artfulness might even be a metatextual comment on romance authors' artificial crafting of exotic and scary spaces to produce a strong impression on the readers, from which Stevenson distances himself while still relying on their legacy. There is indeed the motif of exploration into the wilderness, the Manichean duel between the representatives of good and

evil (Wiltshire and Case), the rescuing of the damsel in distress (Uma), although the latter is somehow overturned as it is finally Uma who comes to Wiltshire's rescue, warning him of Case's arrival, thus also undermining traditional gender roles. The other motifs are consistently deflated, notably through the use of a burlesque tone and comical situations: Wiltshire indeed faints after fighting Case when he feels the latter's blood on his hands, and falls 'with [his] head on the man's mouth' (Stevenson 2008, 68), in a rather comical posture. Moreover, the final rational explanation underscores the closeness of the narrative to the detective story, as Wiltshire progressively unveils the truth about Case and finally manages to solve the 'case', and the onomastics obviously supports this interpretation. This generic liminality is also reflected in the choice of the form itself, the novella being in-between the short-story and the novel, within a collection that is characterised by its extreme generic diversity. Thus both the island and the adventure novel seem to favour hybridity and experimentation, a twofold potential that Stevenson exploited to the full.

In addition, the dialogue between the genres is echoed and reinforced by the 'inner dialogism' of the text (in Bakhtin's terms), i.e. the polyphony of the narrative itself, with the mingling of various narrative voices. For instance, when Uma tells Wiltshire the legends associated to the wilder part of the island, it leads to a shift from the realistic narrative to the folk tale, although her voice is still mostly filtered through Wiltshire's narrative and point of view, as it is often expressed in reported speech and translated into 'plain English' (Stevenson 2008, 30). However, we do have access to a second narrative point of view in direct speech, through the voice of the missionary, and this vocal confluence is materialised spatially by his arrival on a boat, up the river, and ends with his rowing away, thus highlighting the spatiality of the narrative. Moreover, their voices do converge in meaning as they both highlight Case's duplicity and his 'machinations' (Stevenson 2008, 39). This narrative confluence is coupled with a linguistic one, as Wiltshire compares their ways of speaking by using a parallel structure, telling the missionary 'I am what you call a sinner—what I call a sweep' (Stevenson 2008, 35), thus bringing together biblical vocabulary and slang, with the dash that both separates and links them.

The entire text is actually an extremely polyphonic one, mixing Beach-de-Mar, French, American and Scottish slang, and constantly switching levels of language: Wiltshire indeed mentions 'the rough side of [his] tongue' (Stevenson 2008, 27), underlining the interchangeability of these levels of speech. The very expression 'Beach-de-Mar' associates

words coming from three different languages, and also links the liminality and confluence of this language to the insular space itself, as it refers to the connection between the land and the sea that is constitutive of the island. This polyphony becomes more and more prominent as the narrative unfolds, through Wiltshire's growing familiarity with the different languages, as the Catholic priest tries to teach him some French and some rudiments of the native tongue. The blurring of boundaries between languages is highlighted by the hero himself when he mentions the archetype of linguistic confluence, saying that the priest 'muddled [him] up with foreign languages worse than the tower of Babel' (Stevenson 2008, 44). The myth of Babel is taken up again in another text of the same collection, 'The Isle of Voices', this time in the manner of a tale about a magical island where one can hear all the languages of the world whispered on the beach, although no one is to be seen. The recurrence of the motif highlights the crucial importance of languages and polyphony in the island world. The use of images or expressions related to the reality and the culture of the home country in order to describe insular elements or characters also exemplifies this confluence, and has a rather defamiliarising effect, blurring the boundary between the two realms: talking about Uma at the end of the novella, Wiltshire remarks: 'She's turned a powerful big woman now, and could throw a London Bobby over her shoulder' (Stevenson 2008, 70), using a particularly comical and incongruous image.

Linguistic diversity sometimes leads to an opacity of language, when both the meaning and spelling of the words become multiple and unstable. Indeed, even when Wiltshire tries to explain native words he underlines their polysemy and indeterminacy instead: '*Ese* was the name the natives had for Case; it may mean foreign, or extraordinary; or it might mean a mummy apple; but most like it was only his own name misheard and put in a Kanaka spelling' (Stevenson 2008, 27). The diversity of possible meanings creates a rather absurd and humoristic jumble of conflicting definitions, that range from the abstract ('extraordinary') to the concrete ('mummy apple'), and finally to no meaning at all. The link between signifier and signified (should there be one) has become plural and uncertain, as the numerous epistemic modals and periphrases underline ('may'; 'might'; 'most like'), added to the paratactic style that is redoubled with semi-colons, making the link between the two even less fluid.

The plurality of language, that is very evident in all the passages in Beach-de-Mar, is theorised by Deleuze when he explains, '*Quand une autre langue se crée dans la langue, c'est le langage tout entier qui tend vers une limite "asyntaxique", "agrammaticale", ou qui communique avec son propre dehors*' (Deleuze 9). He emphasises the subversive nature of this '*langue mineure*', and indeed the presence of the Beach-de-Mar language within the text has a

very defamiliarising effect and challenges the reader by making the progression through the text sometimes very difficult, as it checks the fluidity of language and signification. Moreover, as it draws near the end, Wiltshire's narration becomes more and more oral and sometimes asyntactic, using rhetorical questions and exclamations, as he addresses the reader or answers a potential listener's omitted questions in a very dialogic way: 'My public-house? Not a bit of it, nor ever likely. I'm stuck here, I fancy' (Stevenson 2008, 71). Through these apostrophes and questions the narrator might be trying to create a connivance or confluence with the reader, or just confusing the novella's mode of enunciation. Moreover, contrary to traditional insular adventure novels, it is clearly stated here that there is no return home, the narrative ends on the island, and with a question mark, thus completely destabilising the final threshold of the text.

Confluence is hence fundamentally subversive, as in this text it serves to question dominant paradigms such as the imperial ideology, generic codes, and even the stable narrative voice, replacing reassuring boundaries with fluidity and merging, and thus leading to the creation of an extremely modern text. Its pervasive liminality might be linked to the period of the fin-de-siècle, being a pivotal period that is at the threshold of modernism. The topos of the island seems to be the ideal place for this superlative form of confluence, being itself a liminal space and a place of concentration due to its reduced size, while its remoteness allows for all kinds of experimentations. The genre of the adventure novel is moreover extremely conducive to these experimentations, having been a hybrid genre since its origins (as Mathieu Letourneux argues<sup>4</sup>); however, this hybridity is brought to a new level by authors like Stevenson or Conrad at the turn of the century, through the association of 'high' and 'low' literature<sup>5</sup>, Realism and Romance, which allows them to consciously use the features of popular literature while simultaneously toying with them and endowing them with high artistic value, by paying careful attention to style and anticipating on modernist narrative devices. In *The Beach of Falesá*, the most strikingly modern feature is probably its linguistic polyphony, that affects the text at all

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<sup>4</sup> 'Là où les œuvres des autres genres se pensent par rapport au modèle d'autres œuvres du même type qu'elles, le roman d'aventures emprunte non seulement aux autres récits d'aventures, mais il paraît se nourrir également des intertextes des autres littératures romanesques' (Letourneux 209)

<sup>5</sup> Richard Ambrosini and Richard Dury express this very clearly: 'And, yet, precisely the ex-centric nature of Stevenson's diversified and provocative opus, with its conscious intertwining of the "popular" and the "artistic", can turn into an asset. Even though, along with Walter Pater, he was the supreme prose stylist of his age and could have continued in a belle-lettrist ivory tower, Stevenson reacted to the new mass-consumption market not by rejecting it but by repeatedly and self-consciously exploring the world of penny literature; and he did so because he saw in the popular subgenres a modern version of atavistic narrative forms.' (Ambrosini & Dury xiii-xiv)

levels, while the whole narrative is driven mostly by the hero's attempts to decipher cultural and linguistic codes, that replace the traditional obstacles of the plot, and redefine the modalities of the adventure novel to create a new, superlatively hybrid literary form.

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