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► **To cite this version:**

Jeffrey Swartwood. Surfing's Early Short Stories by Mark Twain and Jack London: Autofictional Constructions and the Origins of a Genre. *Journal of The Short Story in English / Les Cahiers de la nouvelle*, 2024, 79, pp.271-290. hal-04689916

**HAL Id: hal-04689916**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04689916v1>**

Submitted on 6 Sep 2024

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## Journal of the Short Story in English

Les cahiers de la nouvelle

79 | Autumn 2022

Double Issue: Special Section and Varia

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### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/jsse/3994>

ISSN: 1969-6108

### Publisher

Presses universitaires de Rennes

### Printed version

Date of publication: April 2, 2022

Number of pages: 271-290

ISBN: 978-2-7535-9770-9

ISSN: 0294-0442

### Electronic reference

Jeffrey Swartwood, "Surfing's Early Short Stories by Mark Twain and Jack London: Autofictional Constructions and the Origins of a Genre", *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 79 | Autumn 2022, Online since 02 April 2024, connection on 05 April 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/3994>

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# Surfing's Early Short Stories by Mark Twain and Jack London: Autofictional Constructions and the Origins of a Genre

Jeffrey Swartwood

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- 1 While surfing may appear as an omnipresent and integrated element of popular culture via materials ranging from sound bites of Beach Boys songs to advertising images, there is no “Great Surfing Novel” or short story for that matter which commonly binds or defines surf culture, or perhaps more aptly described, sub-culture. Popular productions exist, of course, but film references are often either underwhelming in their depictions, such as those in the multitude of “beach” films of the 1960s,<sup>1</sup> or, when exploring social history and constructions, under-distributed in documentaries such as Jason Baffa’s 2007 *One California Day*, among others. While potentially controversial in a post-colonial context, Bruce Brown’s 1964 film *Endless Summer* is probably the closest thing to the quintessential surf story, largely accepted by both the more intimate circle of practitioners and the broader public. *History of Surfing* author and historian Matt Warshaw goes so far as to say that “Bruce Brown will be remembered in the world of surfing as the guy that essentially introduced what real surfing is to the rest of the world, the guy that kind of let everybody else in on our great secret” (“Remembering”).
- 2 This is not to say that surfing is not otherwise represented, and of particular interest to this article are the literary forms of that representation. Recent works like William Finnegan’s *Barbarian Days* (2016), Tim Winton’s *Breath* (2009), or Kem Nunn’s *Tapping the Source* (1984) have established the role of the author-participant in a post-*Gidget* literary movement and elevated the genre of surf literature<sup>2</sup> from longstanding, stereotypical limitations. A quick look online reveals a vast array of recent novels, poems, reflective essays, graphic novels... adolescent and children’s books, and, yes, short stories, crafted both by surfers and by writers who have never attempted to stand on a board. And yet, one may ask if this recent surge is a new movement, one that seeks

to reconcile the public imaginary with subcultural reality, or is the continuation of some lesser-known, but existent literary forms.

- 3 The short story, publishable in the specialized press or via small production runs of collected stories, longtime served as the primary medium for literary expression within the global surfing community. Approachable for a wide readership, adaptable in form and style, the short story served and continues to serve as an unpretentious form whose brevity mirrors the intensity and ephemeral nature of wave riding and the rapidly evolving culture stemming from this act. The goal of this paper is to address how early short stories by author-participants such as Mark Twain's "Surf-Bathing Failure" (1866) or Jack London's "Riding the South Seas Surf" (1907) appear to have paved the way for a long line of short fiction narratives that both reflected and developed a transnational and transcultural lifestyle. The length of the works here considered, ranging from just over a single page in the case of Mark Twain's essay, to about fifteen pages in Jack London's surf-related short stories, and narrow focus in terms of characters, settings, and action allow for a concentrated narrative experience. The narrative structure, as will be examined, might be described as short auto-fictional literature in which a combination of elements—journalistic, social observation, personal and extra-personal experiences, and literary license—are assembled to capture something then new to the Western literary world.
- 4 Through a cross-disciplinary lens, the socio-historical context associated with these short stories will be examined not only as a key element in their creation, diffusion, and reception, but as essential in situating these short stories in the sometimes-blurred space between fictional and auto-biographical writings. Surf culture has until recently existed in a relative margin—widely recognized in the collective imaginary in an almost paradoxical combination of counter and mass culture—and understanding the role of these short stories helps bridge the gaps between these two worlds.

## Contextualization

- 5 In the context of a Western audience, surfing is among the many discoveries brought to a wider European knowledge during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A few references to the sport in various forms exist in journals and recitals of travelers to Africa and Asia as early as the sixteenth century, but these were relegated to official or minor publications and failed to capture the public's imagination or to create a continuous tradition of depiction.
- 6 It is only with James Cook's voyages to the Pacific and culminating in his visitation of the Sandwich Islands, or the Kingdom of Hawaii, in 1778, that a wider diffusion of surfing imagery began to emerge. The first depictions, initially recorded by several members of the crew, awakened a broader public to surfboard riding. While surgeon's mate David Samwell does describe "a thin board about six or seven foot long and about 2 broad," it is hard to imagine just how the Native Hawaiians "suffer themselves to be involved in it (the Surf) & then manage so as to get just before it or rather on the slant or declivity" (Moser, *Pacific Passages* 70). These early renderings are perhaps impassioned but all too brief, and the accompanying graphics frequently compositionally flawed, frequently showing surfers somehow balanced at the top of an unbroken wave, rather than descending the sloped face... a physics challenge that was

mistakenly repeated in graphics through the latter part of the nineteenth century and sometimes into the present.

Figure 1. Unknown, *Early Hawaiian Surfriders*, Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century



Source: theinertia.com

- 7 Still, early images such as this do provide an interesting starting point for examining the process of depiction and public reception. Firstly, in that they, whether in textual or in image form, try to capture in a glimpse the complicated and extremely charged—culturally and sensorially—act of riding waves. European, and notably English, observers were seafaring peoples, but they were not sea-loving peoples in the sense that Polynesians were. Relatively few Europeans knew how to swim, waves were considered dangerous rather than elements for amusement, and a long-standing mythology that related the sea as a dangerous world apart existed. Author and historian John Ogden states unequivocally that, “The English might have ruled the waves in 1788, but none of them could really swim. It would take another 100 years before we started to feel comfortable in the surf.” And this culturally distanced fascination was to play a part in the subsequent development of surfing representations.
- 8 During the roughly one hundred years between James Cook’s visit and that of American author Samuel Clemens, surfing continued to be periodically observed in a similar fashion as missionaries vied for the souls (and for the daylight working hours) of the Native Hawaiians, but not practiced among non-native writers. In short, public knowledge of surfing was limited both in terms of exposure to and understanding of the act of wave riding.
- 9 While it thus existed as a minor detail of exotica in the years prior to the second half of the nineteenth century, surfing reached its first mainstream public via the writings of two iconic American writers, Samuel Clemens (via the works published under the *nom de plume* Mark Twain) and Jack London, in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively.

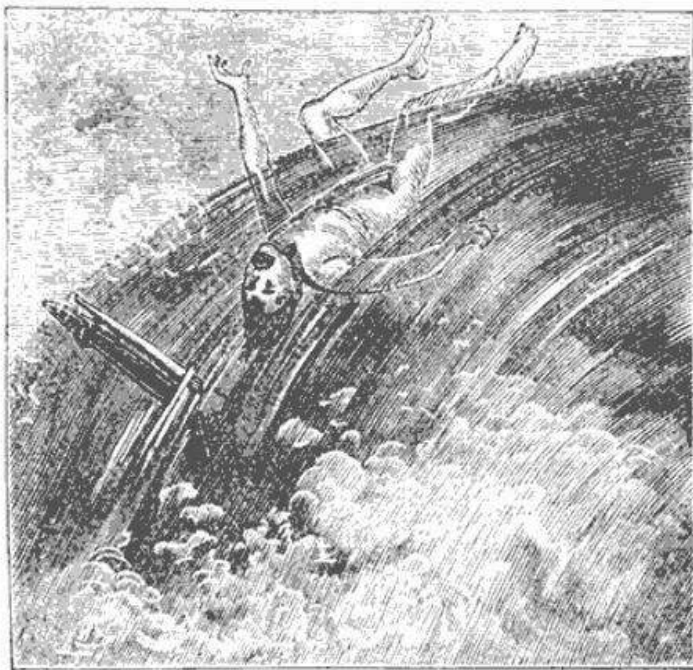
## The Beginnings of Autofictional Surf Narratives

- 10 The emergence of a focused, surf-specific storytelling (outside of the rich Native Hawaiian tradition, of course) really begins with Twain's four-month visit to the islands in 1866. He authored a series of sketches of island life collected in a volume entitled *Roughing It in the Sandwich Islands*, including a short depiction of surfing which is often referred to using the title of an accompanying illustration, as "Surf-Bathing Failure" in 1866.
- 11 Written for the *Sacramento Union* newspaper, Twain's short story is notable in several ways. It is the first-known depiction of Anglo-American writing about surfing from the position of an author-participant. Published initially as an article, and then as a chapter in *Roughing it*, it briefly describes the practice and the "short board" upon which the natives would come in "whizzing like a bombshell!" (Twain 359). Twain then describes his own brief attempt at capturing this exhilaration. And while his narrative cannot be called a success story, it is certainly an invitation to attempt this Hawaiian activity:
- I tried surf-bathing once, subsequently, but made a failure of it. I got the board placed right, and at the right moment, too; but missed the connection myself. The board struck the shore in three-quarters of a second, without any cargo, and I struck the bottom about the same time, with a couple of barrels of water in me. None but the natives ever master the art of surf-bathing thoroughly. (359)
- 12 Within this short quotation, the self-deprecating narration accomplishes both a sensorial rendering of the act—the excitement and complexity of it—and issues a cultural compliment to the Hawaiian practitioners at a moment in which their culture was being deliberately dismantled in the process of colonization. The text was originally accompanied by two images—one of natives successfully riding waves and another of an Anglo experiencing what came to be known as a "wipe-out," which the National Geographic Society succinctly describes as "the act of falling off a surfboard while riding a wave."

Figure 2. Twain, Mark, "Surf Bathing Success," 1865, *Roughing It*, public domain.



Figure 3. Twain, Mark, "Surf Bathing Failure," 1865, *Roughing It*, public domain.



SURF-BATHING—FAILURE.

- 13 The two images are remarkable in that not only do they visually reinforce the textual narrative, but they do so while providing an accurate graphic rendering of positioning on a wave when surfing; the female surfers are actually well-placed in relation to the

wave. It may appear to be a minor detail, but this combination of text and visual renderings prepares the public for a better understanding of surfing in the years to follow. It should be acknowledged that a precise classification of this short work is evasive—the degree to which it is autobiographical, autofictional, journalistic, or fictional is impossible to determine at this time. Yet, although the author is known for his mingling of fact and fiction, having as Drewey Wayne Gunn states in “The Monomythic Structure of *Roughing It*,” dramatized many episodes that seemed to him a little tame, touched up others, and invented others outright when the narrative demanded it” (563), he nonetheless significantly captures the fleeting feeling of a first surf attempt and relays it to his readers abroad in a way that had not been done before. In other words, the space defined by practice is being explored, but that space is being reinvented, represented, and transmitted to a wider cultural audience in the literary form of the short story.

- 14 Following a short lapse in known fictional writings, another American author—Jack London—wrote of his surfing experiences during his visit in 1907. London was to write and publish several essays and short stories which directly or indirectly address surfing in a romanticized and fictionalized style. Published in newspapers and in collections, these essays offer an interesting development upon Twain’s brief text. For the sake of convenience, these works are here referred to whenever possible in their collected form under the 1911 title *The Cruise of the Snark*. Like Twain, London was a keen observer and admirer of Hawaiian culture and was himself a participant in the life that he rendered on the page. It could be tempting to see the production of each author as independent, but circumstances make this unlikely. The authors were familiar with one another’s work and publics, and London, always eager for a physical and cultural personal challenge, all too evidently takes up the implicit challenge left by Twain’s narrative voice: “None but the natives ever master the art of surf-bathing thoroughly” (Twain 359).
- 15 In his 1907 short story “Riding the South Seas Surf,” London appears to seize upon Twain’s depiction of surfing as an exciting and culturally charged activity and then develops this depiction further, broadening its scope and detail, and finally, surpassing it. The first paragraphs are spent lauding the mastery of the Hawaiian surfer amidst the challenging waves with a favorable mythologization of the subject:
- And one sits and thinks of Tristram’s last wrestle with the sea on that fatal morning; and one thinks further, to the fact that that Kanaka has done what Tristram never did, and that he knows a joy of the sea that Tristram never knew. (Cruise 58)
- 16 The reader’s appetite carefully whetted, London then proceeds to explain, in accessible terms, surfing in relation to a breaking wave in a veritable deconstruction of the Cook-era engravings and depictions. While earlier observers often represented surfers almost miraculously positioned on top of cresting waves, London carefully and accurately positions the surfer upon the unbroken face of the wave: “When a wave crests, it gets steeper. Imagine yourself, on your board, on the face of that steep slope. If it stood still, you would slide down just as a boy slides down a hill on his coaster” (Cruise 59). Alternately, he describes his own humbler experience of being pushed before a broken wave in the foam. Familiar to any surfer, these dynamics nonetheless represent a revolution in the printed representation of the sport.



- 17 In continuing with a structure similar to that used by Twain, London also briefly describes the board, “a flat board, six feet long, two feet wide, and roughly oval in shape” (*Cruise* 59), before going on to relate his first attempts at surfing which ended just as Twain’s had some forty years prior: “I tried to emulate them. I watched them, tried to do everything that they did, and failed utterly.” To this point, the structural similarities are nearly perfect, though again, London’s rendering is much more developed.
- 18 In addition to his detailing of the act of surfing itself, Jack London also further develops the theme of cross-cultural development. To do so, he first embraces a local, though non-native, teacher in the person of Alexander Hume Ford before gaining more expert advice from Hawaiian-born waterman George Freeth. The transition is interesting in that it passes through the intermediary of an Anglo-American “gone native”<sup>3</sup> before reaching out to a Hawaiian instructor in order to finally master this difficult endeavor. While the reliance on native knowledge and transmission is extremely valorizing for the Hawaiian practitioners, it also establishes in symbolic form a parallel for the uninitiated reader, who relies upon London as their interlocuter in their own introduction to the sport just as London himself had relied on Alexander Hume Ford.
- 19 Returning to a historical contextualization, through persevering over a period of several months spent in Honolulu in 1915-16, London managed (despite a sunburn bad enough to cost him a week in bed) to become a proficient surfer. This progression, as well as the knowledge that he gleans from it, serve as both primary and background material in his writing from 1907 through the posthumous publication of seven short stories in *On the Makaloa Mat* in 1919. These short narratives run a wide literary range—from romanticized personal experiences to personally-informed fiction. While not always central to a given story, surfing in its various forms is never far either, in an accurate mirror of both traditional and evolving Hawaiian culture in the early twentieth century.
- 20 In addition to the collected forms, his short stories and romanticized essays were also published in a variety of mainstream media supports including journals and newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. As an example, the short story “Aloha ‘Oe” first appeared as a stand-alone text in the London-based monthly *The Lady’s Realm* in December of 1908 before being printed in the collected *House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii* (Macmillan Co, 1912). Similarly, the short text “Riding the South Seas Surf” quoted above was first published in the *Woman’s Home Companion* before being incorporated into the *Cruise of the Snark* in 1911.
- 21 One could imagine that London’s depictions are the fruit of a keen sense of observation combined with a bit of literary license. But period sources paint a more immersive picture. In his recent biography of Hawaiian pioneering lifesaver George Freeth, historian Patrick Moser goes to great lengths to document London’s actual surfing experience and his profound respect for native Hawaiian surfers. Mark Twain may have thrown down the proverbial gauntlet regarding depictions of non-native surfing, but Jack London appears not only to have accepted that challenge but through learning with the local surfers, to have become “quite an expert on the surfboard” while writing about his experiences (see Moser, *Pacific Passages* 137). The tenacity with which he does so is recorded in the short story “Riding the South Seas Surf”:

I shall come in standing up, even as Ford and Freeth. And if I fail tomorrow I shall do it the next day, or the next. Upon one thing I am resolved: the Snark shall not

sail from Honolulu until I, too, wing my heels with the swiftness of the sea and become a sunburned, skin-peeling Mercury. (*Cruise* 68)

- 22 Here the initial sport, the author, and the intended audience are at play in the representation. The act of surf riding is elevated using mythological references, as is the struggle to dominate a complex activity. Local Hawaiian George Freeth and recent immigrant to the islands, Alexander Hume Ford, are both mentioned by name in exalted fashion, creating a model for intercultural participation and mutual learning. This is all the more telling as the presumed audience for whom London is writing is that of the *Woman's Home Companion*—at this point in time it appears that surfing short stories are actively seeking the largest possible audience and encouraging participation—literal or through cultural appreciation—in the island lifestyle.
- 23 Moser also carefully documents the wider context in which London writes of surfing, noting how Ford affects the fiction of Jack London. The figure of Ford provides inspiration and material for several short stories, including how Ford worked towards the idea of creating in Hawaii a desirable destination for further economic development via tourism, immigration, and an assortment of business ventures. He also served as a guide for a Congressional tour of Hawaii destined to study commercial development and potential statehood. Such goals coincided with those of an author whose fame was assured, but who continually sought to ensure his own financial stability while seeking out the powerful life experiences that are reflected in his writing. Thus, although London's writing is effectively highly personal, he is actually a participant-observer in several aspects of cultural development: that of a surfer, that of an author, and that of both direct and indirect developer and diffuser of a broader cultural interaction between the mainland and Hawaii.
- 24 And, because these themes are approached with enough substantive detail, they are able to bridge the gap between an informed (or participatory) public and the uninitiated masses. There are no theoretical grounds upon which to base the following, but over a quarter century of empirical observation by the author offers a potential insight into how this apparently contradictory premise functions. Among practicing surfers, the details of how waves break, of board styles and functions, of the difficulties and frustrations as well as the joys of surfing, validate the authenticity of the experience and identify the author as one of, as 1966 World Champion surfer Nat Young frequently puts it in terms of identity constructs, the "tribe." These inclusions, among the others modeled by London, have become nearly ubiquitous elements in subsequent surf writing. These same details, of board shape, of positioning in relation to waves, of the importance of cultural figures and references, of the sensation of surfing itself, are often omitted or mischaracterized by non-practicing authors. And it is these details precisely which allow the uninitiated to successfully imagine themselves, at least momentarily, as potential or future practitioners, with the presumption of a welcoming, though challenging, rich pastime.
- 25 This latter point highlights the significance of Ford's indirect contributions to the genre. His influence on London's writing, informed by his desire to develop the sport in a specific context of Hawaiian exchange with the US mainland and further abroad, conditioned both the production and the reception of these early surfing works. The authors are writing, though not exclusively, to potential future surfers and participants in surf culture at some level. Although peripheral to this paper, it should be noted that Ford's tireless promotion of surfing and Hawaii perfectly coincided with London's work

and often overlapped. During visits to both coasts in the US, as well as Australia, Ford made use of his relationship with the author: the short stories motivated audiences to see the fiction-come-to-life in surfing demonstrations where they were encouraged to visit Hawaii and continue surfing. This symbiotic relationship continued with other developers and other actors, notably with George Freeth in California and then with his successor, Duke Kahanamoku, in a virtually global series of tours. Kahanamoku, an Olympic gold-medal swimmer, observed the interactions between London and Freeth, and then went on to become the most celebrated Hawaiian, and surf-culture ambassador of the mid-twentieth century.

- 26 A mention should be made that London was not the only author writing about surfing through short stories in the early part of the century. Stories are to be found in various journals and magazines, though often authored by non-surfers. While their titles may be tantalizing, for example Peter B. Kyne's short fictional piece "The Call of the Cool Sea Breeze, Enchanted Summer on Los Angeles Beaches" appearing in *Sunset Magazine* in July 1911, their impact was extremely localized and limited by comparison.

## Complicating the Analysis

- 27 It appears that both Twain's and London's writing can be perceived as convincing surf literature, and as a clear departure from earlier depictions in their accuracy and positioning via the narrative stance as author-participant. However, simply establishing them as surf literature understates the complexity of the works. Here an examination of the blended cultural experience that is both experienced and diffused by the authors is in order.
- 28 While Hawaiian surfing was intricately woven into traditional culture by the year 1200, "modern" surfing really begins with the early Waikiki revivalists—including Ford and Freeth. While Twain participated in surfing, and through his representation perhaps contributed to the maintenance of this cultural activity, a new period of practice and expansion only began in the early twentieth century. As one of its earliest literary chroniclers, London helps not only to depict, but to create a literary form in which multiple contributing cultures are being informed by one another. There is a real exchange and concordant development going on which results in the creation of a new surfing experience and a new genre of short text writing.
- 29 This exchange entails, at its base, the dominant themes and constructions that are found in the short stories here studied, and which subsequently form a core of defining elements within the later body of short surf fiction. Though the following list is non-exhaustive, key elements include a shared language and shared cultural iconic figures, the notions of travel and of liberty, the incorporation of travel. This latter is especially notable in relation to the cultural epicenter of Hawaii or its more local substitutes, and is thus aligned with the theme of "going native."
- 30 The language in which a story is conceived and told is of obvious importance, and in the early surf writings, elements of the Hawaiian language are frequently interwoven into the English narrative. This, of course, occurs in other literatures, but just as the use of Spanish in English-language literature of the United States-Mexican border region often transcends the merely exotic and references deeper levels of cultural interaction, it is also the case here. Mark Twain definitely includes Hawaiian words

ranging from *Kanaka*, *tabu*, *ohia*, or *hula hula* (respectively: Hawaiian native, forbidden, flowering trees, or traditional dance) in the relating of his travels, although the language use remains limited. Thus, there is a form of hybridization at work, but in its early developmental form. London takes the incorporation to another level. In attempting to adequately describe and contextualize his experiences, London's Hawaiian lexicon includes specific names that form the physical and social landscapes, describing trees, houses, foods, flowers, dances, women, folk figures, and priests... all through the largely italicized use of Hawaiian. He goes so far as to include untranslated lyrics for a Hawaiian song in "The Kanaka Surf."

- 31 Beyond the obvious structural hybridity, one must ask if his language use is anything but superficial, a desire to integrate exotic minutia as a form of background décor. This question can be answered in two parts.
- 32 The first aspect is that London appears to be attempting an immersive description, one which addresses objects that are largely unknown to his readership and which potentially evoke new sensations and connotations that have not yet taken verbal form in English. His use of the term "hapa-haole" or half-breed, for example, to describe George Freeth as a surfing instructor (he also expounds upon this structure in a fictional instructional figure in "Kanaka surf") is a clear reference to the hybrid experience of building a new Anglo-Hawaiian culture. This is particularly true in relation to surfing-related constructions. In London's textual linguistic construction, the use of *kahuna* (chief) or *kanaka* (native Hawaiian) are not anodyne—they create a tribal construct within the emerging surf culture in which Hawaiian skills and traditions are placed at the apex.
- 33 The second aspect is that London's use of terms like *wahine*, or Polynesian woman, to describe certain surf spots not only mirror the Hawaiian classifications for surf spots reserved for certain publics, but they allow the introduction of female surfers in conditions that would normally shock conservative mainland or English sensibilities. This appears to be particularly true in "Aloha 'Oe" in which the protagonist is greatly affected by this very duality—her behavior while in the islands was to be abandoned upon her return to the mainland. While in Hawaii, the character Dorothy "had ridden horses, climbed volcanoes, and learned surf swimming" in mixed company without the slightest stigmatization, yet her father sternly admonishes her that this will be unacceptable upon their return home (*House of Pride* 53).
- 34 In this construction, the narrative seeds of the genre are sown: a hybrid language is constructed with which to better convey a specific culture—one which is clearly differentiated and subverted from the mainstream while sharing many aspects with it. One of the most popular writers of his time, London nonetheless helps develop a parallel or sub-culture that lies somewhere between traditional Hawaiian and Anglo social constructions.
- 35 Using this, albeit slightly, hybrid English, London develops upon the groundwork laid by Twain, in which the figures of the *kanaka*, and then the *kahuna*, become culturally iconic within the surfing world. An anecdotal reference to the importance of this can be found in the massively popular 1959 book/film combination of Francis Kohner's *Gidget*, in which the leader of the surfing tribe is simply though reverently referred to as "Kahuna" throughout. Beyond the broad categorical terms, specific historical figures are elevated in London's writings: namely the figures of George Freeth and Alexander Hume Ford. Rather than providing simple background texture, these figures were to

become referential mainstays within the culture and were to inspire the quintessential Hawaiian surfing ambassador figure in the coming decades. While the real-life incarnations of this figure are multiple in the decades subsequent to London's writing, ranging from Duke Kahanamoku to Donald Takayama to Joey Cabell, all notable native Hawaiian ambassadors in contemporary surfing culture, their integration as essential Hawaiian cultural representatives and icons within fictionalized and purely fictional narratives is relatable to London's early work.

- 36 The notion of the travelling surfing ambassador compounds another basic, though potentially understated feature of these early surf travel writings, which is to say the element of travel itself. Both Twain and London explore the surfing theme within the context of their travels to Hawaii from California. And the diffusion of these travel-inspired short stories is perfectly intended to inspire the reader to travel in turn, whether this travel is indirectly experiential from the comfort of an armchair, participatory in the context of Hawaiian travel, or somewhere in between. This integral idea of travel is complementary both to the Hawaii-centered surf universe itself, and to the very nature of the act of surfing which is contingent on the presence and quality of waves. This quality is affected by variables such as swell direction and size, shifting sandbars, tidal conditions and cultural variations of accessibility and, more recently, crowding. William Finnegan devotes numerous pages to this "need" to travel in his *Barbarian Days*, notably in the chapter entitled "The Search" (147-206). Again, this characteristic is emphasized and reinforced by the very structure and diffusion of the earliest depictions.
- 37 Two additional notions are well worth mentioning: those of freedom and of "going native." Closely interwoven, these two themes are nearly defining features of the genre. Both authors draw a clear distinction between the relaxed attitudes and behaviors of the Islands and the more repressive standards of the mainland. While they are addressed in other episodes, the short stories focused on surfing concentrate the differences. Twain often relates the relative freedom in Hawaii and, as we discussed, revels in the speed and dynamic nature of the act of surfing. But he also provides a greater context and desirability. When Twain depicts native women surf-bathing without any clothes prior to his own tentative foray in the waves, he is providing the now-classic trope of sea, sex, and sun. The author also crafts a critical commentary on the missionary culture sweeping the islands and a more subtle critique of mainland restrictions. And by partaking in the sport—one free of terrestrial constraints, practiced by both sexes and naked or close to it—he is a precursor to subsequent generations of author-participants who seek greater freedom in "going native."
- 38 While London's writing lacks the levity and apparent frivolity of Twain's essays, he nonetheless continues in the tradition. London discusses the positive transformation he finds in adopting "island living," and this is reinforced by his direct comparisons to Hume and Freeth. If we refer to his purely fictional constructs, "Aloha Oe" is a perfect reference as the author describes the freedoms enjoyed by both main characters in the Hawaiian context with a negative comparison to the mainland. Also notable is how the figure of Dorothy offers a reflection on the profound sense of loss that she feels when faced with her looming departure from the Islands. This is an interesting social commentary coming from an author whose representations often focus on nearly overtly masculine figures and themes.

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- 39 By way of a conclusion, the enduring legacy and impact of these two authors in the decades following London's last surf-related publication can be evoked. This legacy exists in two forms—a continuity of formats and themes which can be discerned in the works of other authors and artists, and in the explicit references that continue to pepper surf stories to the present day.
- 40 Following the twenties, surfing continued to develop in ever more constructed international circles which remained, nonetheless, Hawaii-centered. While regional centers developed with their own specificities, a rich exchange between Hawaii, California, and then other areas was based on a constant reciprocity in board design and materials, fashion, music, and language, in which participants actively developed a global surf culture. And surfing literature was no exception. While no author of Twain's or London's stature engaged during this period, other writers continued to exploit an author-participant structure that combined personal experience, collective memory, and selective embellishment in an effort to authentically capture the essence of the sport. Though publications tended to be extremely localized, they were extensively distributed through informal networks fostered by the high frequency of travel to Hawaii and thus we see interreferential development. Examples included a precursor with A.R. Gurrey's 1914 *The Surf-Riders of Hawaii* which directly cites London, Freeth, and Duke Kahanamoku, Tom Blake's 1935 *The Hawaiian Surfboard*, or John Heath "Doc" Ball and Jim Feuling's 1946 *Early California Surfriders*.
- 41 In these works, the participant-author, short story formula remains dominant, as do the primary themes represented: travel, freedom, exhilaration and exotica in a hybrid cultural construct. After the 1920s, the increasing role of images changes the format of short surf stories, but not the essential component elements including participatory narrative voice. While the audience reduces from the large-scale public for whom the works of Twain or London were intended, the short story adapts itself to this new reality in the cultural construct in multiple ways.
- 42 Without the support of larger publishers or media, the short story was an inexpensive way to express the culture and creativity of its participants in independent publications. This is explicitly mentioned by surf photographer and author Doc Ball when referring to his work. While participant-authors continued to write, prior to the emergence of a specialized press in the 1960s, the short story format was most conducive to the non-professional writing that characterized the genre. The short format was thus influenced both by the precedents created by the earliest authors, but also by the economic and professional context in which the literature evolved.
- 43 As the surfing short story developed, a core almost paradoxical lesson seems to have been retained from London's narration: that surfing is nearly fundamentally more rewarding than reading—and by extension writing—about it. While the short format was seen as valuable as a means of expression, exchange, cultural development and transmission, the form remains both accessible and, in this case, unpretentious. The understated, slightly self-conscious short story thus continued to focus on authenticity, shared experiences, shared cultural markers and references. And this, whether the writing occurred in Hawaii, California, Australia, or New Zealand, as works like Ron Stoner's travel stories (published in early *Surfer Magazine* issues), Peter Dixon's collected short stories in *Men and Waves*, and Midget Farrelly's *This Surfing Life* can

attest, only to mention a few. Other examples include collections by Chris Ahrens such as his 1994 *Good Things Love Water* or his 1998 *Joyrides*. Of particular interest is the way in which Scottish author Malcom Findlay addresses the hybrid yet communal heritage of short surf literature in his 2022 *The Surfing Collection*, stating:

All of the stories in this book have some connection to real-life events, so if you already are a surfer, you may recognize some of the situations that arise in the stories, indeed you may even identify with some, though hopefully not all, of the characters. If you're not a surfer, this book may offer some insight into the traits that surfers display, whoever they are, and wherever they live... passion, dedication, and benevolence, but also selfishness, hubris, and vanity in roughly equal measure. (Foreword)

44 Such is the elliptical space between other cultural or literary movements in which the admittedly sometimes vague construction of “surf literature” thus continues to thrive at a near-global level.

45 Surfing literature after the 1960s has become more complex and diversified, but the importance of the early literary roots is still clearly distinguishable in the short story and well beyond. Returning to the introduction and to Bruce Brown's iconic film *Endless Summer*, the narrative is essentially a captivating visual recreation of the format pioneered by Twain and London. When Australian writer Tim Winton speaks of “safaris” up the coast to a more tropical destination in his aptly named short story “Big World,” or more explicitly of the Hawaiian heritage of surfing's urban incarnation in Australia in his full-length novel, *Breath*, he is writing in direct continuity as well. And should this direct lineage appear to be mere similarity or coincidence, there are always titles such as the humoristic “Jason Borte teaches Mark Twain to Surf” to remind us of its relevance today. Although overall critical of London, historian and writer Matt Warshaw nonetheless states in his *Encyclopedia of Surfing*:

But credit Jack London for knowing a good thing when he saw it the moment he stepped off his boat in Hawaii all those years ago, and for jumping right in to try surfing himself, and for turning his huge megaphone towards the Mainland and beyond—London's literary fame in 1907 was at its peak—and spreading the word.

46 In short, while the complexities of the process of literary creation are not always conscious to either the restrained circles of surfing practitioners or to the wider sphere of general public readers, they are significant and lasting. This examination, while limited in scope, appears to confirm the prominent place of the not-so-humble surfing short story in the development of a literary sub-genre whose current expansion and relative success is the fruit of a long and rich transcultural and transnational past.

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## NOTES

1. While the first notable Hollywood "beach film" is probably *Gidget* (Paul Wendkos, Columbia Pictures, 1959), based on the novel *Gidget* by Frederick Kohner (1957), a plethora of films of varying quality emerged throughout the 1960s. For further reading on the films and their important social impact see, for example, Lisanti.

2. The notion of surf literature as a distinct genre is somewhat fluid and in a formative stage with much discussion regarding the defining "characteristics in common in spite of their different origins" which elevate surfing beyond "a simple hobby or sport" in literary constructs (Pérez 2-5). In general, these characteristics include for example a coastal setting, surfing as a principal theme and identifier, as well as references to a broader surfing culture or subculture. The first bibliography of surf literature appeared in print only in 2004 (see DeLa Vega).

3. The use of gone native as a derivative of the form going native is here intentionally used to designate the assimilation of non-traditional Western behaviors inherent to surfing, but also to evoke the colonial context of latter nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hawaii in which such adoptions were socially frowned upon. The notion is not unique to this setting, of course, and the usage evokes references from Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, among others.

## ABSTRACTS

This contribution aims to examine the auto-fictional short stories that potentially lay the origins of a long tradition of short fiction in the increasingly recognized genre of surf literature. While exploring early surfing short stories such as Mark Twain's "Surf-Bathing Failure" (1866) or Jack London's "The Kanaka Surf" (1917), careful attention will be paid to the context of their creation and diffusion as stand-alone and collected works, as well as to the appearance of key elements which appear to create precedence: from setting to cultural evaluation and inclusion. These short works will be viewed through the prism of the author-participant, and thus as short works of auto-fiction which both combine and exceed individual qualifications such as journalism or purely fictional writing.

Cette contribution vise à examiner les nouvelles autofictionnelles qui pourraient être à l'origine d'une longue tradition dans le genre émergent de la littérature de surf. Tout en explorant les premières nouvelles de surf telles que "Surf-Bathing Failure" (1866) de Mark Twain ou "The Kanaka Surf" (1917) de Jack London, une attention particulière sera accordée au contexte de leur création et de leur diffusion en tant qu'articles dans la presse ou dans des collections, ainsi qu'à l'apparition d'éléments clés qui semblent créer des précédents dans le genre : du cadre du récit à

l'évaluation culturelle et à l'inclusion. Ces œuvres courtes seront considérées à travers le prisme de l'auteur-participant, et donc comme des œuvres d'autofiction qui combinent et dépassent les catégories de l'écriture journalistique et de la fiction.

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