Late Victorian Ballad Translation

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates late Victorian ballad translations that depict non-British people. It focuses on ballads published in the 1890s, at the height of imperialist expansion and at a peak of ballad collecting and editing. In this period, as recent criticism in the field has shown, many ballad scholars, collectors, and publishers treated this verse form like an artifact in a Victorian museum: they framed, bowdlerized, and decontextualized the ballad, as if it were an inanimate object, rendering it easily consumable for the middle classes. By looking at poets who translated the ballad rather than publishers who ‘artifactualized’ it, I show that the ballad remained a vital—even rebellious—politically engaged form, even during this period of intense collecting and cataloguing.

My work contributes to the burgeoning field of global poetics through an investigation of four poets: William Morris, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, and E. Pauline Johnson. My first chapter, a study of Morris’s ballad translations from Danish and Icelandic, argues that Morris figured the ballad as embodying folk up-rising. My second chapter argues that Kipling’s ballad translations are from “Atkinsese,” a language named after Tommy Atkins, the soldier-speaker the “Barrack-Room Ballads.” Tommy sings of the experiences of empire, but, in the margins of the text, an editor-
figure retranslates Tommy’s words in order to undercut the authority that Tommy establishes. In my third chapter, I show that Stevenson’s translations from Tahitian blend Indigenous rhythms with conventions of the classical epic in an attempt at translating ethically. Finally, in my fourth chapter, I argue that Johnson’s *The White Wampum* includes hybridized balladic monologues that not only translate Indigenous Canadian voices into fluent English, but also translate the concept of the wampum belt to create hybridized “verse-wampum.” This dissertation dwells in the thresholds of Victorian poetry—in the margins of pages, at the borders of nations and of languages—in order to suggest that these zones of interaction and interpretation were broader and more significant than currently conceived.
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Introduction

When scholars of Victorian literature write about translation, and when scholars of translation theory write about the Victorians, both groups invariably include a discussion of Matthew Arnold’s *On Translating Homer*. Written in response to Francis William Newman’s 1856 balladic translation of the *Iliad*, Arnold’s three-part essay—delivered as a lecture series at Oxford in 1860, but not published until 1861—condemns Newman for failing to render Homer’s nobility. This failure, Arnold argues, is due to Newman’s archaic “odd diction” (40) and to his choice of genre, the ballad: “the ballad-style and the ballad-measure are eminently inappropriate to render Homer. Homer’s manner and movement are always both noble and powerful: the ballad-manner and movement are often either jaunty and smart, so not noble; or jog-trot and humdrum, so not powerful” (47, emphasis in original). Newman, in his response piece *Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice* (1861), argued that the ballad metre “is essentially a noble metre, a popular metre, a metre of great capacity” (22), and condemned Arnold’s derision of “ballad-manner” by arguing that, if hymns could be written in the “Common Metre” that is “the prevalent ballad-metre,” then it is inaccurate of Arnold to assume that “whatever is in this metre must be [all] on the same level” (20 n2). Arnold then rebutted Newman’s response with an 1862 lecture and article titled *On Translating Homer: Last Words*, in which he repeats his charges that “the English ballad-style is not an instrument of enough compass and force to correspond to the Greek hexameter” (36) and that “the ballad-form is entirely inadequate” to Homer’s “grand style” (60).

Although it is usually figured as a debate about the purpose and method of classical translation, this famous disagreement is also a debate about the nature of the ballad. The ballad was a broad, loose category in the nineteenth century, and Arnold’s use of the term—often qualified by hyphenation—exemplifies the breadth of features that might have been considered balladic. In *On Translating Homer*, Arnold refers variously to the “ballad-style” (46, 48, 59, 60), “ballad-measure” (47, 83), “ballad-manner” (47, 49, 51, 55, 60), “ballad-slang” (51), “ballad-rhythm” (52), “ballad-metre” (67), “ballad-verse” (43, 69), and “ballad-swing” (57); most of these terms he defined by example, by quoting a passage and then positing its qualities as self-evident: “That is the true ballad-
manner, no one can deny” (51); “any scholar will feel that this is not Homer’s manner” (57, emphasis in original). In Last Words, Arnold adds to these hyphenated terms “ballad-character” (as in, “On this question about the ballad-character of Homer’s poetry, I see that Professor Blackie proposes a compromise …” [58]) and “ballad-form” (as in, “the ballad-form [is] from a form not commensurate with [Homer’s] subject-matter” [59]).

What these examples reveal is that Arnold is drawing on a conception of balladry that he either assumes is shared broadly or positions as if it is shared broadly, and yet the proliferation of hyphenated qualifiers suggests that this genre is in constant need of clarification and definition. Arnold writes about the ballad as if there is a critical consensus as to what this genre is or does—as if all agree about its style, its manner, its metre, its ignobility. Because of the importance of Arnold as a Victorian thinker and critic, his side of the debate overshadows his contemporary opponents; On Translating Homer effectively constructed a critical consensus out of what had been a more diverse set of assumptions about the ballad, its characteristics, and its connotations.

Recent critical work on nineteenth-century poetry has begun to interrogate the diversity of meanings associated with poetic terms related to genre and to reading. For instance, Virginia Jackson’s Dickinson’s Misery (2005) and Meredith Martin’s The Rise and Fall of Meter (2012) have shown that terms like “lyric” and “prosody,” respectively, are culturally determined; at the same time, however, their work shows that reading practices have brought definition and stability to diffuse concepts and forms. This dissertation argues that, while Victorian ballad-reading practices—shaped by editors, collectors, and publishers—moved in the direction of stabilizing the conception of the form, an alternate history can be traced through translating practices. By shifting the focus from Arnold, and those critics of the ballad who followed him, to Newman and the ballad-translators who came after him, we can see a fracturing of assumptions about the ballad’s forms, styles, manners, measures, and politics. Ballad translations provide us with interpretations of the ballad that are not the same as the interpretations that can be found in Victorian literary reviews or prosody textbooks or introductions to ballad collections. Making sense of the ballad at the end of the nineteenth century requires engagement with ballad translations, because investigations of ballad-reading practices
paint an incomplete picture of the genre—they confine a diffuse Victorian form within narrow generic parameters.

In this dissertation, I examine four poets who translated into the ballad. The first poet, William Morris, translated from a written text; the second, Rudyard Kipling, from a fictitious source; the third, Robert Louis Stevenson, from a number of oral versions of a single story; and the fourth, Pauline Johnson, from wampum—an object that embodies stories without ‘writing’ them. These poets all published their ballad translations in the 1890s, a decade of intense ballad collecting and editing. As I shall demonstrate, current critical scholarship on the Victorian ballad tends to emphasize the ways in which editors assembled collections of both literary and traditional ballads to render them appropriate for middle-class consumption. While Jason Rudy, Michael Cohen, Yuri Cowan, and Susan Stewart have made arguments about the marshaling and bowdlerizing of the Victorian ballad by looking at how it was collected, edited, and published, I argue that looking at how it was translated enables us to see the range of connotations each poet imagined the ballad as holding, rather than simply seeing it as an object akin to something in a museum collection, being presented as representative of a homogenous national past, and being rendered easily available for middle-class consumption. In his introduction to his translation of the *Iliad*, Newman argued that “[t]he moral qualities of Homer’s style [were] like to those of the English ballad” (v); this dissertation suggests that we can learn about the diverse set of qualities moral and immoral associated with the ballad at the end of the nineteenth century by examining how it was interpreted in translations.

## 1 Ballad-reading and Artifactualization

Current critical work on the Victorian ballad emphasizes how collectors, critics, publishers, and editors increasingly narrowed the range of stanzaic patterns, subjects, and voices that were considered truly or authentically balladic. Reviewing criticism by Coventry Patmore and W. E. Aytoun published in the late 1840s and 1850s in order to uncover the “qualities” of Victorian poetry that “its original readers seem to have held most dear” (594), Jason Rudy argues that the form of the mid-Victorian ballad reinforced
a common theme: “most middle-brow literary ballads […] offer insistent regularity as a model for cultural stability” (593) and, Rudy claims, mid-century “critics are quick to attack the mildest deviation from standard ballad practices” (592). Michael Cohen demonstrates that this critical marshaling of the boundaries of acceptable ballad practice only intensified in the decades that followed. Cohen, whose work on E. C. Stedman has demonstrated the “transatlantic interdependence of nineteenth-century poetry” (“Stedman” 167), argues that there was a process of increasing “cultural domestication of ballad reading” (“Whittier” 15-16) in the U.S. from the 1840s to the 1890s:

 critics increasingly interpreted poets and poems through new protocols of ballad reading; during the same period, ballads became artifacts of the anthology. The consolidation of ballads in books provided “the ballad” with a cultural mobility unique in the generic hierarchy of the time; while ballads maintained their imagined historical connection to the popular voice, their artifactualization within books aestheticized and domesticated them for genteel consumption. (“Whittier” 15)

Although many of the particulars of this “cultural domestication” process are specific to the United States, ballad “artifactualization” occurred on both sides of the Atlantic. The domestication and aestheticization of English ballads can readily be found in ballad anthologies by editors like William Allingham, Samuel Carter Hall, George Barnett Smith, John Harland, and Andrew Lang, as Yuri Cowan and Marysa Demoor have shown, as well as in the most important traditional ballad collection of the nineteenth century, English and Scottish Popular Ballads (1882-1898), compiled and edited by the American scholar Francis James Child; his ESPB attempted to pin down every version of every popular ballad and to categorize all regional variants.

Susan Stewart—the first to use the phrase “the artifactualization of the ballad” (105) in her 1991 Crimes of Writing—has traced a trajectory of increasing restrictions to the category of “the genuine ballad” (102) through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth: “In the early part of the eighteenth century, we find writers such as Allan Ramsay eagerly considering almost any ‘song’ or ‘poem’ as an example of the traditional ballad, but by the 1840s we find writers such as [Robert] Chambers doubting the authenticity of nearly everything” (103). While Stewart’s chronology doesn’t extend another fifty years into the 1890s, she too points to the end of the nineteenth century and
to Child’s collection as the pinnacle of scholarly decontextualization and ‘preservation’ of folk balladry, arguing that “the literary tradition, in rescuing a ‘folk’ tradition, can just as surely kill it off” (102). Penny Fielding follows Stewart’s trajectory: she describes Walter Scott as “curating” his Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border and argues that, “as collections moved into the nineteenth century,” ballad editors, collectors, and antiquarians “[i]ncreasingly removed [ballads] from the social practices that shaped them” (“Curated” 164), and instead used the ballad to “stand for abstractions of nation, or history, or art” (“Curated” 168). If Stewart and Fielding identify the eighteenth century as the starting point of “the emerging notion of the ballad as artifact” (Stewart 105), then Cohen, Cowan, and Martin identify the end of the nineteenth century as the moment in which this notion becomes the de facto rule.

Martin, in her forthcoming ELH article, builds on the critical consensus that “reading practices consolidate” a heterogeneous set of “poetic forms and […] mutable, unstable genres” (par. 10). Martin then goes on to survey a range of nineteenth-century prosody texts in order to show that “[v]ariable definitions of the ballad stanza persist throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and do not solidify into the notion we have now (a quatrain of alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter) until the turn of the twentieth-century” (par. 10). Martin shows that what we now call ‘the ballad stanza’ was only one of a range of ballad stanzas recognized by mid-Victorian poets, prosodists, and readers; to supplement Martin’s reading with an additional example, witness the opening lines of Newman’s ballad translation of Book I of the Iliad:

Of Peleus’ son, Achilles, sing, oh goddess, the resentment
Accursed, which with countless pangs Achaia’s army wounded,
And forward flung to Aides full many a gallant spirit
Of heroes, and their very selves did toss to dogs that ravin,
And unto every fowl, (for so would Jove’s device be compass’d);
From that first day when feud arose implacable, and parted
The son of Atreus, prince of men, and Achileus the godlike. (1)

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1 My thanks to Meredith Martin for her permission to quote from this forthcoming article.
Newman’s ballad meter is unlike anything that would appear balladic to a casual twenty-first century reader who is familiar with the conventions of the form. Having eschewed rhyme as inappropriate to Homer, Newman “found an unpleasant void” at the end of each line, which he then filled by adding “a double-ending to the verse, i.e., one (unaccented) syllable more than our Common Metre allows” (*Iliad* vii). The result was a series of unrhymed verse-paragraphs, made of long lines of fifteen syllables and seven stresses, with a strong caesura in the middle, marked by the gap in the line. For Newman, writing in the mid-1850s—and for Arnold too—this was a ballad meter. Only by the end of the century, Martin demonstrates, did the ABXB quatrain of alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines become codified by prosodists and essayists as ‘the’ ballad meter. By looking at how prosodists, editors, collectors, and publishers described, policed and produced the ballad, recent critics have identified a trajectory across the nineteenth century in which this genre is increasingly restricted. By reshaping the ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ ballad, these editors, collectors, and publishers produced for ballad-readers an acceptable image of the nation via its primary, collectively-produced folk form; that a few men could also profit from the sale of non-threatening, aestheticized ballad collections to an increasingly wealthy and literate populace was an added bonus.

Importantly, the process of artifactualization—the process of deciding that a work is an object that can be removed from its original context, classified according to new matrices as determined by a ballad scholar, and packaged within an editorial frame—occurs in Victorian treatments of both literary and traditional ballads. Indeed, drawing a line between these two types of balladry is to impose on the nineteenth century an anachronistic demarcation; in the era before copyright, both “Chevy Chase” and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Village Blacksmith” could be transferred equally easily

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2 Here I am indebted to Bill Brown’s conception of the object in his 2001 article “Thing Theory.” “Objects,” Brown tells us, exist in the external world; when we write a history of the pencil or the zipper, the toilet or the potato, “we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature or culture—above all, what these disclose about us)” (4, emphasis original). See also my 2013 article on thing theory and the material of literature in *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net.*
by word of mouth, on a broadsheet, or in print. Take, for instance, the “Ballad of Lord Bateman,” which is also known as “Young Beichen” (Child Ballad No. 53): in On Translating Homer, Arnold contrasts the “the genuine Homeric mould” against “the form of the Ballad of Lord Bateman” in order to emphasize the contrast between “our old ballads” and “the supreme form of epic poetry” (44). “Lord Bateman” is the only “old ballad” that Arnold specifies by name in his four speeches. So when, over twenty years before Arnold’s essay, George Cruikshank sang a Cockney version of the ballad to his friend Charles Dickens—and when Dickens then made a few small changes to the lyrics, and replaced the final stanza with a new one, to which Cruikshank then added illustrations—and when Dickens then sang this new version of the ballad to William Makepeace Thackeray, who in turn etched his own plates with the thought of independently publishing a version of the ballad—and when these three then combined their contributions along with comic footnotes by Dickens, and published it as The

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3 On the overlap between the different categories of ballad, David Atkinson writes: “So-called traditional ballads are simply those that were collected, along with other kinds of songs, from mostly rural and working-class singers during the folk song revivals of the Romantic period and, especially, the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. That these [i.e., ‘traditional,’ ‘broadside,’ and ‘literary’] are not, in fact, in the slightest degree mutually exclusive categories should be readily apparent” (124).
Loving Ballad of Lord Bateman (see Figure 1a and 1b)\textsuperscript{4}—to what category, literary or traditional, does this ballad belong? If we call it “literary,” can we confidently point to the precise moment in the process of singing, rewriting, and sharing when the ballad ceased to be traditional? Could similar points not be found in the production of oral variants, such as the Scottish ballads of “Young Bekie,” “Young Beichan,” “Young Beichen,” and “Young Bichem”?

In 1839, Dickens, Thackeray, and Cruikshank mock those ballad editors who try to treat such a ridiculous ballad as an example of good poetry; the notes at the end of the poem jokingly compare the ballad-poet to Byron (32) and Shakespeare (33), and make hyperbolic statements about the quality of the verse. For instance, a note upon the line “Avay and avay vent this proud young porter, / Avay and avay and avay vent he” reads: “Nothing perhaps could be more ingeniously contrived to express the vastness of Lord Bateman’s family mansion than this remarkable passage” (36). Almost sixty years later, Andrew Lang and Francis James Child both cut the mocking paratexts—the notes and the illustrations—and then regularized the spelling of the text, collected the poem as a part of a set of texts belonging to the same category, and presented the poem as yet another quaint example of English balladry. Indeed, Child includes this version of the ballad as variant “L” of Child 53; as Figure 2 (below) shows, Child 53L is the 1839 poem verbatim, except with the comic elements—the misspellings, the illustrations, the notes—removed. Even Dickens’s new closing stanza can be found in Child’s collection, its ‘literary’ origin unmentioned. Child describes Ballad 53L as “illustrated by George Cruikshank,” suggesting that Cruikshank copied it from Cockney tradition, and that Dickens’s interventions are sufficiently minor as to be overwhelmed by the poem’s traditional aspects. Lang then reproduced Child’s version in \textit{A Collection of Ballads} (1897), noting in his introduction that “[n]o ballad has a stranger history than \textit{The Loving Ballad of Lord Bateman}” thanks to Cruikshank and Thackeray; nonetheless, Lang confidently places this ballad alongside “Sir Patrick Spens,” “Tam Lin,” and “The Twa

\textsuperscript{4} For a discussion of the collaborative process behind \textit{Lord Bateman}, from which Dickens immediately distanced himself, see Jane Cohen (26-7).
Sisters” as examples of “our ballads” (xi), “composed by men of the people for the people, and then diffused among and altered by popular reciters” (xx).

If the 1839 poem was what we might confidently call a “literary ballad,” it had become, for the ballad editors of the 1890s, a traditional, “old,” or “popular” ballad, subject to the same artifactualizing process—the same de- and re-contextualization as a piece of “vernacular heritage” (Stewart 103)—as any other ballad text. Our twenty-first-century critical tendency to designate ballads published by known authors, especially important, canonical authors like Dickens and Thackeray, as “literary” and therefore separable from the ballad “tradition” is thus anachronistic to the Victorian period, and circumvents a late-century ballad-reading practice that reframed, repackaged, and recontextualized ballad texts.

Child’s and Lang’s treatment of “The Loving Ballad of Lord Bateman” is in no way unusual, and the process of artifactualization of both traditional and literary ballads can be found in any number of late-nineteenth-century ballad collections. Victorian ballad collectors sought to distinguish themselves from Romantic-era ballad editors, and so included extensive paratextual apparatuses, including lengthy introductions, footnotes, and endnotes, which emphasized that, unlike earlier editors who regularly altered their sources and included fabricated ballad imitations, the Victorian ballad collector was an authoritative, trustworthy scholar who could cite his sources. Along with establishing the
credibility of their collector, these paratexts served to sever the ballad from its original context, positioning it as an inanimate object—a part of a catalogue of ballad goods—rather than a vital, vibrant, potentially disturbing, or threatening text. Consider, for example, George Barnett Smith’s *Illustrated British Ballads, Old and New* (1881); in his notes on each poem, he repeatedly frames the ballad genre as a simple and sentimental verse form that does nothing to unsettle established values. Tellingly, Smith claims that the author of “The Muster of the North: A. D. 1641”—Charles Gavan Duffy, an Irish-Australian politician and Irish nationalist—stated “that there was no intention whatever to make [the poem] available for a political purpose” (2. 88); this despite the ballad’s content, celebrating the ousting of English and Scottish settlers from Ulster. Whether or not Duffy ever made such a statement is unknown; Smith’s commentary at this point is but one example of what Florence Boos has described as the Victorian ballad editor’s typical move of “interpret[ing] away any political or social commentary” (“Working-Class” 204).

Another example of Smith framing his selected ballads as simple, sentimental, and non-threatening can be found in his commentary on George Meredith’s “Beauty Rohtraut,” in which he side-steps the significant controversy over “Modern Love” by stating that “early in his career [Meredith] published two small volumes of poems, which make us regret that his appearance as a poet has not been more frequent. What little he has published in verse shows a wide range, and much originality of treatment” (1. 67). Given that one of these two collections, *Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside* (1862), produced a level of moral outrage surpassed perhaps only by Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads* four years later, Smith’s circumlocution—“a wide range and much originality”—is an incredibly euphemistic way of referring to a set of poems focused on hypocrisy, adultery, suicide, and social inequality. In Smith’s commentary, then, we can see that Victorian ballad editors tended to artifactualize the ballad genre by removing or even explicitly down-playing the original publication context, and re-framing their collected poems with commentary that emphasizes the poems’ superficial features. Like the text panels on a museum wall or the labels in a museum case, these paratexts established the context in which the ballad-artifact should be read.
The traditional ballad was not an established genre in Victorian Britain; what we now call “traditional” builds on a diffuse set of categories such as “old” ballads (Smith’s preferred term), “popular” ballads (Child’s term), and “genuine” ballads (Lang’s term). A Victorian balladmonger could sell a broadside edition of Thomas Hood’s “Song of the Shirt” next to another of “Babes in the Wood,” because ‘tradition’ is a practice, not a stable category. Individual texts could be adopted into or rejected from tradition, whether or not they had a known author because, in practice, people take up what they like. This isn’t to say that the Victorians saw no difference between “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” and “Sir Patrick Spens”—certainly, “Spens” was known to be older—but both texts were treated as “ballads.” Poems like Keats’ only became “literary ballads” after 1900: after the rise of copyright law entrenched the importance of a particular model of authorship; after the institutional division of folklore from literary studies; after the establishment of Child’s ballad collection as canon. Victorian ballad editors did not keep our ballad categories and definitions, and so when they included the kinds of poems that we’d now call “literary ballads” in their collections, they treated them to the same artifactualizing process as they did “old,” “genuine,” “popular” ballads.

To sum up the current state of the field, then: recent criticism of Victorian poetry that seeks to understand the ballad as a genre by focusing on how the ballad was presented to readers emphasizes the artifactualization of the ballad, and traces a trajectory of increasing policing and stabilizing of the form from the 1840s to the 1890s. In this dissertation, I show that attention to ballad reading paints only a partial picture of ballad interpretation at the end of the nineteenth century. Even though Victorian essayists, editors, and publishers framed the ballad as an object that was thought to be a national

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5 The Bodleian Library’s *Broadside Ballads Project* includes images of five editions of Hood’s “Song of the Shirt”: Bod12873 (Manchester, published between 1850 and 1855); Bod8827 (London, between 1863 and 1885); Bod9911 (Preston, between 1840 and 1866); Bod20246 (Bristol, date unknown); and Bod2354 (Durham, between 1797 and 1834). None of these editions names Hood as the author. The poem’s ubiquity and geographic spread suggests it had entered some kind of popular tradition, but this poem is not considered a ‘traditional ballad.’

6 For example, both “Sir Patrick Spens” and “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” were published in John Williamson Palmer’s *Folk Songs* (1861), Barnett Smith’s *Illustrated British Ballads, Old and New* (Vol. 1, 1881), and Reginald Brimley Johnson’s *Popular British Ballads, Ancient and Modern* (Vols. 1 & 3, 1894).
form and that could easily be consumed by the middle classes, and even though Victorian
literary critics wrote about the ballad as if there were a critical consensus as to how it was
understood, Victorian poets at the end of the century continued to turn to the ballad—and
to a wide range of ballad meters—as a vital form for translating non-British people,
cultures, and stories. It’s not just that poets break rules: it’s that translators reveal the
rules to have been broader than the current critical conception suggests. Looking at ballad
translations enables us to see what these poets thought the ballad genre was or could do,
which provides us with a different picture than that provided by ballad-readers. “Ballads
flourish from time to time, with variable ideas of balladness,” argues Mary Ellen Brown
(“Placed” 120). This dissertation aims to explore counter-trends to our current critical
understanding of the late Victorian “idea of balladness”—which is formed through
analyses of how the ballad was presented to the reading public—by surveying four 1890s
ballad translations that start with radically different conceptions of the ballad.

Methodologically, this dissertation engages with contemporary debates in
Victorian Studies about formal analysis. In 1999, Herbert Tucker called for a “Cultural
Neoformalist” approach that would bring together close attention to poetic form and the
study of the cultural and historical contexts of artistic production (535); since the
publication of his “Open Letter,” critics of Victorian poetry have increasing brought
metrical patterns and deviations to the fore in their analyses. But poetic form is more than
just meter. As the Newman/Arnold discussion above makes clear, the stable, clearly-
defined “ballad stanza” that we now recognize (an ABXB quatrain in alternating
tetrameter and trimeter lines) didn’t come to be known as ‘the’ form of the ballad until
the turn of the twentieth century; because meter, rhyme scheme, and line and stanza
length are not consistent across nineteenth century ballads—because the ballad is not
even necessarily a written form—this dissertation proposes that scholars of Victorian
poetry expand our formalist reading practice to consider more than just rhyme, meter, and
stanza. A formal reading of nineteenth-century ballads additionally demands a
consideration of not only punctuation and incremental repetition, but also, crucially, the
paratextual features that frame and shape the ballads they contain: footnotes, endnotes,
dedications, illustrations, titles, and so on. An extensive paratextual apparatus is a
common feature of the written ballad; one need only think of the woodblock illustrations
of broadside ballads, the commentary in Percy’s Reliques, Blake’s imagetexts, Coleridge’s gloss on “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1817), and so on through the nineteenth century. These paratexts shape a reader’s interpretations but they also affect the physical, visual shape of the texts they surround: Blake’s poems’ titles growing from the branches of illustrated trees; Coleridge’s gloss slipping out of the margins; and, as we shall see in this dissertation, Morris’s illustrations and font and ink choices colouring our reading; Kipling’s and Stevenson’s footnotes and endnotes interrupting the progression of the words in the text; Johnson’s lack of commentary reinforcing the logic of her verse-wampum. All of these paratexts are a part of the form of these ballads.

Paradoxically, in considering these framing devices as a part of the form of these ballads, this dissertation works against the critical assumption that forms that impose boundaries necessarily confine. In Forms (2015), Caroline Levine highlights the new formalist distrust of “bounded wholes,” and the critical assumption that the “valuing of aesthetic unity implies a broader desire to regulate and control—to dominate the plurality and heterogeneity of experience” (25). While the bounded whole of the artifactualized ballad collection does represent this homogenizing impulse, my approach, like Levine’s, rejects “the idea that bounded wholes are always and necessarily dangerous and successful, on their own terms, at organizing experience” (29). Kipling’s paratexts, for example, seem designed to ‘organize’ the experience of reading Tommy’s ballads in only the most superficial way. Stevenson’s attempt at making Polynesian and Scottish legends cohere—and thus at showing that Indigenous Polynesians have a history—was critically ‘unsuccessful,’ despite his conventional, authoritative ballad commentary. Johnson’s verse-wampum and Morris’s re-membered ballad collection are ‘dangerous’ only to oppressive power structures. A formalist reading practice that includes a consideration of paratexts need not “necessarily entail a valuing of containment and exclusion” (Levine, Forms 31), but may instead reveal instances of resistance against practices that sought to contain and exclude the heterogeneity of the ballad genre.

In suggesting that this dissertation intervenes in twenty-first century debates about new formalist methodologies, it is not my intention to suggest that the nineteenth-century ballad is ‘a form,’ singular. I describe it as a genre, in that it is a type of poem marked by
a set of distinguishing features, but not always displaying the same physical or visual shape. This dissertation demonstrates that we can examine the heterogeneity of the late-Victorian ballad by looking at a number of its different shaping and structuring features.

The trajectory that I have traced, of an increasing tendency to treat the ballad as an artifact in the nineteenth century, is of course not the only way in which Victorian poetry scholars discuss this type of poem. Just because the ballad was increasingly being collected, framed, packaged, published, and read as if it were an object in a museum, that doesn’t mean that all poets necessarily conformed to the dominant critical and cultural conception. Recent essays by Jill Ehnenn, Linda Hughes, and Sean Pryor have discussed late-century ballads that feature a range of forms and subjects, and that are not at all artifactualized. Victorian reviewers’ responses to these kinds of innovative ballads were often derisive; for instance, Pryor traces the reaction to Stevenson’s Polynesian ballads in the *Saturday Review* and the *National Observer*, in which reviewers respectively claimed that his poems were “not ballads at all” (331) and “not so much ballads as long and leisurely narratives in verse” (151). Because of these kinds of responses, Victorian poetry scholars who have attempted to sketch a comprehensive picture of the ballad as a genre in the period—rather than, say, an image of a particular poet or text—have tended to look at commentary on the ballad, arguing that poets could and did write what they like, but late-century ballad readers judged their work according to increasingly restrictive parameters. This dissertation offers an alternate model of commentary on the ballad, by looking at poet-translators, who combine the roles of artist and interpreter.

The poets whose works form the substance of this dissertation are Morris, Kipling, Stevenson, and Johnson. Morris was one of the most prolific and famous translators of the nineteenth century, but his short ballad translations receive much less critical attention than his translated epics; Kipling, too, was an incredibly famous poet in his time, although now his prose is more read and more studied than his poetry. Stevenson, on the other hand, was a critical failure as a balladeer, and Johnson was much better known in North America than in the United Kingdom. And so while not all of my chapters focus on a major Victorian poet, I will argue that, by articulating each writer’s distinct ballad practice, my dissertation will collectively resist the critical tendency to
confine retrospectively this diffuse Victorian genre within narrow parameters. This dissertation thus dwells in the thresholds of Victorian poetry—in the margins of pages, at the borders of nations and of languages—in order to suggest that these zones of interaction and interpretation were broader than currently conceived.

2 On the Translation as Interpretation

Arnold’s debate with Newman is but one iteration of the debate that theorists and scholars of translation have had for hundreds, even thousands, of years—to be “faithful” or to be “free” in one’s rewriting of the source text. The precise terms of this debate have varied, but the crux has often come down to two choices: whether it is preferable to stay, in the new text, as close as possible to the form and the vocabulary of the original; or, whether it is preferable to use different forms and language to reproduce, in the new language, some sense of the “intent” or “meaning” or “tone” or “sense” of the original.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century translation theory frequently positions itself as transcending the binary approach. But, as Edwin Gentzler has shown, these contemporary lenses still sometimes reproduce the terms of the old debate, as in, for instance, Lawrence Venuti’s “fluent” and “foreignizing” paradigms, between which “there seems no middle ground” (Gentzler, Contemporary 42). This binary division usually proves unsatisfactory for literary critics after Derrida, and the questions that deconstructionists have asked about binaries generally and about translation specifically—putting into question, for instance, the primacy and stability of a single, identifiable ‘original’ text—have forced translation theorists to fundamentally reimagine their approaches. One way of moving beyond the faithful/free paradigm—one way of refusing to make the assessment of equivalence primary—has been to focus on the life of a translated work in its new context, interrogating the relationships between, for instance, translations into English and the broader set of English literature. This is the approach favoured in this dissertation, as my interest is less in showing how ‘faithful’ or ‘free’ a particular poet-translator has been, and more in unpacking the significance of the adaptive choices they have made, thereby revealing the ways in which their translations reflected and contributed to late-nineteenth-century conceptions of balladry. That is, my approach is less invested in how much a poet-translator’s formal and linguistic choices reproduce
some source or sources, and more interested in considering the significance of their interpretive moves. Such an approach has precursors in the Victorian period.

In the same year that Arnold first published *On Translating Homer*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti published his collection of translations from Italian, *The Early Italian Poets*. Aspects of Rossetti’s text adhere to the binary terms of the old debate: his subtitle, *In the Original Metres*, suggests that he privileges fidelity to form; in his introduction, he emphasizes that the poet-translator’s “primary condition of success” is to ensure the “beauty” of his translation, and so the translator may choose either “literality of rendering” or “paraphrase,” depending on which best serves the goal of beauty (viii). And yet Rossetti’s introduction also contains some of the seeds that have grown into twentieth-century translation theory. The most famous line in Rossetti’s introduction is his claim that “a translation […] remains perhaps the most direct form of commentary” (viii). The idea of translation as “commentary” begins to shift the focus away from an Arnoldian emphasis on the translator’s ability “to reproduce” his or her source (*Three Lectures* 30), and towards an emphasis on the significance of a translator’s adaptive strategies. By understanding a translation as “commentary,” we can begin to ask questions about the kind, function, and politics of the interpretive translation.

In contrasting ballad reading with ballad translation, my approach accords with Rossetti’s description of translation as “the most direct form of commentary.” Like Umberto Eco, I believe that “every translator is an interpreter” (125); like Susan Bassnett, I argue that the verse translations in this dissertation “are based on [each poet-translator’s] *interpretation* of the original and on their *shaping* of that interpretation” (103, emphasis in original). For this reason, I argue that a study of ballad translations is a study of interpretations of the ballad, and that we can learn about the ballad by examining translations in this genre. And yet, as Matthew Reynolds has shown, there is good reason to interrogate the critical move that is made when one states, “let’s think of translation on the model of interpretation” (*Poetry* 60). As Reynolds notes, “translation” and “interpretation” are different words with different meanings, and thus to suggest, as Eco and others do, that translation is a form of interpretation is to evoke one in a series of metaphors available for understanding translation: translation as “transcription,
transposition, bridge-building” (Reynolds, *Poetry* 60), for instance, or as stealing, rendering, turning, transplanting, or repeating. Each of these metaphors for translation, Reynolds argues, corresponds to a different model for translation; they are “different imaginative processes which have been shaped, and can be named, by different metaphors” (*Poetry* 6). Translation-as-interpretation is one of the most difficult to unpack of the set of translation metaphors because it pairs an ambiguous tenor with an equally ambiguous vehicle.

For Reynolds, one important distinction between a translation and an interpretation is that “the value of an interpretation—like that of a paraphrase—lies primarily in how it differs from whatever it is an interpretation of (for instance in being clearer or shorter)” (*Poetry* 59). An interpretation of a sonnet by Hopkins might be written in prose and bring clarity to the density of his metaphors; an interpretive translation of a sonnet by Hopkins will imply that its form, in the new language, bears some similarity to the effect of distinction between Hopkins’ sprung rhythm and the conventional sonnet’s iambic pentameter. Both of these new texts will necessarily differ from Hopkins’ sonnet. Reynolds notes that figuring translation as interpretation has the benefit of “giv[ing] recognition to the element of creativity in the work of translators” and can also serve to highlight the ways in which translations “are conditioned by the circumstances of the making,” but his emphasis is on the ways in which the metaphor of translation-as-interpretation “has an insidious consequence”:

The shift that distinguishes interpretation is taken to be illuminating; but it is therefore also, inevitably, narrowing. […] To call something an interpretation is to imply that it does not need to be interpreted in its turn; at least, not as much as the material it itself has interpreted. (*Poetry* 61)

Reynolds’ claim seems to apply to the example of the prose interpretation of Hopkins’ sonnet; a critical essay may be complex, but there are few, if any, university courses dedicated to the study of literary criticism about sonnets, while there are many dedicated to the study of sonnets. The narrowing effects of interpretation are likewise found in the collections discussed above, which classify ballad-artifacts and present them for interpretation as specimens and curios framed by scholarly paratexts. These paratexts
perform interpretive work, but aren’t positioned as themselves needing the same degree of interpretation as the ballads they frame.

For Reynolds, it does not necessarily follow that translations governed by the metaphor of interpretation have this “insidious consequence” of positing themselves as less in need interpretation. Reynolds argues that “textual counter-currents, created in part by the interactions between the metaphor that shapes the translation and similar metaphors that appear in the source, mean that the definition supplied by the guided metaphor is never complete. [... T]ranslations both obey and attack the metaphor ‘translation is interpretation’” (Poetry 62). As this dissertation will show, the “attack” against the metaphor of translation-as-interpretation, with its suggestion that the translation will be less in need of interpretation than its source, can be found in the paratextual frames that surround each of the ballads—from Stevenson’s endnotes to Kipling’s footnotes, Morris’s illustrations and typography, and Johnson’s dedication. These paratexts show that translation-as-interpretation is never final, and always in need of further commentary, further interpretation. In the margins of each poem, in the thresholds of each book, lies “a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author” and that offer to the reader “a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies)” (Genette 2). These paratexts thus serve as a commentary on the commentary that is the translation; they are intralingual and intersemiotic translations, as deserving of interpretation as the core text they surround, and thus often the subject of my critical attention. And, importantly, the paratextual frame provided by each poet-translator in this dissertation engages in a different way with, and responds in a different way to, the conventional paratexts of the late Victorian ballad collection and their associated artifactualizing tendencies.

In describing the paratexts as intralingual and intersemiotic translations, I draw on Roman Jakobson’s tripartite definition of translation:

(1) Intralingual translation, or rewording (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language).
(2) Interlingual translation or translation proper (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language).

(3) Intersemiotic translation or transmutation (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems). (114)

For Jakobson, a “translation” can take place within a single language or across languages; it can involve an adaptive element, moving from one art form to another; but it is always interpretive. Translation, defined thus, has much in common with other kinds of intertextual relationships: adaptation, parody, paraphrase, pastiche, and so on. Where translation differs from these other forms of rewritings, however, is in the translation’s self-posturing as both the same as its source and necessarily different. An adaptation or a parody is a response to an earlier work; a translation makes a claim to be a rewriting of that same work—a “new ‘original’” (Bassnett 10) written in “fresh language” (D. G. Rossetti xiii).

Where my definition of translation diverges from Jakobson’s, however, is in his insistence that only “verbal signs” can be translated. As my discussion of Johnson’s “verse-wampum” will show, non-verbal forms of recording too can be translated, as she does when she creates balladic monologues that convey, in a new language and new form, both the logic of the wampum and the lived experience of life as a First Nations person at the end of the nineteenth century. Jakobson’s definition of translation doesn’t account for the possibility that a “non-verbal sign system” might be translated into a “verbal sign system,” but Johnson’s verse-wampum are importantly different from, for instance, an ekphrastic description of Brueghel’s “The Fall of Icarus,” in that a wampum belt is a form of recording without writing.

In largely following Jakobson’s definition of translation, it is not my intention to deny the significance of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century translation theory, especially postcolonial approaches. Like Tejaswini Niranjana, I am aware of the ways in which colonial-era translators like Stevenson and Kipling needed to construct an “original” source in order to have something that they could claim to faithfully translate, and of the two-way flow of translation, “influencing both source and target cultures, and thereby destabilizing notions of origin and telos” (Gentzler, Contemporary 179). As my
The final chapter will show, when Johnson translates wampum belts into “verse-wampum,” her poems both represent contemporary Indigenous Canadian life to an English-speaking audience and construct for Haudenosaunee people an authoritative, correct way of understanding wampum. The only poet-translator in my dissertation who wrote his translations from a book was Morris, and the book that he chose as his source for his translations from Danish—Svend Grundtvig’s *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (*Denmark’s Old Folk Ballads*)—features verses that are as much constructions of folk sources as was Child’s version of “Lord Bateman” discussed above. Morris needed to figure Grundtvig’s text as an authoritative voice of the Danish folk in order to then depict metaphorical folk up-risings in his translations. Translation-as-commentary is thus transformational: it destabilizes the priority of the original by reconstructing an original text that can then be translated. All three types of translation—intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic—have this kind of reciprocal relationship with their sources.

Isobel Armstrong, whose *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* (1992) reformed critical conceptions of the politics of Victorian poetry, described the prototypical Victorian poem as a “double poem” (13)—a poem of both expression and analysis; a poem that represents a subject or point of view but that also “calls into question the poem’s grounds for representing its subject and who or what should figure in poetry” (Hughes, *Cambridge* 7). This dissertation posits the literary ballad translation as a particularly apt subset of the Victorian double poem, as it is marked by multiple self-contradictory doubles: the ballad is both familiar and forgotten, both alive as a persistently popular form and dead as a tradition; the translation is both unchanged and new, both comprehensible and foreign. If the double poem shows that poetry and criticism are linked, then ballad translations—“the most direct form of commentary” on the ballad—are prime terrain for investigating late-nineteenth-century conceptions of the ballad.

3 On Ballads

The last book-length study of Victorian literary and popular ballads was Albert Friedman’s *The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated*
Poetry (1961). While other prominent Victorian forms have received sustained critical attention in the last fifteen years—in Glennis Byron’s Dramatic Monologue (2003); Joseph Phelan’s The Nineteenth-Century Sonnet (2005); Herbert Tucker’s Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse, 1790-1910 (2008)—studies of the ballad tend to be piecemeal, with individual journal articles and book chapters on individual poets. Given that the ballad was “a poetic form whose dimensions were explored by almost every nineteenth-century poet who gained attention in his or her own time” (Bristow, “Whether” 90), clearly sustained critical attention to the ballad is due. This dissertation strives to fill an obvious critical gap in a non-obvious manner, by studying how the ballad was translated and thus interpreted, instead of studying how it was read.

My first chapter is a study of Morris’s ballad translations from Danish and Icelandic, first collected in A Book of Verse (1870) but not published until Poems by the Way (1891). In this chapter, I argue that Morris figured the ballad as embodying folk uprising. His translations are both textual and material: he changes Grundtvig’s language and context to create ballad imagetexts that blend in with the rest of the works in their collections, forming cohesive wholes. In his translations, especially their formal features, illustrations, and font choices, Morris provides multiple instances of repetition with difference—repeated returns and images of permeated surfaces. He demonstrates that the ballad’s conventional simplicity, stability, and regularity could mask troubling, even dangerous, undercurrents; the poems thus prefigure the folk up-risings of his later Socialist works. And, finally, he positions himself as an advocate for the folk as he counters the arbitrary division of ‘high’ from ‘low’ art forms and the assumptions that accompany it. In order to do so, however, he must figure Grundtvig’s source text—an example of highly artifactualized ballads—as the voice of the authentic folk.

My second chapter argues that Kipling’s ballad translations are from “Atkinsese” (Henley 55), a language named after Tommy Atkins, the soldier-speaker (or perhaps soldier-singer) of Kipling’s “Barrack-Room Ballads.” The “Barrack-Room Ballads” were a series of poems that were published in a number of editions, the most important of which is Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses (1892). In this book, Tommy sings of the experiences of empire, but, in the margins of the text, an editor-figure retranslates
Tommy’s words in order to undercut the authority that Tommy establishes; both Tommy
and the editor attempt to position themselves as authoritative by demonstrating their
linguistic prowess. Translation is thus a rhetorical technique in the poems and a central
concern of the poems. The editor-figure’s footnotes and dedication frame the collection
and make it appropriate for the middle classes, in a parody of the conventional ballad
collection’s artifactualizing process. Musical settings of these poems, though, show that
Tommy’s voice could resist such containment strategies, as the scores by Gerard Francis
Cobb, Arthur Whiting, Oley Speaks, and George Chardwick Stock set music to Tommy’s
words and Tommy’s words only, thereby eliding the role of the editor-figure.

In my third chapter, I show that Stevenson’s translations from Tahitian blend
Indigenous rhythms with conventions of the classical epic in an attempt at translating
ethically. For Stevenson, ethical translation entailed responsibility to his Tahitian
sources—collecting and preserving traditional stories that he believed were going to be
lost—and entailed as well responsibility to his readers in the UK and US, at whom he
targeted his ballads, and for whom he emphasized the similarities of Indigenous
Tahitians. In “Song of Rahéro,” Stevenson shows that Indigenous Tahitians are not
ahistorical, and he turns to the ballad to counter conventional portrayals of Tahitians in
evolutionary anthropology. In the shift between text and paratext, though, Stevenson’s
position moves from invisible translator to forefronted interpreter. Stevenson’s paratexts
translate his translations and frame the work for a marketplace with a specific audience.
In so doing, they position him as an authority on matters Tahitian. His performance of
translation in the paratexts complicates the unambiguous politics of the core text.

Finally, in my fourth chapter, I argue that Johnson’s The White Wampum includes
hybridized balladic monologues that not only translate Indigenous Canadian voices into
fluent English but also translate the concept of the wampum belt to created hybridized
“verse-wampum.” Her book was published by the Bodley Head, the most important
publishing house in London in the 1890s; for an English audience, her poems represent
the lived experience of Indigenous Canadians and attempt to bring English people into
Haudenosaunee social order. But Johnson’s book also circulated on the Six Nations
Reserve, and she recited from her collection in Brantford as she did across North
America. For a broader audience of Indigenous people in the Great Lakes region, Johnson posits her poems as demonstrating culturally correct models of behavior; for a Haudenosaunee audience in the know, Johnson’s *The White Wampum* also carries a particular resonance, in that it supports the Mohawk version of Six Nations history and positions Mohawk characters as defenders of Indigenous traditions.

This dissertation is neither an empire nor a transatlantic project. Rather, it is a global circulation project. I use “circulation” not in the sense that book historians use it—in reference to the movement of books through a human network—but rather in the sense the scholars in the emerging field of global literary studies use it: that is, in an understanding of “how key Anglophone works, authors, genres, and literary movements have been translated, received, imitated/mimicked, adapted, or syncretised outside Britain, Europe, and North America, and, conversely, how key works from outside these areas have been translated, received, imitated/mimicked, adapted, or syncretised within Anglophone literary traditions” (Gagnier). The four poets that I have chosen—Morris, Kipling, Stevenson, and Johnson—translated stories from four different types of nations: nations never colonized by Britain, nations colonized but not settled by Britain, nations from the British “shadow empire” (Jolly, “Piracy” 157), and nations settled by British colonizers. My dissertation contributes to the burgeoning field of global poetics and shows that the field of Victorian poetry was no more static than the form that is the focus of my inquiry.

In his *Handbook of Poetics, for Students of English Verse* (1885), Francis Barton Gummere described the ballad as a form that spread organically; he argued that the genre was “not of native [English] origin” but that, “blown from the East over Europe, [it] dropped seed in many countries” (36-7). If the ballad, in the late-nineteenth-century cultural imagination, was an import—from “the East,” as Gummere suggests, or from classical antiquity, from Scandinavian folksong, from the French ballade, from Scotland, from any other imagined point of origin—then to write a ballad in the late Victorian period was to place a poem in a transnational, translinguistic network. The approach of global poetics and of global circulation is thus especially well-suited to this form in this period.
Chapter 1
Golden Ballads: William Morris’s Translations in *A Book of Verse* and *Poems by the Way*

The titular knight of “Knight Aagen and Maiden Else,” which was first published in William Morris’s *Poems by the Way* (1891), dies before the end of the ballad’s second stanza. His death, though, doesn’t stop him from walking and talking in the poem’s subsequent twenty stanzas. Rising from his grave, and carrying his coffin on his back, Aagen arrives at Else’s door and blames his mourning ex-lover for his restlessness; the speaker quotes the ghost’s words:

“O whenso thou art joyous,  
And the heart is glad in thee,  
Then fares it with my coffin  
That red roses are with me.

But whenso thou art sorrowful  
And weary is thy mood,  
Then all within my coffin  
Is it dreadful with dark blood.” (150)

Having instructed Else to stop crying, Aagen picks up his coffin and heads back to join the other “dead folk” underground (150). When Else follows the dead man back to the graveyard, Aagen invites her to look up to “the little stars and bright” when she is sorrowful, and—punning on his title, “knight”—says that therein she will see “how sweetly / It fareth with the night” (151). Aagen then goes back into his grave, but his words don’t change Else’s “weary mood” (151), and she too is dead by the poem’s last stanza.

Despite being one of the “dead folk” (150), Aagen repeatedly rises up: the ballad speaker twice describes Aagen’s actions with the words, “Uprose the fair knight Aagen, / […] Sore hard as the work might be” (149, 151). This chapter shall argue that ‘up-risings’ like Aagen’s prefigure the class up-risings of Morris’s later Socialist texts. In Morris’s ballad translations, the past is mobilized, able to interfere with the present; balladic protests are not depicted as remnants of a dead history. The process of ballad artifactualization creates the past as distinct from the present and in need of preservation,
but Morris’s ballads show the overlap between present and past, suggesting that a finite separation of past from the present—in the ground; in books—is impossible. By showing the continuity between past and present, and by depicting the continued vitality of folk art forms, Morris suggests that the political resonance of balladry persists despite the actions of antiquarians, collections, and editors.

Morris’s Aagen is an unusual ghost: he is haunted by the living. His message to Else—that the actions of the living affect the dead—is repeated in Morris’s Danish and Icelandic ballad translations, and Aagen’s status as an undead figure—a dead man who won’t stay in the grave—makes him a metaphor for Morris’s treatment of that most important folk verse form, the ballad. Morris’s source for “Knight Aagen and Maiden Else,” Svend Grundtvig’s “Faestemanden i Graven” (“The Betrothed in the Grave”), which is poem number 90A in the second volume of Grundtvig’s Danmarks gamle Folkevisor (DgF, “Denmark’s Old Folk Ballads”), is a highly artifactualized ballad, but Morris’s translations combine the verbal and the visual in order to re-member a folk ‘original’ that he can then posit as only seemingly contained by Grundtvig’s collection. Grundtvig’s collections are the graves of hundreds of Aagens who, as Morris’s translations show, stubbornly refuse to stay dead. Just as Knight Aagen rises up from the grave, so too is “Knight Aagen” reanimated in Morris’s translations. These poems are distillations of Morris’s Socialist aesthetics, coming from the Danish and Icelandic past, but combining to call for the destruction of the capitalist system.

Knight Aagen may be Morris’s only balladic walking dead man, but he is not the only figure for up-risings in Morris’s ballad translations. Whether it be the living unable to escape the dead (“Ballad of Christine”; “Hildebrand and Hellelil”), the dead experiencing empathetic responses to the living (“Knight Aagen”; “The Son’s Sorrow”), or living people emerging from under the soil (“Agnes and the Hill-man”), Morris’s ballad translations repeatedly depict permeable surfaces and crossed boundaries. These characters’ sufferings are often linked to gold, and the capitalist system for which gold is a metonym, with Morris’s ballads repeatedly depicting—and frequently embodying—the tension between the superficial beauty of gold and its deeper role in oppressive economic structures. This chapter thus argues that there is a political continuity in Morris’s artistic
productions, which are usually divided into ‘early’ and ‘late periods,’ and that this continuity can be found in the metaphorical folk uprisings of his translated ballads.

1 Svend Grundtvig and the Nineteenth-Century Nordic Ballad Collection

Although best known today as a designer and publisher, Morris was popular in his own time as a poet and translator. Morris’s poetic career spanned six volumes and thirty-four years, book-ended by his collections of short poems The Defence of Guenevere (1858) and Poems by the Way (1891). He translated in prose and verse from Greek, Old English, Danish and Icelandic. Simon Dentith describes Morris as “the nineteenth century’s most prolific translator” (83), and Andrew Wawn suggests Morris’s translation of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs (1876) helped him to earn “an international reputation as Victorian Britain’s most arresting poetic spokesman for the old north” (247). And while Morris collaborated with the Icelander and Cambridge librarian Eiríkur Magnússon on his longer translations like Sigurd, there’s no evidence that the two worked together on these shorter ballad translations. In the colophon to A Book of Verse, Morris says that he translated the Icelandic ballads; Magnússon’s name is unmentioned, despite the credit given to Edward Burne-Jones, George Wardle, and Charles Fairfax Murray, which suggests that Morris translated the Icelandic pieces alone. Morris also appears to have translated the Danish ballads by himself: a note on the first manuscript copy of “Hafbur and Signy” states, “translated from the Danish (by poor little me) Feb. 3rd 1870” (qtd. in Morris Archive; see also Anderson).

7 As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller has noted, there is a critical tendency to divide Morris’s early, Pre-Raphaelite art and poetry from his late-life Socialist speeches, romances and printing—a tendency that “ignores the continuities between his early and late career” (“William Morris” 477).

8 I am indebted to Florence Boos for sending to me a copy of Karl Anderson’s dissertation “Scandinavian Elements in the Works of William Morris” (1940). Anderson likewise argues that Morris translated the ballads without Magnússon’s help, but suggests that Morris’s source for some of the Danish ballads was W.H.F. Abrahamson, R. Nyerup, and K.L. Rahoek’s Udvalgte Danske Viser fra Middelalderen (Selected Danish Medieval Ballads, 1812-14), a collection that includes the kind of ‘improvements’ and amendments typical of Romantic-era ballad editing. In arguing that Morris translates from Grundtvig, I follow David Latham’s claims in his introduction to Poems by the Way, as well as my own comparisons between Morris’s verses and Grundtvig’s translations, performed with the assistance of Sune Auken, Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Copenhagen.
When Morris, in the late 1860s and early 1870s, began to write his shorter translations, he turned to the most scholarly sources for Nordic balladry in the mid-nineteenth century: the collections of Svend Grundtvig. Grundtvig, a folklorist and philologist, was the son of the important Danish pastor, philosopher, and politician N. F. S. Grundtvig, and his collections of folk poetry and stories include the 1854 Íslenzk Fornkvæði (Icelandic Poems, co-edited with Jón Sigurðsson, one of Morris’s travelling companions for his first trip to Iceland in 1871), and Danmarks gamle Folkeviser (Denmark’s Old Folk Ballads), the first volume of which was published in 1852.  

Morris used Íslenzk Fornkvæði as his source for the Icelandic poems he translated in A Book of Verse and later published in Poems by the Way, and used the second volume of Danmarks gamle Folkeviser (1856) as his source for the Danish translations in Poems by the Way. The only two translations that Morris publishes in Poems by the Way that are not sourced from a Grundtvig text are “The Wooing of Hallbiorn the Strong” (from Ari Dorgilsson’s 1829 edition of the Landnámabók), which loosely translates a prose text into balladic verse paragraphs, and “Mine and Thine,” a Socialist poem in couplets that dates from 1889 (Latham xvii). The subtitles to these two poems—“A Story from The Land-Settling Book of Iceland” and “From a Flemish Poem of the Fourteenth Century,” respectively—distinguish these two works from the Grundtvig-sourced texts, the subtitles of which more specifically identify them as “Translated from the Icelandic” and “Translated from the Danish” (emphasis mine). While the non-Grundtvig texts are simply “from” particular sources, only the six Grundtvig poems are identified specifically as “translated.”

Importantly, the sources that Morris turned to for his ballad translations are examples of the kind of artifactualized ballad collections discussed in the introduction to

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9 Work on this collection continued long after Grundtvig’s death: the twelfth volume of DgF was published in 1976.

10 See Latham 1994: xvi. The sources for each poem are as follows: “The Ballad of Christine” – “Kristinar Kvæði” (152-7); “The Son’s Sorrow” – “Sonar harmur” B (147-9); “Hildebrand and Hellelil” – “Hildebrand og Hilde” B (394-5); “Agnes and the Hill-Man” – “Agnete og Havmanden” C (53); “Knight Aagen and Maiden Else” – “Faestemanden i Graven” A (495-6); “Hafbur and Signy” – “Kongenssøns Runer” C (333-4).
this dissertation, as is evident in both the structure of Grundtvig’s collection and his paratextual commentary on the ballads he collects. Both Íslenzk Fornkvæði and Danmarks gamle Folkeviser classify ballad clusters by name and number, assigning each variant of the ballad an upper-case letter and each source of that variant a lower-case letter. So, for example, Danmarks gamle Folkeviser no. 38 is “Agnete og Havmanden” (“Agnes and the Half-man”), and Figure 3a (below) shows the first few paragraphs of Grundtvig’s opening editorial commentary on this poem. Grundtvig provides four variants of “Agnete og Havmanden,” 38A through 38D; each variant is in turn traced to one or more sources, and Figure 3b (below) shows the eleven sources for 38A, which are indicated with the lower-case letters “a” through “k.” These lower-case source texts are not printed in full; rather, they are presented as identical texts, all represented in the single variant that is 38A. The 38A source “a” is from a broadsheet (”flyveblad”), while “b” through “i” were recorded by collectors who then forwarded their poems to Grundtvig: “c” was recorded from a girl in Zealand; “d” from a peasant in Sorø; “e” from a peasant’s wife in Præstø; “g” from a schoolteacher in Stillinge, who learned the song as a child; and so on. The opening commentary in Figure 3a describes variants “b” through “i” as “recorded from tradition” (”Obtegnelser efter Traditionen”), thereby designating the various individuals from various places listed under the “A” version as all embodiments of this “tradition”—a tradition that was then recorded, catalogued, and made consumable in the book. The paratexts to DgF 38A thus construct a vernacular tradition that is shared among different regions in Denmark—here, Zealand (“c,” “d,” “e,” “f,” and “j”) and Jutland (“g”)—bringing together the nation via this shared heritage, and thus bolstering the image of a strong and united Denmark. In the hands of Grundtvig, ballads like “Agnete og Havmanden” became pieces of “vernacular heritage” (Stewart 103) that could be removed from their local contexts and classified like finches—species that share a common ancestor but evolved to fit their particular environments.

Grundtvig’s classification system extends beyond even groups of ballad variants, as each of the four volumes of Danmarks gamle Folkseviser published in his lifetime classified ballads according to broader categories: the first volume was of heroic ballads, kaempevisor; the second was of magical ballads, tryllevisor; the third and fourth were of chivalric and romantic ballads, ridderviser; of these, the kaempevisor and tryllevisor were
29

38.
Agnete og Havmanden.


classified as mythical and the ridderviser as historical (Hustvedt 195). A poem like DgF 38A was thus framed not only by substantial paratextual material, a portion of which can be seen in Figures 1a and 1b, but also by these multiple registers of categorization: sources grouped into variants, variants grouped as a single poem, and poems grouped into types and subtypes of balladry.

That Grundtvig would strive “to effect a kind of archaeology of speech forms parallel to the rescue of what is properly known as ‘material’ culture” (Stewart 103)—that is, that he would turn the ballad into an artifact—makes sense given the context of 1840s and 1850s Denmark. Denmark was bankrupted by the Napoleonic Wars and shifted from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy after the Year of Revolution, 1848; even in the face of these difficulties, though, the first half of the nineteenth century was a golden age of Danish artistic production. Adam Oehlenschläger, Hans Christian Andersen, and Søren Kierkegaard all wrote during this period, and painting, architecture, music, and ballet blossomed, inspired by a renewed nationalist pride and by the ethos of German Romanticism. Sven Hakon Rossel describes the Danish romantic poets as sharing a characteristic “intensive focus on national history” (187).
Grundtvig’s ballad collections were of a piece with the Danish romantic nationalist movement. Grundtvig appealed to the public to collect folklore in an 1854 article in the national magazine *Dannebrog*, named after the Danish flag (Holbek 122). Helene Høyrup describes Grundtvig’s intention in this article as building towards the creation of “a national ‘museum’ of popular traditions” (434), which again suggests that he treated folk ballads like objects that could be recontextualized and marshaled towards nationalist objectives. Sigurd Hustvedt summarizes Grundtvig’s project:

To him traditional poetry was more than a means of scholarly research. It was a national inheritance, the preservation of which was a patriotic duty, and the right appreciation of which by the people would constitute a lasting incentive to love of home and country (199).

Grundtvig’s ballad collections can thus be understood as a part of the artifactualizing project, which sought to categorize ballads as if they were artifacts in order to “establish a corpus of texts that would reflect nationalist impulses” (Stewart 103). *Íslenzk Fornkvæði*, like *DgF*, is of a piece with Grundtvig’s goal of marshaling folksong in support of an image of a unified people; Iceland was a Danish colony until 1918. And while *Danmarks gamle Folkevisor* began publication in the 1850s, forty years before ballad artifactualization in Britain reached the peak of its intensity, Grundtvig’s collection became the model for Francis James Child’s *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*—the nineteenth century’s most important, and most systematic, collection of British ballads—and the two exchanged many lengthy letters concerning best practices for ballad editing.  

Child also connected many Grundtvig texts to his ballads, including grouping “Agnete og Havmanden” with Ballad 41, “Hind Etin.” Grundtvig’s collection thus forms a significant part of the foundation on which 1890s ballad artifactualization was founded.

11 In the introductory “Advertisement” to the first edition of *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Child wrote: “in the editing of these ballads I have closely followed the plan of Grundtvig’s *Old Popular Ballads of Denmark*, a work which will be prized highest by those who have used it most, and which leaves nothing to be desired but its completion. [...] But besides the assistance which I have derived from his book, I have enjoyed the advantage of Professor Grundtvig’s criticism and advice, and have received from him unprinted Danish texts, and other aid in many ways” (vi). See also M. E. Brown, *Child’s 84-89, 166-171; Hustvedt 175; Gregory 44-47.*
When Morris translated Grundtvig’s collected ballads, he not only produced interlingual translations—rewritings of the poems in a new language—but also translated the context in which the books appeared. Rather than replicating Grundtvig’s context, with its heavy scholarly apparatus, Morris recontextualized the poems in collections that rendered as visual the qualities of the oral originals—of 38A “b” through “i”—thereby producing intersemiotic translations in his paratextual frames. Because of this two-fold aspect of Morris’s ballad translations, understanding their material context is integral to an understanding of his texts. Morris was a poet as well as a visual artist—a designer, a publisher, and a craftsman—and considerations of his poetry need to account for the books in which his poems appeared, as studies by Caroline Arscott, John Plotz, Jerome McGann, and Rosie Miles, amongst others, have shown. Morris’s translations move beyond ‘form v. content’ translation debates by producing new originals with transformations to both the text and material context; he changes not only the language of the poems but also the paratextual elements that structure these works, as illustrations, ornamental borders and drop letters, and even font choice and colour combine to draw out the complexity of this seemingly simple genre. What Morris reveals in his translations is that Grundtvig’s ballad artifacts are not these poems’ final forms, and that the ballads, like the people, will rise and live again.

2 Material and Critical Contexts

The short translations examined in this chapter come from two books: *A Book of Verse*, a single-edition handmade book made by Morris in 1870 as a gift for Georgiana Burne-Jones, and *Poems by the Way*, published by Morris’s own firm, the Kelmscott Press, in 1891. *A Book of Verse* contains two translations, both ballads, and both translated from the Icelandic: “The Ballad of Christine” and “The Son’s Sorrow.” These poems were then published, with some changes, as “The Lay of Christine” and “The Son’s Sorrow” in *Poems by the Way*, along with four Danish ballad translations: “Knight Aagen and Maiden Else,” “Agnes and the Hill-Man,” “Hildebrand and Hellelil,” and “Hafbur and Signy.”
A Book of Verse was William Morris’s gift to Georgiana Burne-Jones for her 30th birthday, in August 1870. Currently held in the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, it is a single manuscript, hand-illustrated book that was never reproduced for sale and not published with a commercial publisher until 1980. It’s also quite beautiful, as it is written in a calligraphic script that was influenced by sixteenth-century Italian copy books (Strong n.p.), with dense illustrations of foliage that curl around the lines of verse, as well as small illustrations by Burne-Jones and Murray, not to mention titles, borders, page numbers, and drop letters all in burnished gold leaf. Rosie Miles has described A Book of Verse as “outside the economic” sphere not only because it was given as a gift, but also as a reflection of the pre-capitalist print culture that it imitates—that is, the decorated book produced before the invention of printing apparatus (140).

Since it was presented as a gift, since “despair of love” is such a central theme, and since it was produced during the period when Janey Morris was in a relationship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, A Book of Verse is frequently read in biographical terms: Ken Goodwin suggests that the poems “may well sum up Morris’ feelings about” his relationship with Georgiana Burne-Jones (400); David Faldet claims that the “hopeless love which infuses the poems” was “partly inspired by Jane’s loss of interest in her husband” and may “also [refer] to Morris’s inability to find a substitute for that love in Georgiana” (67); Roy Strong described the book as “reveal[ing] much of [Morris’s] innermost feelings at this period” (par. 2); Andrew Wawn establishes a number of “links between Morris’s domestic woes and the series of sagas about love and romance that he translated, or put into verse paraphrase, or prepared illuminated manuscripts of” (263). But while the biographic context tends to dominate readings of A Book of Verse, Janey Morris’s inclusion of a number of these verses in her fair copy notebooks suggest that the poems in this collection were written for publication, rather than solely for Georgiana’s eyes (Boos, “Unprintable”). My aim is to supplement the critical tendency to read A Book of Verse biographically by aligning the collection with Morris’s later political beliefs, finding correlatives with his future socialist principles mixed in with the twining tendrils, stylized calligraphy, and all that gold leaf.
A Book of Verse contains a number of different types of poems. There is the short narrative poem “Missing” in rhyme royal (later renamed “Error and Loss” in The Earthly Paradise); there is the apostrophe in heroic couplets, “To The Muse of the North” (later published in Poems by the Way); “To Grettir Asmundson” is a sonnet (later used to introduce the prose translation The Story of Grettir the Strong); and there are two ballads, “The Son’s Sorrow” and “The Ballad of Christine.” These two translations are the only ballads in the book, but they are not revealed to be translations until the colophon, the last page of the collection in which Morris attributes different features of the text to different hands. While Grundtvig’s paratexts trace sources and catalogue an archive of ballad-singers, Morris’s paratexts bind ballads to lyrics in a range of forms, all equally vital; the branches and vines that connect the buds and blooms in A Book of Verse suggest that the book’s many different flowers—and its many different forms—all live, grow, and spread.

Poems by the Way, unlike A Book of Verse, was printed, published and sold as a commercial work. It was Morris’s last collection of poetry, and two versions of it were published in 1891. The first to come out was Morris’s own Kelmscott Press edition; the Kelmscott PBTW was only the second book published by the house, after The Story of the Glittering Plain. The second version of PBTW was published by Reeves and Turner one month later (see Peterson 315 n2).

As Faldet has noted, the Kelmscott Poems by the Way bears multiple traces of Morris’s hand. Faldet details the many instances of Morris’s “signature and his distinct design style” in the Kelmscott edition of the collection, from “the daisy watermark designed by Morris and featuring his initials” on the first two blank pages of the book to the pressmark on the final page, “designed by Morris and featuring the furling Kelmscott banner, interlaced by the wreathing branches of a tree, surrounded by a decorative border of flowering vines with ‘William Morris’ across the bottom” (72). The book is a small quarto, with a thick, ornate border on the first page of poetry; each poem begins with a

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large, bold drop-letter\textsuperscript{13}; and, unlike the first Kelmscott book, which was printed in monochrome, \textit{PBTW} was printed with two colours of ink: black for the majority of the text, red for the shoulder titles and refrains.

The title of \textit{Poems by the Way} is a reflection not of the collected poems’ marginality but rather of the long period of time over which the poems were written. The earliest poems date from the late 1860s,\textsuperscript{14} over twenty years before the collection was published, and only one poem, “Goldilocks and Goldilocks,” was specifically written for \textit{PBTW}. Many of the poems included in \textit{A Book of Verse} were first collected for publication in \textit{PBTW}, including “The Two Sides of the River,” “Hope Dieth: Love Liveth,” “To the Muse of the North,” and the Icelandic translations “The Son’s Sorrow” and “The Lay of Christine.”

In the decade since Latham, in his introduction to the Thoemmes Press edition, called \textit{PBTW} “Morris’s most neglected book” (xxxi), there has been little more critical attention to the collection or its individual works. The Kelmscott edition of \textit{Poems by the Way} is usually read by literary critics as a ‘late’ Morris text—for instance, Goodwin titled his 1996 \textit{Victorian Poetry} article on the collection “The Summation of a Poetic Career”—but by bibliographers and book historians as an ‘early’ Morris book—William Peterson describes it as showing the “slow evolution of Morris’s typographical style while the Kelmscott books were still in an experimental stage” (227). What few readings of \textit{PBTW} there have been have tended to argue that the collection is of a piece with the decade in which it was published: Florence Boos finds \textit{PBTW} “surprisingly consistent with a fin-de-siècle affinity for iconic, ritualistic, or spiritualist turns” and notes Morris’s poetic anticipation of “one theme that became central in various ways to fin-de-siècle writers—the blocking or interdiction of love” (“Banners” 39, 38-9); Norman Kelvin likewise associates Morris with “the acknowledged makers of the aestheticism of the 1890s” due

\textsuperscript{13} Peterson notes that the drop-letters were originally designed for \textit{The Golden Legend} (216).

\textsuperscript{14} While it is difficult to date which of the \textit{PBTW} verses may have been written first, “The Two Sides of the River” and “The God of the Poor” were both published in \textit{Fortnightly Review} in 1868.
to his interest in “writing the body” (428); McGann aligns books of poetry published by Kelmscott not with its own decade but the decades that followed it, claiming that Morris’s “materialist aesthetic” (45), which was especially evident in his Kelmscott books of poetry, was “deeply influential, [and] pre-cursive” of modernist poetics (75).

For the purposes of this chapter, what is significant about Morris’s ballad translations is not how well they fit with other verses of the fin-de-siècle, or how much they resonate with later Modernist poets, but rather how strongly they subvert the artifactualization of their source. The ballad-as-artifact is intriguing because of what it reveals about the people who made it. Morris’s ballads are unclassified, uncategorized, and presented as just as deserving of attentive reading as any other verse form. Nor do Morris’s ballads suggest the preservationist impulse of an archive. Like Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, I read the “socialist aestheticism” evident in Morris’s Kelmscott Press books as “chiefly a matter of timing”—as if these verses say: “all these things will be true of art after the revolution” (Slow Print 35). Similarly, Boos has argued that “Morris’s use of medieval history” in romances like A Dream of John Ball was “motivated by a search for anticipations of the future in the past” (“Alternative” 23). As the ballad-stanza “The Day is Coming,” from PBTW, proclaims, Morris’s “tale[s]” belong to “the wonderful days a-coming, when all / shall be better than well” (111). Morris’s PBTW ballad translations reflect Morris’s future-looking socialist aesthetics and call for the up-risings necessary to create the kind of world depicted in Morris’s best-known book, News from Nowhere.

The racial politics that underlie Morris’s utopia have been put to question in recent years. James Buzard’s critique, for example, is as cutting as it is compelling:

The stay-at-home preference of these people, who are after all under no constraint not to follow their fancies at will, works serendipitously toward the preservation of what is at bottom, and for all Morris’s repudiations of nationalism, a national culture grounded in race. Just liking to stay put, they will breed among themselves, reproducing an ethos that will seem at once wholly optional and powerfully determining, giving identity and direction to individual lives without requiring
either national boundaries or state bureaucracies for the processing of citizenship.

(304)

Rachel Teukolsky has also noticed the homogeneity of the “healthy white bodies, descended from good English stock” in *News from Nowhere* (177), while Patrick Brantlinger has likewise located a problematic racial politics in Morris’s writings, noting that Morris’s “forthright but general anti-imperialism” is complicated by an interrogation of his “inconsistent or unsettled ideas about India” (476). At first glance, Morris’s translated ballads seem to reinforce these readings, as the dominant plotline in the ballads features a young person travelling across a sea, falling in love, and then dying, or having their lover and/or children die. These ballads seem to be anti-miscegenation narratives. However, a closer look—as in, for instance, the reading of “The Son’s Sorrow,” below—reveals this boundary-crossing to enable a kind of fruitful production, even when biological reproduction is not possible. Moreover, lovers die in all of Morris’s ballads, whether or not they travel abroad: in “The Raven and the King’s Daughter,” a conversation between the two titular characters slowly reveals that the lover of the King’s Daughter, Olaf, has died in battle; “Love’s Reward” tells of a maiden who travels by ship to find the dead body of her lover—a sailor—so that she can give him one final kiss; “The Hall and the Wood” is one of the few examples to the contrary, as Sir Rafe and Kate the Rose escape the tyrannical king and live in the wood, where “[t]hey dwell, and fear no wrong” (25). Loving or marrying a racially or nationally ‘other’ person—as in, for instance, “Agnes and the Hill-man,” also discussed below—is no more punished than almost any other balladic love or marriage. What at first seems a “stay-at-home” warning can be re-read in the context of Morris’s other poems as a more general recurring motif of lovelorn melancholy.

Michael Cohen has argued that late-nineteenth-century ballad scholars, including Grundtvig and Child, figured the ballad as a necessarily nationally-inflected genre: “Popular ballads were made the objects of a fantasy in which a collective people acted like an individual—a fantasy, therefore, about nation-states, which also figure disparate populations into singular personifications” (“Popular” 206). For Morris, however, the ballad is a genre of the working class; his “fantasy” is of a “folk unity” (Cohen, “Popular”
that transcends borders of nation and of race. In the 1870 preface to his prose translation of the *Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs*, Morris wrote:

> For this is the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks—to all our race first, and afterwards, when the change of the world has made our race nothing more than a name of what has been—a story too—then should it be to those that come after us no less than the Tale of Troy has been to us. (xi)

While the ballad translations may not have the same significance as “the Tale of Troy” or “the Great Story of the North,” they are positioned, as are Morris’s epic translations, as part of the “common inheritance of humanity” (Dentith 79). For Morris, this “inheritance” carried specific, class-based connotations, as a consideration of his description of the genre will show.

### 3 Morris’s Conception of the Ballad

Morris’s clearest articulation of his conception of the term “ballad” is contained in “Feudal England,” which was delivered as a lecture in Hammersmith in 1887 and then published in the collection of essays *Signs of Change* in 1888. While the bulk of “Feudal England” is dedicated to outlining the ramifications of the change from Teutonic to feudal systems and social structures in the fourteenth century, the essay also describes the literature of the period. Morris describes fourteenth-century literature as having a “double stream in it”: on the one hand is the “courtly elegance” of Geoffrey Chaucer; on the other hand is “the ballad poetry of the people” (74), a genre he describes as:

> wholly untouched by courtly elegance and classical pedantry; rude in art but never coarse, true to the backbone; instinct with indignation against wrong, and thereby expressing the hope that was in it; a protest of the poor against the rich […]; no more gloomy than the gentleman’s poetry, yet cheerful from courage, and not content. Half a dozen stanzas of it are worth a cartload of the whining introspective lyrics of to-day. (74-5)

This characterization of the ballad corresponds with the description, in *The Dream of John Ball*, of a young man singing a ballad concerning “the struggle against tyranny for the freedom of life, how that the wildwood and the heath, despite of wind and weather, were better for a free man than the court and the cheaping-town; of the taking from the
rich to give to the poor; of the life of a man doing his own will and not the will of another man commanding him for the commandment’s sake” (17).

Chaucer was, in contrast, “the court poet, the gentleman” (73)—in other words, a representative of the social class that ballads directly challenged. For Morris, Chaucer’s verses, though “elegant,” were naïve, fuelled by a Muse that was “interested in and amused by all life” (74). There are echoes of Bleak House’s Harold Skimpole in Morris’s description of the world of Chaucer’s poetry: “a sunny world even amidst its violence and passing troubles, like those of a happy child, the worst of [it] an amusement rather than a grief” (74). Morris subtly characterizes Chaucer’s verses as non-English, noting “his Italianizing metres, and his formal recognition of the classical stories” (73). Steve Ellis sums up Morris’s image of Chaucer as that of the “gentleman-aesthete, sunning himself on the social sidelines,” and describes the Kelmscott Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (1896) as “an ideal expression” of this characterization (14). Unlike the verses of Chaucer, whom he characterized as politically naïve, for Morris the ballad was a politically engaged genre, and thus could be described as “true poetry” (Morris, Signs 75).

Significantly, however, there is a disconnect between how Morris says ballads function and how they are presented in his translations. Morris’s Danish and Icelandic ballads aren’t like the ballads described in “Feudal England.” Rather, they more closely resemble the kinds of poems that Morris devalues than the ballads of “true poetry.” While in “Feudal England” he decries the irrelevance of “courtly elegance,” Morris’s translated ballads are filled with knights, earls, princes, and kings. In “Feudal England,” he celebrates the ballad as “a protest of the poor against the rich”; in his ballads, his subjects are rich in monetary terms, and protest the poverty of their love lives. In “Feudal England,” he disparages “Italianizing metres”; in A Book of Verse, he writes in an Italianate script, and in Poems by the Way, he reproduces an early Venetian font. Add to this the visual richness of both texts, and Morris’s ballad translations don’t seem to do what, he later claims, ballads should do: bear witness to the experiences of the poor.
The First Golden Ballad: “The Ballad of Christine”

Although Figure 4, which includes the first page of “The Ballad of Christine,” is a reproduction of a reproduction, the visual features that qualify it as a “golden ballad” can still be seen. There is gold leaf on the title, the page number, and the first letters of alternating stanzas, and the page is filled with ornate botanical illustrations—the identifiable flowers include tulips, larkspur, columbines, and primroses. The intricate vines and flowers that surround the verses on this page are typical of the book as a whole, except for the fact that each page’s flowers and leaves are unique.

It’s not just the decorations of this poem that are golden and rich. Form matches content: Christine’s ballad is a story of lost love, as the knight who rescues her from a watery death is murdered by “the king’s ill men” (33). Christine frames her sorrow as a
loss of “my grove of gems” (34), and says that she would give away “all the red gold
that” she has in order to “win away” from the world that no longer holds her lover (35).
Christine’s is a ballad of lost love among the nobility, of riches, of “silk” gowns (33) and
“swains” (34). The gold of this golden ballad is, moreover, not out of place in the
collection as a whole: the maidens of “The Two Sides of the River” are “Girt round with
gold” (2); the speaker’s lover in “Meeting in Winter” wears a “deep-furred gown” (28);
and pretty much every physical description of a beloved mentions at least golden hair.
The richness of the ballads in A Book of Verse is in keeping with not only the appearance
of the book but also the contents of the other poems.

The ballad opens with a detailed attention to surfaces, as Christine describes in
first person the clothes that cover her body and her seemingly miraculous ability to stay
above the ocean’s waves while bound to a wooden board. After her lover’s murder,
however, surfaces begin to betray Christine: although she suffers deeply, she remains
“fair,” and is mocked by local men who, seemingly daily, emphasize how “fair” she looks
(34). The irony of stories of such suffering and loss—themes that persist throughout
ABOV—being told in a floral-illustrated manuscript is evident especially in this poem, as
“Christine” emphasizes the gap between what the “eyen” can see and the “heart” can feel
(34). As Christine draws her ballad to a close, she explicitly and repeatedly condemns
gold as merely superficially valuable, turning her story from a personal tragedy to a
broader lesson about systems of exchange and value.

The closing stanzas of “The Ballad of Christine” contain a series of shifts—shifts
of verb tense, of intensity, and of audience. As the poem closes, it moves from the past to
present tense, suggesting that Christine’s storytelling serves to reinscribe rather than
purge her trauma; her ability to describe her lover’s murder doesn’t constitute a mastery
of that trauma: “Each hour that this my life shall last / Remembereth him alone / Such
heavy sorrow lies on me / For our meeting time agone” (34). Like Coleridge’s Ancient
Mariner, who repeats his tale to listener after listener without relieving his own pain,
Christine’s storytelling is not cathartic, and she continually, repeatedly, wishes that she
might be able to get away “from the world” and her worldly suffering (35). The final
stanza, though, suggests that her purpose in repeatedly re-telling this story is not to ‘get over’ her loss, but rather to have her personal loss become socially significant.

Christine’s focus is on what her gold can’t buy, and on the paltry value of gold when compared to the value of love. When the local men of her town “cry, Christine the Fair, / Art thou well content with that true-love / Thou sittest loving there?,” Christine begins by responding to them—“O yea” (34)—before turning to the subjunctive, and then the imperative:

All the red gold that I have
Well would I give today,
Only for this and nothing else,
From the World to win away

Ah, of all folk upon the earth
Keep thou thy ruddy gold,
And love withal the mighty lord
Who wedded thee of old. (35)

While “red” isn’t an unusual quality of gold in either old ballads or Morris’s medieval-inflected poetry—in he mentions red gold in, for instance, “Welland River” and “Near Avalon,” from The Defence of Guenevere—in the shift from “red” to “ruddy gold,” Christine ascribes a contemptible quality to gold. Christine’s emphatic, doubled-up instruction, “Keep thou thy ruddy gold,” suggests that she finds gold to be not only red-coloured but also shameful. In her final stanza, Christine also shifts from speaking directly to the men who mock her towards making a more general declaration. Her directive to “all folk upon the earth” is both a call for a global reassessment of value—gold’s status as currency diminishes when it can’t be used to buy what one truly desires—

15 Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable notes that in “the old ballads ‘red’ was frequently applied to gold (‘the gude red gowd’)” (Dent). Elizabeth Helsinger discusses overlapping red and gold colours in her Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts (68-9) and ultimately argues that “[i]n Morris’s poems it matters less that two readers have the same sensory image of “scarlet” or “gold” (or that these designate with precision particular colors in the ‘real’ world) than that they understand them to be vivid presences. […] Neither the rhythms of shifting colors nor the patterns of differentially related colors depend for their effects on evoking particular colors with precision or uniformly for all readers” (58). Such an argument, however, doesn’t account for the material context in which these words appeared, as changes in ink colour would mean that “particular colors”—particular shades of red and black in the Kelmscott books; specific reds and golds in ABOV—were evoked “with prevision [and] uniformly for all readers” of these specific texts.
and also an impossible imperative. Christine calls for “all folk” to love “the mighty lord” who did not, and could not have, “wedded thee,” plural. The closing pair of lines represents either Christine turning back inward to personal reflection in a moment of grieving confusion—the imperative to “love withal” being, in this reading, Christine’s instructions to herself—or else a call for empathy, a call for “all folk” to learn from her love story, and to remember what is truly valuable.

In his published version of the ballad, “The Lay of Christine” (see Figure 5), Morris amplifies the tension between Christine’s desire and her poem’s material context. In the Kelmscott edition, the repetition of the red-inked refrain—“O well were I from the World away”—appearing as it does after each stanza, materially and formally inscribes Christine’s persistent sorrow. “Christine” is the only first-person ballad in Morris’s collection, so unlike the refrain of a poem like “Hildebrand and Hellelil”—one which is
understood to repeat, but is not repeatedly printed; one which appears to be not in the
voice of the speaker of the rest of the poem—the refrain of “Christine” acquires an
insistence as it is repeated. The refrain’s urging declaration in the Kelmscott “Christine,”
perhaps even more than in the ABOV version, amplifies the multiple, contradictory
resonances of the word “well”: when the men ask Christine if she is “well content,” she
says “yea, so well I love him”; in her imagined exchange of red gold for her lover, she
says, “Well would I give” the gold; and, of course, the red-inked refrain repeats that it
would be “well” for Christine to leave “the World” (140). The Kelmscott “Christine” thus
seems to increase the earlier version’s emphasis on the difficulty of assessing what is
“well” or good, and in so doing likewise amplifies the earlier poem’s call for a
reassessment of systems of assigning value. If gold can’t buy good things, and if the
meaning of the word ‘good’ is unstable, then what ‘good’ is all the gold in the world?

Unlike the ABOV “Christine,” the Kelmscott “Christine” uses quotation marks
around the speech in the final three stanzas. In ABOV, none of the dialogue is separated
from the text with punctuation, but in the Kelmscott “Christine,” as Figure 5 shows,
quotation marks separate first the men’s speech, next Christine’s reply, and then the final
stanza. The men ask Christine if she is “well content”; she replies in the affirmative, and
reflects on her desire for this impossible exchange, and that ends her reply to the men.
The final stanza—the call to “all folk upon the earth” to invest in love rather than “ruddy
gold”—is bracketed off by its own pair of quotation marks, and thus is grammatically
separated from Christine’s response to the men (140). She no longer speaks directly to
them; she quotes herself, as if repeating previously stated words. If the bulk of the poem
suggests that Christine’s past interferes with her present, her “to-day,” then in this final
stanza we have yet another shift, as the “old” story is mobilized to speak to the present-
day of the reader (140). The “thou” who Christine addresses are no longer characters
within the poem, and her imperative speaks to a unified, international population who are
figured as “folk.” The reflective “Ah” of the stanzas in which Christine addresses the men
turns to the emphatic “Nay” of the final stanza, as she calls to reject the status quo (140).
In revising the 1870 ballad translation for publication in the 1890s, Morris conscripts
Christine’s story, placing it in the context of broader poetic calls for change. He enlists
this old story in an anti-capitalist cause, making Christine’s old love and her suffering a part of broader, systemic suffering, which in turn is linked to gold.

5 Epic and Ballad Translations

In arguing that Morris’s ballads blur boundaries between past and present, part of my point is that his ballad translations serve a different purpose from his epic translations. Although both genres were and sometimes still are thought of as ‘primitive’ narrative forms—and although, as we’ve seen in Newman’s work, a number of nineteenth-century readers and writers thought of the English-language ballad as bearing some kind of equivalence to the classical epic—for Morris the two genres are distinct. This distinction is manifest in the diction and the meter of Morris’s epics and ballads.

As Marcus Waithe notes, the archaic language in Morris’s epic translations “include[s] linguistic markers of pastness, effects that keep the story-matter at a social and historical distance from the present” (92). Dentith comes to the same conclusion, arguing that “Morris evokes the barbaric world to insist on its historic distance from modernity” (79). As the number of biographical readings of A Book of Verse testifies, the concerns of Morris’s shorter translations resonate strongly with the poet, his audience, and his contemporary, modern experience. While what Mikhail Bakhtin terms an “absolute epic distance” separates the setting of Morris’s epics from the time in which the poet and his audience live (17), there is no corresponding “absolute ballad distance” evident in the shorter translations. Instead, the poems demonstrate the intrusion of the past into the present—Aagen returns to Else’s world; Christine’s plea shows the continuity of past sufferings in the present—and the violence that the present and past can both do to each other. Rather than marking the past off strictly from the present, these ballads show how different time periods can be bound together by trauma and suffering.

Morris’s short translations exclude the archaizing markers that figure so prominently in the long poems: the dominance of words derived from Old Norse and Old English origins rather than Latin, and noun phrases that suggest the Nordic poetic device, the kenning. The closest things to kennings in “The Lay of Christine” are the hyphenated phrases “green-wood” (138), “sea-sand” (139), and “little-one” (139); while “sea-sand” is
like a kenning in that it consists of a pair of nouns, the meanings of these phrases are literal rather than metaphorical, and so they aren’t properly kennings. Consider, for instance, the opening lines of Book One of *Sigurd*:

There was a dwelling of Kings ere the world was waxen old;
Dukes were the door-wards there, and the roofs were thatched with gold;
Earls were the wrights that wrought it, and silver nailed its doors;
Earls’ wives were the weaving-women, queens’ daughters strewed its floors,
And the masters of its song-craft were the mightiest men that cast
The sails of the storm of battle adown the bickering blast. (1)

In “door-wards” and “song-craft” we have kenning-esque noun clusters; in lines three and four there is heavy alliteration with the consonant “w”; and, in “wright” (“An artificer or handicraftsman,” from the Old English “wyrhta” [OED]) and “strewed” (“To cover,” from the Old English “stręwian” [OED]), we see the dominance of terms derived from Old English. As a contrast, take this passage from “Knight Aagen and Maiden Else”—also mentioned above—which presents an exchange between the living Else and her dead lover:

‘Hearken thou, knight Aagen,
Hearken, true-love, and tell,
If down-adown in the black, black earth
Thou farrest ever well?’

‘O whenso thou art joyous,
And the heart is glad in thee
Then fares it with my coffin
That red roses are with me.’ (150)

Gone are the noun clusters and the alliteration; gone too is the strict avoidance of Romance-derived words, as “joyous” and “coffin” come from Old French and Latin respectively. To focus on the one word that is used in both passages, compare how “adown” figures in, firstly: “The sails of the storm of battle *adown* the bickering blast”; and, then: “down-*adown* in the black, black earth.” Unlike *Sigurd*’s “almost purely Teutonic” diction, “Knight Aagen and Maiden Else” isn’t a poem that “takes us back to 1290 or thereabouts” (T.L. Kington-Oliphant, qtd. in Tucker, *Epic* 519 n66).
This is not to suggest that Morris’s ballads exclude all archaisms. There are some old-sounding words in his ballads: in addition to the ‘thous’ and ‘-th’ verb endings, for example, Morris in the refrain to “Agnes and the Hillman” translates the Old Danish word “Fuglene,” which is still the standard word for “birds” in modern Danish, with the more archaic English word “fowl” (Auken). These kinds of old-sounding words, though, are much less markedly distinct from contemporary Victorian poetic diction than is Morris’s epic diction—they are less frequent, less obtrusive, and less alliterative. The language of Morris’s ballads conveys their age; the language of his epics conveys their foreignness. That Morris doesn’t present an absolute, unbridgeable distance in his ballad translations is likewise evident in his paratexts to these poems. Materially, the ballad translations are designed to fit unobtrusively in their collections; this is especially evident in ABOV, as, without subtitles or notes to highlight the translations’ difference, all those winding vines and tendrils link each page to the next as a visual whole, even though they don’t bleed into the border of white space.

Morris’s ballads are also metrically distinct from his epic translations, even though some critics have described these longer poems as balladic. The metre of Morris’s book-length epic translations—The Aeneids of Vergil (1875), Sigurd the Volsung (1876), the Odyssey (1887), and Beowulf (1895)—has been a topic of debate since their first publication. Discussing Sigurd in 1877, Francis Hueffer wrote in The Gentleman’s Magazine that Morris’s metre “has been a sore puzzle to the critics” and has been “described as ‘anapaestic’, ‘dactylic’, ‘English ballad metre’, and what not” (qtd. in Faulkner 232). While generally consistent across these texts, Morris’s epic metre defies strict classification or delineation. Morris’s critics have tended to qualify their descriptions of his verse: Henry Nettleship calls the meter of Morris’s Aeneid a “long ballad verse” (qtd. in Faulkner 222); Edmund Gosse describes Sigurd as “peculiar,” featuring a “lax ballad-metre, capable of very considerable variety” (qtd. in Faulkner 234); Oscar Wilde can describe the metre of Morris’s Odyssey only adjectivally, as “rushing and ringing” (qtd. in Faulkner 303). When George Saintsbury attempts to define Morris’s epic metre in his 1910 Historical Manual of English Poetry, he calls it “[s]trongly stressed, strictly middle-paused, but perfectly regular anapaeste sixes, with substitution and a hypercatalectic syllable or half foot at the pause” (118, emphasis in
original), and the best example he could find of what he called the “Sigurd metre” is from The House of the Wolfings. But while the specifics of this metre were contested, there was a critical tendency in the Victorian period to read Morris’s epic translations as balladic, in line with the ideas of F. W. Newman discussed in this dissertation’s introduction, and in line as well with Newman’s precursors, including Friedrich August Wolf and William Maginn.

More current descriptions of Morris’s metre are equally wide-ranging. Jane Ennis says that the metre of Sigurd is anapaestic hexameter (ix); Dentith calls it a “basically dactylic” hexameter with “heavy use of alliterative formulations” (75); Jason David Hall follows an early twentieth-century precedent in describing Morris as writing in the ballad’s “fourteener metre” (1); Herbert Tucker calls Morris’s epic lines “ballad-based,” identifying the metre as a “six-stress line [...] over a constant eight-beat structure that stems from vernacular English balladry and takes as its unit three firm stresses plus an equally firm pause, two such foursquare units forming each poetic line” (Epic 512). As did Morris’s contemporaries, recent scholarly criticism suggests that Morris’s metre was consistent across his epic translations, although the specifics of that metre remain contested.

If the epic translations are written in a contested, qualified, sometimes ballad-esque metre, Morris’s shorter translations are much more consistent and much more conventionally balladic. If the epics formally echo the ballads—and that is a contested claim—the converse is not true: his ballads are not epic.16 Morris’s ballads are in four-line stanzas with consistent rhyme schemes and consistent tetrameter and trimeter rhythms. While the word “ballad” may have been broadly used in the period, Victorian prosodists and poets applied the terms “ballad measure” and “ballad metre” to a more narrow set of verse forms. For Coventry Patmore, the ballad metre is lines of “fourteen syllables, with the stress on the eighth, or, what is the same thing, the stave of ‘eight and

16 In reading Morris’s ballad translations as distinct from his epic translations, I follow David Latham’s suggestion that Poems by the Way is tied more to Morris’s non-poetic writings than the rest of his poetic oeuvre: “Rather than representing the conclusion to his poetic canon, [PBTW] provides poems that share the concerns of his lectures, romances, and designs” (xiv).
six’” (44-45); for John Earle, it is “a long line of fourteen (or fifteen) syllables—that is to say, of seven accentual beats” (172). John Meiklejohn was slightly more specific, specifying rhythm and line length: “the ordinary ballad metre consists of quatrains—that is, four lines, two of iambic tetrameter, and two of iambic trimeter” (204). These are four different ways of describing roughly the same rhythm—the rhythm in which Morris wrote his English-language versions of Icelandic and Danish “true poetry.”

The translations in A Book of Verse and Poems by the Way closely resemble the ballad metre as described by Patmore, Earle, and Meiklejohn, as they generally are written in alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines rhyming ABAB or ABCB, with refrains that are understood to repeat at the close of each stanza. The metre is dominantly iambic, with occasional anapests; this kind of subtle variation, however, was considered to be a convention of ballad metre (see Patmore 43-44). The form of Morris’s short translations is thus markedly distinct from—and markedly more conventionally balladic than—the form of his epic translations.

Drawing on contemporary accounts of Morris’s readings of his epic translations, Tucker argues that, “at bottom,” the similar forms of Morris’s epic translations demonstrate that they “all had […] the same cultural work to do”: “recou[ping] through print mediation an endangered communal performativity” (Epic 512). But just as his epics and his ballads are distinct in form and in diction, so too do Morris’s ballads perform different “cultural work”: in his ballad translations, Morris depicts the continuity of the past in the present; the ability of folk forms to resist erasure, independent of intervention; and the persistent force of balladic protest. Morris’s ballad translations are both verbal and visual; as a reading of the text and paratexts of “The Son’s Sorrow” shows, Morris depicts folk storytelling not as “endangered” but as fruitful and thriving.

17 “Hildebrand and Hellelil” is written in ABAB-rhyming iambic tetrameter quatrains, with the B-lines being refrains that are understood to repeat in each stanza; “Agnes and the Hill-Man” is similarly structured, except its refrain is in trochaic trimeter. “The Ballad of Christine,” “Knight Aagen and Maiden Else” and “Hafbur and Signy” are written in alternating iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter quatrains that rhyme ABCB; of these three texts, the first two also have one- or two-line refrains that are understood to repeat, unchanged, after each stanza. “The Son’s Sorrow” is in AA-rhyming iambic tetrameter couplets, with a one-line refrain that is understood as repeating after each couplet.
6  A Second Golden Ballad: “The Son’s Sorrow”

Figure 6, below, depicts the last two pages of the *A Book of Verse* version of “The Son’s Sorrow.” In this poem, a son, recently returned to his homeland, tells his father that, while travelling, he fell in love with a woman who bore him three sons. The woman and children all die, however, and he buries them in a single grave: “First in the mould I laid my love, / Then all my sons her breast above” (39). The poem thus represents a kind of infertility—the son’s reproduction is unproductive—and yet the double-page spread in which the son describes the births and deaths of his own sons is the only double-page spread in all of *ABOV* that features only fruit-trees. The impossibly plentiful numbers of full, ripe lemons and oranges that fill the branches provide ironic contrast to the son’s lack of fruitful production; the thin trunks of the trees, fixed at the bottom-left corner of each page, push to the outside of the frame the kinds of roots that the son was unable to establish in a new land.

Figure 6: Excerpts from “The Son’s Sorrow” from *A Book of Verse*. 
And yet the son’s sorrow does result in a kind of fruitful production: the death of his wife leads to the creation of the poem—and not just this single version of it, but related ballads in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, and English, as Grundtvig notes in his commentary on “Sonar Harmur.” Grundtvig connects “Sonar Harmur” to the northern Scottish ballad “Leesome Brand,” which was first published in Buchan’s *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland* (1828); in “Leesome Brand,” the son’s dead love is awoken by three drops of St Paul’s blood, presenting yet another image of impermanent death. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Francis Barton Gummere—a student of Child’s—described the international spread of ballads as “not of native [English] origin, but, blown from the East over Europe, dropped seed in many countries” (36-7). The metaphor of organic dispersion and germination finds a correlative in Morris’s illustrations of lemons and oranges.

In the published, *Poems by the Way* version of “The Son’s Sorrow” (Figure 7, below), the son finishes speaking in the penultimate stanza, and the poem closes with a stanza in the voice of the ballad-speaker, followed by the repetition of the red-inked refrain: “No man now shall stand on his feet / To love that love, to woo that sweet: / O fair it is to ride abroad” (146). The refrain is ironic, but it is not sarcastic: the ballad-speaker here suggests the uniqueness and beauty of the particular love shared by the son and his lover. “Love” thus contains a double meaning, as “no man” shall love that particular woman again—the Icelandic reads, “að unna því vífi”; “to love that wife”—and likewise “no man” will ever possess that specific love that the son had for that specific woman. The son described his lover as one of the “fairest of maidens under heaven” and the day that she rode off with him as “so fair a day”; thus the refrain’s claim, that it is “fair [...] to ride abroad,” accurately reflects the beauty of the son’s riding, a beauty that his sorrow does not negate.

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18 Child included “Leesome Brand” in the appendix to his second volume of *English and Scottish Ballads* in 1857, and, when he reorganized his ballads for the expanded *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, “Leesome Brand” became known as Child Ballad number 15. His notes on “Leesome Brand” repeat Grundtvig’s claim of its connection to “Sonar Harmur.”
speaker and the son in this poem suggest the consistency of beauty; the men who call Christine “the fair” likewise suggest that beauty is eternal, though for Christine, beauty is no comfort. In “The Son’s Sorrow,” beauty—fairness—persists despite the passage of time, and is not exchangeable, and thus the son does not even attempt the kind of impossible bargaining that is present in the penultimate stanza of Christine’s text.

To come back to Tucker’s idea of “cultural work”: Morris’s *ABOV* version of “The Son’s Sorrow” demonstrates the continuity of folksong and folk tradition as a means of proliferating beauty, rather than depicting the ballad as a fragile artifact of a historical, but disappearing, art form. Morris’s illustrations combine with the poem’s text to suggest that death and infertility can be artistically productive, and that linear conceptions of ever-advancing time oversimplify the relationship between past and present; these layers of meaning in “The Son’s Sorrow,” however, are dependent on a
consideration of the poem’s material context, which has little to do with any concern for an “endangered communal performativity” (Tucker, *Epic* 512).

The version of the poem in *A Book of Verse*, however, does not end with the same stanza as *Poems by the Way*. The earlier version of the text contains an additional final stanza, also in the voice of the ballad-speaker, and the refrain is slightly different. The *ABOV* version ends: “Five leagues away the mould below / She trembled with his weary woe. / O fair and sweet to ride abroad!” (39). In his notes on “Sonar Harmur,” Grundtvig suggests that, upon telling his story, the son’s heart explodes with a boom that shakes the grave one-and-a-half miles away. In Morris’s version of the poem, the son’s sorrow is reciprocal: the son is wearied by his lost love, and she in turn trembles because he is weary. Rather than presenting his reader with a Bakhtinian “absolute epic distance” that is “beyond the sphere of possible contact” with the present (17), “The Son’s Sorrow” demonstrates not only the effect that the past has on the present—the son haunted by the deaths of his family—but also the effect that the present can have on the past—as is conveyed through the seemingly pain-produced responses of a dead woman’s body.

Unlike “The Lay of Christine,” “The Son’s Sorrow” doesn’t include a direct call for social change. The son doesn’t mobilize his own story as a part of a broader call for the reassessment of the measurement of value. Nonetheless, the text includes a subtle suggestion that events of the past are not isolated in the past, nor are they separable from the present. Morris collapses the present in which the story is narrated with the present of the reader via the ballad-speaker’s use of the present perfect verb tense: that “the king has asked” his son about his sorrow (145)—rather than simply, “the king asked,” the simple past tense—suggests that the events narrated in the past tense continue to have consequences in the present. One such consequence is revealed in *PBTW*’s closing stanza: “No man now shall stand on his feet” (146, emphasis mine). By ending the *PBTW* version of the ballad on this present conditional tense, and omitting the final past-tense (“she trembled”) stanza of *ABOV*, Morris frames the son’s narrative with a pair of stanzas.

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19 Grundtvig publishes three complete versions of “Sonar Harmur”—17A, B, and C—and only the A-version contains this closing stanza.
in the voice of the ballad-speaker, both of which suggest that the son’s story cannot be solely contained in the past, as its repercussions persist. Again Morris counters Grundtvig’s artifactualization by emphasizing the connections between the ballad-world of the past and the modern present.

7 The Book of Leaves

*A Book of Verse* is very much a book of leaves, of decorative leaves, and leaves of paper—a book that foregrounds its materiality. By bringing the ballad into the illustrated book, Morris’s work suggests that traditional, folk art forms are as worthy of close attention and decoration as any of the other verse forms he uses: sonnets, for instance, or verses in rhyme royal or heroic couplets. Ballads are not objects to be looked through, as a part of detached studies of ‘the folk’; rather, they are subjects in their own right. Morris’s adaptation is not a burlesque, even though it does bring ‘low’ and ‘high’ art forms together, but rather is an argument for the ballad’s equal status to other verse forms, a counter to the arbitrary division of ‘high’ from ‘low,’ and a demonstration of the ability of folk forms to speak to human concerns that transcend time.

When Morris adapts Nordic ballads, translating their words, recontextualizing them along with original poems that share similar themes, presenting them in an illustrated manuscript, his versions don’t highlight their historical alterity, as his longer translations do. Rather, they blend in with the rest of *A Book of Verse*, the twisting and winding vines and branches tying the collection together. Not only are “The Ballad of Christine” and “The Son’s Sorrow” translated from another language, but their medium is likewise a translation of pre-print forms of book production. Morris’s objective in creating an illustrated book and including within it golden ballads was not straightforwardly to imitate pre-print forms, but to re-create—that is, create anew—this mode of book production.

In the middle ages, a ballad would have never been included in an illuminated manuscript. The illustrated books that Morris studied in the Bodleian and British Museum in the 1850s and 60s were largely Bibles, Psalters, and other ecclesiastical books; even the theological and philosophical treatises, herbals, and bestiaries that he
mentions in passing in his essay on illuminated books wouldn’t have contained traditional songs or folk poetry. A Book of Verse belongs to a world in which the value of the ballad, “true poetry,” is made visible and tangible, through the signals of gold leaf and ornate illustration. A Book of Verse is the kind of book that Dick describes in News from Nowhere when he praises “handsome writing” and says that “many people will write their books out when they make them, or get them written; I mean books of which only a few copies are needed—poems, and such like, you know” (31).

More abstractly, though, like News from Nowhere, A Book of Verse produces, from medieval materials, an imagined space that exists outside of the economic sphere: money doesn’t exist in News from Nowhere, and A Book of Verse was given as a gift. And so “The Ballad of Christine” and “The Son’s Sorrow” are still thematically “protests of the poor,” even though they are golden, because they focus on people who are poor in love, a theme that transcends the merely monetary. By removing A Book of Verse from the sphere of capitalist exchange, Morris is able to invest his verses with a value that is not available to poetry written within the capitalist system. Under capitalism, balladic protests of the poor focus on economic disparity; outside of the monetary system, the ballad retains its purpose—it still bears witness to injustice; its narrative is still testimony—without the restrictions caused by capitalism.

Poems by the Way, unlike ABOV, was published and sold in the marketplace. Nonetheless, the politics of the ballad translations included in Poems by the Way build on those of the earlier book, as we have seen in the subtle changes between the two versions of both “Christine” and “The Son’s Sorrow.” In the ballad translations published only in PBTW, Morris repeats the motif of the up-rising body in order to highlight the problems caused by bringing money into human relationships, and to mobilize old balladic stories as a part of his larger, future-looking Socialist project.

Morris did produce imitation illuminated manuscripts, the earliest of which—from 1856-7, thirteen years before ABOV—was of two verses from Robert Browning’s Paracelsus: “The page is written in a shaky, crowded Gothic script, and the text is bordered with two strange, elongated shapes with bird wings and grotesque heads, each spiking irregularly out like the border ornamentation in a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century manuscript” (Waggoner 90-91). See also Phimister 32-33.
8 The *PBTW* Golden Ballads: “Agnes and the Hillman,” “Hildebrand and Hellelil” and “Hafbur and Signy”

Morris was not the only Victorian poet to translate Nordic ballads into English.\(^1\)

Morris’s “Agnes and the Hill-Man” (see Figure 7, above) is based on the “C” variant of Grundtvig’s “Agnete og Havmanden”—discussed in detail above—which was translated as “The Deceived Merman” by George Borrow in 1826 and as “Agnes” by Robert Buchanan in 1866, and was loosely adapted by Matthew Arnold as “The Forsaken Merman” in 1849. Although in Morris’s version (as in the “C” variant) Agnes’s husband lives under a hill rather than under the water, the outline of the stories remains roughly consistent across the different versions: Agnes goes to live with this supernatural man, and has a number of children with him, only to decide to return to the world above ground, abandoning her husband and children. Whereas Borrow, Buchanan and Arnold either evoke a reader’s sympathy for the merman left behind—Borrow’s version ends with the merman’s “shrieks and mournful cries” (123); Arnold’s version ends with the merman remaining “left lonely forever” (108)—or depict the pair as star-crossed lovers—in the Buchanan version, Agnes dies of a seeming homesickness, while the merman is left to weep “over his lost true-love” (83)—Morris’s version is mired in ambiguities.

In Morris’s translation, the Hillman entices Agnes to leave “the fair world without” and join him underground by offering her the “reddest of gold” (146). Again, this is a poem of surfaces and depths: after living inside the hill for three years, Agnes begins to feel homesick, and, after hearing “how the bells of England were ringing,”

\(^1\) As Andrew Wawn notes, “An impressive canon of English translations of many of these [old Scandinavian] works [such as eddas and sagas] emerged [in the nineteenth century]—literal and paraphrastic, prose and verse, archaized and modern, reliable and muddled, influential and neglected” (6).

\(^2\) In his 1865 *Fortnightly Review* article “The Old Ballads of Denmark,” which is partially reprinted in the preface to *Ballad Stories of the Affectations*, Buchanan is critical of Agnes, calling her “the cruel one” for not returning to her sons; he claims that “Danish mermen […] seem to have been good fellows, and badly used” (693). His poem, however, is much more sympathetic to Agnes.
Agnes begs the Hillman to let her go aboveground “to the church of the English Land” (147). The Hillman agrees, but names a few conditions: Agnes should “cast not abroad [her] golden hair,” sit in the pew with her mother, or kneel upon hearing God’s name spoken (147). Agnes, seemingly agreeing, leaves the hill, and immediately breaks all of the Hillman’s conditions. When he confronts her, demanding her return—“Come, Agnes, into the hillside to me, / For thy seven small sons greet sorely for thee!” —Agnes replies, “Let them greet, let them greet, as they have will to do; / For never again will I hearken thereto!” (148). Upon hearing this, the Hillman curses Agnes, and, “that self-same hour,” she dies (148).

There is no villain in Morris’s version of the poem. The Hillman’s demands may seem inordinate and his punishment severe, but Agnes breaks her promise without a second thought, and has no qualms about abandoning her children. The Hillman is described as Agnes’s “true-love” (147); he is not a captor or tormentor, nor is she characterized as an English rose poorly used. Morris’s objective ballad speaker provides no moral resolution—this is no straightforward “demon lover” ballad—but the poem does hint at a possible problematic origin to Agnes and the Hillman’s romance: gold. The Hillman’s first words to Agnes include a promise of gold in exchange for her company; before returning to the England above the ground, Agnes lays her hand “on all gold that was there,” as if swearing an oath, but then “cast[s] abroad her golden hair,” in defiance of the Hillman’s stated wishes (147). At the core of the problem in the relationship between Agnes and the Hillman is what, in another ballad-esque poem in PBTW, “All for the Cause,” Morris calls “the curse of gold” (120).

In Morris’s Socialist ballads, which were written years after these ballad translations but were included alongside them in PBTW, gold—and the capitalist system that it represents—turns good relationships sour; this is made most explicit in “The Day is Coming,” in which Morris describes “the wicked city” as “the gold-crushed hungry hell” (114), and anticipates the day when “wealth then shall be left us / when none shall gather gold / To buy his friend in the market, / and pinch and pine the sold” (112). Gold signifies trauma in Morris’s ballad translations as well: in “Hafbur and Signy,” the titular lovers are the children of rival kings whose war with each other is marked by the sound
of Hafbur’s father’s “gold-wrought horn” (159). The emblem on Hafbur’s chest, “in red gold all a-blaze” (158), foreshadows the “embers red” (166) to which Signy turns her own bower when her father puts her lover to death. In another ballad translation featuring aristocratic lovers, “Hildebrand and Hellelil,” Hellelil survives Hildebrand’s execution but unconsciously makes her sorrow manifest in her artistic production when she transposes the gold and silk threads in her sewing.

The gold of these golden ballads, then, is either associated with or the cause of great emotional pain. With gold comes privilege and thus suffering, not just for those who lack wealth and its associated power—as in Morris’s later, non-translated Socialist ballads, which were published alongside these translations in Poems by the Way—but also for those who have it. As in “The Ballad of Christine,” these ballads emphasize the value of what gold cannot buy, and yet they are printed in the font called “Golden,” which again suggests the persistence of beauty—the beauty of gold, of this font, of these verses—despite changes wrought through time. Other Victorian translations of these same poems—not only those of “Agnete og Havmanden” mentioned above, but also Borrow’s “Aager and Eliza,” Buchanan’s “Hildebrand,” and R. C. A. Prior’s “Habor and Signild,” amongst others—do not place the same emphasis on the problematic exchange value attributed to gold. In his introduction to PBTW, Latham claims that this seemingly diverse set of poems all “approach common concerns from different perspectives” (xix). In the golden ballads, Morris demonstrates that those with “name, and fame, and honour” are as much “slaves of gold” as are the “nameless, poor, unlettered” who receive the focus of the Socialist poems (119-120). Gold may be beautiful, but its beauty is superficial, and the power that it acquired in the capitalist system turns it ruddy.

9 Translation, Collection, Violence, and the Undead

Morris is the most ‘literal’ of the four poet-translators discussed in this dissertation, as he is the only one to work from a single written source (Grundtvig), and because he echoes so closely the Icelandic or Danish of his source, in both the sound and the meaning of his diction—for instance, “strandanna” (Grundtvig, Íslenzk 154) becomes “sea-strand” (Morris, PBTW 138) and “upp á land” (Grundtvig, Íslenzk 154) becomes “up a-land”
(Morris, *PBTW* 138) in “The Lay of Christine”; “Lad dem graed” (Grundtvig, *Danmarks 53*) becomes “Let them greet” in “Agnes and the Hill-man” (Morris, *PBTW* 148); “glaffuinnd och spyd” (Grundtvig, *Danmarks 395*) becomes “glaive and spear” in “Hildebrand and Hellelil” (Morris, *PBTW* 142); and so on. Morris’s fidelity, however, is superficial. While rewriting Grundtvig’s texts, Morris must absent Grundtvig from his version of ballad history. If Morris’s ballad translations are balladic protests against an unjust system, and show the rightful place of folk forms in the beautiful books of the future—if Morris’s ballads are to be instances of “true poetry” rather than mere “whining […] lyrics” (Morris, *Signs* 75)—then his ballads need to represent the authentic voice of the folk, not the voice of an artifactualized folk. Morris thus positions himself as translating from Danish and Icelandic oral tradition, by-passing the mediator, Grundtvig. Morris’s translations may be “literal,” but, in his literal fidelity to Grundtvig’s texts, he is unfaithful to Grundtvig’s role as a ballad collector and editor.

What’s interesting to notice about Morris’s effacement of Grundtvig is that the content of his translations—poems in which the past refuses to stay in the past, and the dead and the living continue to assert their influence on each other—offer an alternative model to conventional theories of both translation and ballad artifactualization. Take, for instance, the rhetoric of violence that is pervasive in discussions of translation. Take the oft-cited Italian pun “traduttore, tradittore” (“translator, traitor”), or the idea of translation as “abusive fidelity,” a term derived from Philip Lewis’s “Vers la traduction abusive” (1980); consider the parallels between violence and colonialism that Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi trace in their introduction to *Post-Colonial Translation*: “translation is often a form of violence. […] And the metaphor of the colony as a translation, a copy of an original located elsewhere on the map, has been recognized” (5). In his “‘Conclusions’ on Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’,” Paul de

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23 I am indebted to Sune Auken for pointing out Morris’s near verbatim translation of “Hildebrand and Hellelil.”

24 Bassnett and Trivedi also note that translation-as-violence isn’t the only metaphor available for translators, and point, for example, to Spivak’s “uncharacteristically tender plea that a translator should adopt a procedure of ‘love’ and surrender’ towards the original” (8). Their conclusion is that, while
Man describes the function of translations in largely destructive, violent terms: “They disarticulate, they undo the original, they reveal that the original was already disarticulated. […] They kill the original, by discovering that the original was already dead” (86). Similarly, Susan Stewart describes the process of ballad artifactualization as a kind of murder, as ballad editors and scholars needed to figure the genre as dead or dying in order to position it as needing preservation in books. Stewart describes this positioning as “the production of a ghost” (108)—that is, producing this idea of a ballad that is no longer passed on through “traditional” oral means, and thus needs to be recorded and archived in a form—print—that maintains certain features of the original—the words—without maintaining its vitality.

Whereas both translation and ballad collecting have been described in criticism as violent, even murderous, processes, Morris’s poems suggest that the translated, collected ballad cannot and will not be killed—and nor will the folk who are embodied in this form. If Grundtvig produced his Danish and Icelandic ballads as ghosts, then what Morris ‘kills’ through his translations is this earlier ‘murder’; for Morris, Grundtvig’s sources were not, in de Man’s words, “already dead,” but were only seemingly—or perhaps temporarily—dead. As poems like “The Lay of Christine,” “Knight Aagen and Maiden Else,” and “The Son’s Sorrow” repeatedly assert, death is not final; Grundtvig’s ballad-ghosts are reanimated in Morris’s ballad corpus. Grundtvig’s implicit narrative of the ballad as a dead or dying form is countered in Morris, as Morris’s translations both rewrite and adapt their sources into new contexts, the collections A Book of Verse and Poems by the Way.

Morris may position Grundtvig as if he weren’t a mediator in the ballad tradition, but Morris does so in order to reveal that ‘the original’ that predates Grundtvig—the translation historically has been used as a tool for violence and colonialism, with the advent of postcolonialism and its commensurate “increasing awareness of the unequal power relations involved in the transfer of texts across cultures” comes an opportunity “to rethink both the history of translation and its contemporary practice” (16).
Danish and Icelandic oral tradition—is resilient, and has survived despite the process of artifactualization. Morris substitutes one “original” for another. Recall that the subtitles of Morris’s poems suggest that they are “Translated from the Icelandic” and “Translated from the Danish,” as if Morris were translating from a pure and unmediated language or a pure and unmediated people. If Grundtvig was creating an image of “the folk” in order to support a resurging Danish nationalist project, then Morris recreates this folk in order to rise against forces that perpetuate human suffering.

Waithe has aligned Morris’s approach to translation with his ideas about architecture, noting that Morris favoured the preservation of ancient buildings to their restoration. Waithe argues that Morris believed that the imitation inherent in restoration projects was not only impossible but could do a kind of violence to the past, as it guised misrepresentation as replication. In parallel, *A Book of Verse* and *Poems by the Way* are not imitations of earlier book-forms like the illuminated manuscript. Rather, these books and their verses signal their difference from the models on which they draw by the inclusion of key differences: in *A Book of Verse*, Italian script replaces Gothic letters, and Venus, the goddess of love, stands in for a Christian God; in *Poems by the Way*, arts and crafts borders surround a Gothic font produced by a printing press. By adapting rather than imitating, Morris’s translated book and ballads attempt to avoid the violence of appropriation that can be found in building restoration, as Waithe has shown, and also in translation and ballad collection. For Morris, the ballad doesn’t need careful preservation; it thrives in continued reproductions and proliferations; it can re-member the present.
Chapter 2
“The Banjo Bard of Empire”: Bardic Nationalism and Kipling’s “Barrack-Room Ballads”

In a 1912 lecture to his son’s boarding school called “The Uses of Reading,” Rudyard Kipling described the “steadying” effects of the English ballad for soldiers in the Boer War:

I happened to be in Bloemfontein after a “regrettable incident” called Sanna’s Post—where we lost five or six hundred men and several guns in a little ambush. I met one of the survivors a few hours after the thing had happened. He had done very well in a losing game, and he had come out of it, looking exactly like a man after the last half of a really hectic footer game. His clothes were ripped to bits, but his temper was quite good. After he’d told his tale I said to him: “What are we going to do about it?” He said: “Oh, I don't know. ‘Thank Heaven we have within the land five hundred as good as they.’”

Then he went off to report himself, and see if he could get on to the column that was going out in support. But not half an hour before I met him, I’d seen an agitated gentleman flogging a horse along the veldt and he had told me that the ‘flower of the British Army had been destroyed.’ Here were two men, under severe strain and excitement. One of them threw up a steadying quotation from the ancient, but quite modern, ballad of ‘Chevy Chase’ and went on with his job. The other made bad worse by shouting what was nothing better than a newspaper scare head-line; and, judging by the rate he was travelling, I don’t think he reported for duty that night. (61-2)

Given the context in which this anecdote was reported, Kipling might have had multiple reasons to tell this story. Perhaps one objective was to get the boys reading beyond the popular presses. He might have wanted to make a point about the benefits of a positive attitude, even in times of duress. The description of the “gentleman” with a horse, contrasted against the foot-soldier who looked like a “footer” player, may suggest a class-based resonance to the story. Not to be lost amongst all these possible readings, however, is the significance of the particular poem to which Kipling’s Bloemfontein soldier alludes.

That the soldier quotes from a ballad, and this ballad specifically, is telling.

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25 My thanks to Ashley Miller, University of Texas at Arlington, for bringing this passage to my attention.
Although it may date back to as early as the 15th century (Perry 251, 255-6), “Chevy Chase” still circulated popularly in the Victorian period, as is attested to by the casual references to it in both *Wuthering Heights* (301) and *North and South* (81). The ballad, which even by the sixteenth century “was already the product of a long series of interactions between oral, manuscript and print culture” (Fox 3), describes a battle instigated by the English Lord Percy’s decision to lead a hunting raid onto territory claimed by the Scottish Earl Douglas in the Cheviot hills. Like the “five or six hundred” lost in Bloemfontein, the battle described in “Chevy Chase” involved substantial casualties in a single day. “Chevy Chase” is told from an English perspective, and, argues Ruth Perry, was “slanted by nationalistic and propagandistic purposes to glorify the English” (256). Yet, claims Perry, “Chevy Chase” is unlike the war rhetoric of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in that it refuses to dehumanize its opponent: as the soldier’s quotation suggests, the ballad depicts both sides as “good.” This is a ballad that both tells a story of “a mighty battle and of great heroism” (259) while also demonstrating “the tragic absurdity of war” and the “sense of how unnecessary it all was” (260). The ballad, Perry argues, “horrifies us and brings home the senselessness of war as much as it appeals to patriotic feelings” (261).

The ambivalent attitude towards war evident in this well-known ballad resonates strongly with Kipling’s own war poetry. “Chevy Chase” is, in Kipling’s words, “ancient, but quite modern” because its concerns, and its vexed nationalism, resonate in both eras. Like “Chevy Chase,” Kipling’s early war poems carry a nationalistic charge that is complicated by subversive, realistic depictions of life and death at the edges of empire. This chapter centers on the importance of the ballad in Kipling’s depictions of life in the colonies in his “Barrack-Room Ballads,” and the importance of translation to his treatment of empire in these verses. Drawing on observations made about the influence of the music-hall on Kipling’s verses by readers of his poetry as diverse as Robert Buchanan, T. S. Eliot, and George Orwell, recent scholarship takes for granted the strong influence that the music hall had in shaping the voice and the rhythms of Kipling’s poetry (see, for example, Attridge 72-3; Bevis 26; Bratton 76, 81-2; Keating 65-68; Parry 42; Prescott 71). Although the influence of the ballad is usually overshadowed by a focus on the music hall, this chapter argues, in line with T. S. Eliot, that the “starting point for
Kipling’s verse” is generic—that Kipling is first and foremost “a ballad-maker” (6). In the poems for which Kipling was best known, he takes up both the mantle of the Celtic Bard and the persona of the artifactualizing ballad collector, and reshapes them to fit his subject matter, setting, and themes.

Focusing on Kipling’s status as the late nineteenth century’s most prominent imperialist balladeer, this chapter interrogates Kipling’s role as the “Banjo Bard of Empire”—the epithet applied to Kipling by W. T. Stead—a hundred years after the period discussed in Katie Trumpener’s Bardic Nationalism (1997). Trumpener argues that, in the late eighteenth century, bardic genres “are transported out of British peripheries into the colonies of the new British Empire” (12), where they are transformed from sites of “historical testimony” (4) into works of “colonial amnesia” (233). This chapter posits that, a hundred years after the rise of bardic nationalism, Kipling brings bardic writing back into the heart of the Empire—England—figuring the ballad as a site of contemporary testimony and as a challenge to willful blindness regarding the realities of colonial administration. I argue moreover that translation is the process by which this challenge is both brought about and undercut: Kipling creates an argot for his ballad-singer, transcribing his words to demonstrate his linguistic prowess, but the collection’s fictional editor retranslates Tommy’s words in an attempt to position himself as having more authority and power than the soldier-singer.

There are important continuities between the Welsh, Scottish, and Irish nationalist antiquarians described in Trumpener’s Bardic Nationalism and the artifactualizing ballad collectors described in Susan Stewart’s Crimes of Writing, discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. Both of these studies focus on Romantic-era literary engagement, and both critics describe processes in which the ballad was collected, studied, and represented as a nationalist form. Trumpener describes “antiquarian editors” like Thomas Percy as having used the word “reliques” to describe ancient poetry and poetic fragments, noting that the term not only carries Christian connotations, but also connotes the idea of the poem-as-“artifact” and as “crucified object” (28). Trumpener argues that Welsh, Scottish, and Irish antiquarians imagined the ballad—and related bardic genres—as “vehicle[s] of collective expression” (7), and read them as synecdoches for “the culture and the
historical moment that produced” them (28). All of these descriptions resonate with *Crimes of Writing*: Stewart, in parallel, points to some ballad collectors’ “antiquarian motivation[s]”—that is, “the sense of a national culture and the impulse to legitimate that culture through documents and artifact” (113)—as driving their work.

Where Trumpener’s Celtic antiquarians diverge from Stewart’s ballad artifactualizers, however, is in terms of the political ends that they imagine the ballad as serving. Both groups posited the ballad as representing a people and a nation, but while the antiquarians stressed “the continuities of language and culture from ancient times to the present” (Trumpener 24, emphasis mine), the artifactualizers emphasized the *disconnection* between modernity and the culture of ballad-producers, the latter of which were “characterized by fragmentation and exoticism” (Stewart 103). The antiquarians are interested in the ways in which a culture is rooted in land and place; the collectors abstract art forms from their social and geographical contexts, choosing instead to classify ballads by tropes or themes.

Kipling begins writing and publishing his ballads a hundred or so years after the emergence of these two trends. While Kipling positions his collection as if it adheres to the conventions of the artifactualized ballad collection, in fact he appropriates and translates the antiquarians’ Celtic Bard, creating a banjo bardic nationalism that serves as testimony of the lived experiences of empire soldiers. For the Banjo Bard, like the Celtic Bard before him, ballads present an opportunity to voice “the enormous cultural damage wrought by imperial occupation” (Trumpener 24)—only, in Kipling’s case, the damage wrought is to the imperialists, rather than to an Indigenous population.

1 “Barrack-Room Ballads”

Kipling moved to London in October 1889, at the age of 23, after seven years as a journalist in India. In February 1890 he began publishing the first of his “Barrack-Room Ballads” in the *Scots Observer* (later, the *National Observer*). Widely successful with readers, the ballads and short stories that followed soon thereafter catapulted the young writer to success; although unlike the decadent writers that define, in twenty-first-century minds, the *fin-de-siècle*, Kipling was very popular in the decade that followed, finding
admirers in Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Oscar Wilde, not to mention a diverse cross-section of the reading public. He was also extremely prolific: 1890 has, quite appropriately, been called the year of the “Kipling Boom” because, as Stephen Arata has noted, “[i]n 1890 alone he published or republished 78 stories, 86 poems, 12 essays and periodical pieces, and a novel—177 items in twelve months” (152).

Capitalizing on this success, Kipling brought together the separately published poems under the title *Departmental Ditties, Barrack-Room Ballads, and Other Verses* (1890), but it was his expanded 1892 volume, *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses*—titled *Ballads and Barrack-Room Ballads* in American editions—that quickly surpassed the earlier work as the standard edition of Kipling’s soldier poetry. The title of *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* names its two sections; “Barrack-Room Ballads,” the first section of the collection, contained six new poems in addition to the fifteen that already had been published in *The Scots Observer* in 1890. The best known of the “Barrack-Room Ballads” are “Danny Deever,” “Gunga Din,” and “Loot.” The section titled “Other Verses” also contains twenty-one poems, including “The Ballad of East and West.” The entire volume is framed by a dedicatory poem to Kipling’s friend and publisher Wolcott Balestier, who died in December 1891, and who was the brother of Caroline Balestier, whom Kipling married in early 1892. A second series of “Barrack-Room Ballads,” published in 1896, was contained in a larger poetry collection called *The Seven Seas*. Both series detail the lives of soldiers in the colonies, told from the perspective of—and in the distinctly Cockney voice of—army servicemen, whom Kipling collectively called “Tommy Atkins.”

“Tommy Atkins” was a name for a low-ranking soldier that dates back to the mid-eighteenth century (Laffin xi). As Steve Attridge as shown, Kipling was not the first author to identify the lower-class English soldier using this sample name—James Milne’s *The Epistles of Atkins* (1865) is one such literary precedent—but he did popularize the use of the term (49). Kipling also changes the status of the soldier: while earlier literary and popular poets depicted Tommy Atkins as a low-status, itinerant figure (Keating 59), Kipling’s British soldier presents himself as a man with valuable knowledge, including subversive knowledge about the realities of life in Greater Britain.
In Kipling’s balladry, Tommy stands in for all serving soldiers. Some critics have differentiated the speakers of the various ballads based on differences in accents (see for example Keating 70-1, Parry 48), but while there may be pronunciation differences, each of these separate individuals is still subsumed under the name “Tommy Atkins,” as “Tommy” is the name the speaker consistently uses to identify himself and his colleagues throughout the collection. The deindividualizing move of this single name is in keeping not only with the collective actions that are usually discussed in the poems—Tommy is as likely to speak of himself as “we” as he is “I”—but also with one of the markers of balladry: the impersonal status of the balladeer. Conventionally, the speaker or singer of a ballad was unobtrusive, not so much an individualized character as a representative of the voice of the community; Tommy Atkins can be read, in parallel, as a single voice that speaks for the collective. This collective is repeatedly reinforced throughout the collection, beginning with “To T. A.,” in which Kipling’s editor-figure speaks to a singular “you”; continuing through “Tommy,” in which the speaker describes British soldiers as “single men in barricks” who both are individualized and are made uniform by experience (8); and concluding with “Shillin’ a Day,” in which troops “From Birr to Bareilly, from Leeds to Lahore, / Hong-Kong and Peshawur, / Lucknow and Etawah, / And fifty-five more all endin’ in ‘pore’” coalesce around the sound of “the Revelly” and around their shared poverty (70). So while acknowledging the variations that individualize the specific speakers of the different poems in this collection, I refer to them in this chapter in the same way that they refer to themselves—as “both archetype and individual character” in the singular identity of Tommy Atkins (Attridge 71).

This chapter focuses largely on the 1892 collection “Barrack-Room Ballads”—rather than the “Other Verses” of the same collection, or the 1896 series—for a number of reasons. For one, the 1892 Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses was both immensely popular and critically lauded: it was, from its first publication and for three or four decades, the most popular collection of poetry in the English-speaking world (Carrington 2). With Tennyson’s death in October 1892, there were calls for Kipling to receive the Poet Laureateship (Ricketts, Unforgiving 196-7). Although he had published a number of collections of short stories, as well as the unpopular novel The Light that Failed, in the 1890s Kipling was primarily thought of as a poet, and specifically as the
voice of Tommy Atkins. Even as late as 1909, E. M. Forster was arguing of the 1892 Tommy Atkins poems that, “To many readers, these are Kipling, and most perfectly manifest his genius” (18). Likewise, those less convinced of Kipling’s “genius” also tended to focus on the 1892 “Barrack-Room Ballads”: Robert Buchanan’s “The Voice of the Hooligan” (1899) dedicates the bulk of its criticisms to the 1892 series, condemning Kipling for unabashedly depicting the British soldier as a “a drunken, swearing, coarse-minded Hooligan” (239), while giving only a paragraph apiece to the 1892 “Other Verses” and to *The Seven Seas*. As Simon Dentith has noted, it is the “Barrack-Room Ballads” “which struck Kipling’s contemporaries especially strongly, and it is these [poems] which manage to assert the heroic in demotic and contemporary terms, in a wholly unprecedented way” (164). Kipling was thus not simply a well-known writer: it was his Tommy Atkins poems that were the focus of popular attention and criticism.

A second reason to consider the 1892 collection in isolation from both his earlier and later poetry is that Kipling’s perspective at this moment was unique. David Sergeant argues that the “culture shock” that Kipling experienced upon returning to London in 1889 manifested itself in his short fiction, as he found himself writing for “a readership he found ignorant and apathetic about its imperial responsibilities” (144, 146). Sergeant argues that Kipling’s return to Britain is concurrent with the most important period of change in his writing (157); building on Sergeant’s claims, this chapter shows that the distinctiveness of Kipling’s 1889-1890 literary productions isn’t limited to his prose, and the “Barrack-Room Ballads” likewise benefit by being considered in isolation. Kipling wrote *Departmental Ditties* in India for an Anglo-Indian audience—the first edition was modeled on government docket-envelopes, and was addressed to “All Heads of Departments and all Anglo-Indians” (see Keating 18)—and his move to America just after the publication of *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* saw his perspective shift again, with *The Seven Seas* speaking for the entire English-speaking empire, as is clear in poems like “The Song of the Cities,” which consists of addresses from personifications of Calcutta, Capetown, Hong Kong, Hobart, Halifax, and ten other Commonwealth cities (see Ricketts, “Nine” 116). Even Buchanan noticed the differences between the 1892 and 1896 series of “Barrack-Room Ballads,” calling the later collection “more restrained, less vulgar, and much more varied” (“Voice” 240).
A third reason to look closely at the “Barrack-Room Ballads” has less to do with Kipling and more to do with the cultural moment, and the significance of the ballad in this moment. Simultaneous with the Kipling Boom was a boom in imperialist and colonialist expansion:

In 1890, the Scramble for Africa was reaching its peak; in the previous decade, 10 million square miles and 100 million people had fallen under European suzerainty. By the late 1880s, maps of Africa in school atlases were revised every year. (Parry 37)

In parallel to this land grab, Kipling’s poetry colonizes other cultural traditions: on a formal level, in the appropriation and adaptation of the Celtic Bard; on a linguistic level, in the incorporation of translations and mistransliterations from Hindi, Urdu, Zulu, Gujarati, and Burmese. In “The English Flag,” first published in St. James’s Gazette and The National Observer in April 1891, Kipling asked: “what should they know of England who only England know?” (174). In parallel, Tommy’s poems seem to ask: “what should they know of English who only English know?” Rejecting standard English as inadequate to expressing life in colonial Africa and Asia, Tommy adopts the same approach to Indigenous languages that he takes to tangible possessions of Indigenous peoples: he loots.

The association of Kipling’s ballads with the English nation was deeply troubling to critics like Robert Buchanan, who feared that bringing “the free-and-easy rattles, the jog-trot tunes, which had hitherto been heard only in the music-halls” (“Voice” 242) into Kipling’s ballads in turn brought a “Hooligan spirit” (“Voice” 247) into patriotic, imperialist, and nationalist sentiment. Buchanan’s concern was that, under Kipling’s shaping influence, “the coarse and soulless patriotism of the hour” exemplified in Tommy’s songs would become the norm, and the English would be “in danger of being swept back into the vortex of barbarism altogether” (“Voice” 249). However, Buchanan’s rhetoric of atavistic decline and cultural degeneration isn’t the only language that we have to discuss Kipling’s war poetry.
Buchanan’s cries of hooliganism weren’t the only ways in which Kipling’s poetry was described in the period, nor is “Voice of the Hooligan” the epithet most frequently attached to Kipling’s name in criticism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As Arata notes, “Buchanan, when he is remembered,” is more often discussed for his 1871 attack on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “The Fleshy School of Poetry,” than he is for “The Voice of the Hooligan” (11). There’s no reason to require that the rhetoric of the scarcely-remembered Buchanan dominate discussions of Kipling’s poetry, as it does in the analyses of both Arata (11-14) and Attridge (70-106), and, to a lesser degree, the work of Dentith (151) and Parry (76-78); his language of degradation doesn’t need to be the language that we use to interpret Kipling’s work. Indeed, to do so, argues Chris Snodgrass, is to write against a trend in 1890s poetry, evident in the work of a range of writers including Henry Newbolt, W. E. Henley, and Alice Meynell, that “celebrated the health and vibrancy of Victorian culture” (326). This chapter argues that it is more productive to read Kipling using an alternate interpretative model that comes from another fin-de-siècle essay, which labels Kipling as a “Banjo Bard,” marked by a willingness to translate, appropriate, and incorporate non-English words and cultural models into English poetry. For Kipling, the “Barrack-Room Ballads” are symbolic not of English decline, as Buchanan would have it, but of English expansion.

2 The Banjo Bard of Empire

The “Banjo Bard” epithet was first applied to Kipling by W. T. Stead, the editor, journalist, and friend of Cecil Rhodes. In the April 1899 issue of Review of Reviews, which Stead edited, he praised Kipling’s depiction of “Empire as service, the service or ministry by the stronger and more advanced nations of the weaker and less progressive races,” and contrasted Kipling’s writing against “the turbid flood of the bastard Jingoism which revels in the splendours and ignored the obligations of Empire” (319). The terms in which Stead frames his praise are significantly bardic: Kipling was “the Robert Burns of his time” who “has struck ‘that bard’s true lyre, a nation’s heart’” (319). This rhetoric continues throughout Stead’s piece: for instance, Stead claims that, with “Recessional,” England learned that Kipling “could on occasion lay down the banjo and strike with an unerrong hand the lyre of the Hebrew bard” (321); the reference to King David shows that
Stead’s associations with the bardic are pastoral and ancient rather than, say, Shakespearean. For Stead, Kipling is bardic because he is popular—“the Poet Laureate […] of His Majesty King Demos”—and because his verses are both “familiar” and “heroic” (319).

By claiming that he has inherited the title of “bard,” Stead imagines Kipling as a voice speaking for and speaking to the Tommies. Kipling was bardic not simply because he wrote ballads, but because his ballads spoke from and of a unified primitive culture: the army. Stead draws on a tradition that can be traced back to the eighteenth century, as in, for instance, Percy’s claim in his preface to *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* that bards “contributed to soften the roughness of a martial and unlettered people” (I. xi). Certainly fin-de-siècle British soldiers were “martial,” and the deviations from Standard English may lend a suggestion of Tommy’s being “unlettered,” but it is through Kipling’s bardic positioning that they become “a people,” and Tommy Atkins, the voice of that people. Kipling’s poems ‘sing’ with a popular voice that represents Atkins’ way of living, but is also a little above it: the speakers of most of the poems—save, perhaps, “Danny Deever”—are the most experienced and the most self-aware of all the Tommies, a part of the whole and yet uniquely respected within it. Not all Victorian ballads are necessarily bardic, but Kipling’s are, because of the particular role and status of his speaker.

The label of “Banjo Bard” was not the only title that Stead bestowed upon Kipling in this piece—he likewise dubbed him “the vates sacer26 of the last years of the nineteenth century” and “the prophet of the Imperial idea” (319)—but the bardic label was the one that stuck, being quoted in contemporary letters and reviews (Cameron 275; James 124) as well as in criticism and biographies throughout the following century (to cite only a few: Adas 385n; Dentith 150; Katz 128; Magubane 125; Meyer and Brysac xix; Ricketts, “Nine” 111; Rutherford 21; Sullivan 9).

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26 Latin, “sacred poet.”
The evocation of bardic imagery at the close of the nineteenth century nicely frames Kipling’s work as a late-Victorian echo of what Trumpener describes in *Bardic Nationalism* as the Romantic period’s “systematic imitation, appropriation, and political neutralization” (xi) of Celtic nationalist literature—a process that culminates a hundred years later in collections of ballad artifacts. Tricia Lootens convincingly reads the poetry of Kipling’s years in Vermont (1892-96) as “repeatedly test[ing] the limits of bardic nationalism” (288), even “bring[ing] bardic nationalism into crisis” (291). But what Lootens’ project doesn’t take into account is the significance of Kipling as a “Banjo Bard”: a reinvented bard of the colonies, whose harp or lyre has been replaced by an instrument of African origins that was appropriated by the music hall and then turned into “the war-drum of the White Man round the world”—as Kipling himself describes the instrument in “The Song of the Banjo” (*Seven Seas* 79; see Dentith 154).

“The Song of the Banjo” and the figure of the Banjo Bard contrast sharply with the best known self-styled Celtic Bard of the 1890s, William Butler Yeats. Yeats sought to renew old traditions; in the essay “Bardic Ireland,” he describe the bards as “kept by the rules of their order apart from war and the common affairs of men, [riding] hither and thither gathering up the dim feelings of the time, and making them conscious” (110). In striving to restore bardic traditions and an associated Irish national unity, Yeats “adopted an affected bardic pose” and would recite his poems with “a strange, chant-like delivery” (Schuchard xx). Such is not the manner of the Banjo Bard. In “The Song of the Banjo,” the instrument itself speaks, and positions itself as inheriting a poetic status—“[t]he grandam of my grandam was the Lyre / […] By the wisdom of the centuries I speak” (83-4)—but also as adapting a bardic role for the context of military life in the empire. The banjo, with its “Pilly-willy-winky-winky-popp!” (78) and its “Tinka-tinka-tinka-tinka-tink!” (81), is better positioned to “babble what the weakest won’t confess” (80)—that is, to speak the “dim feelings of the time” (Yeats 110)—than is the bard’s harp or the poet’s lyre; the banjo is a modern instrument, made from and for a modern world. The Banjo Bard is an adaptation and appropriation of the Celtic tradition, not a Yeatsian revival of it.

In the time that Lootens’ study focuses on, Kipling was concerned with transnational Anglophone solidarity—a concern that is evident in the globe-spanning title
of *The Seven Seas*, written largely during his Vermont years. When Kipling’s concerns turned to global English, he began to evoke “British imperial subjects who *can’t* be English” and “a British imperial subject who may no longer want to be” (Lootens 291, emphasis in original). Before his interest in transnational Anglophone relationships, Kipling was not as invested in dissolving British or English identity in favour of a universal construct. This chapter focuses on Kipling’s poetry before his move to Vermont, before his interest in global Anglophone relations emerged. It reads the 1892 “Barrack-Room Ballads” not as “test[ing] the limits of bardic nationalism” but rather as adapting bardic nationalism, playing it on a banjo, repeating bardic nationalism with a critical distance. Like the Celtic Bard, the Banjo Bard displaces “political anger into cultural expression” (Trumpener 11). The Banjo Bard is the late nineteenth century’s reappropriation and reinterpretation of the Celtic Bard, restoring bardic nationalism’s emphasis on poetry’s “status as historical testimony” (Trumpener 4) but rejecting Scottish, Welsh, and Irish rhythms and manners of delivery.

The banjo bardic nationalism of Kipling’s war poetry thus demonstrates not the “limits of bardic nationalism,” as Lootens suggests, but rather its second phase of appropriation and transformation in the peripheries of empire. Trumpener argues that, “under the sign of the bard,” Celtic antiquaries sought to “reconceive national history and literary history” (xii) and bring “the voices of the past into the sites of the present” (33)—this is bardic nationalism—only for English Bards to appropriate and transform the figure, turning him into a symbol of “cultural fragmentation and aesthetic autonomy” (xv). At the end of the eighteenth century, antiquarians began to organize bardic texts into collections; this collecting increased throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in the artifactualization described in the introduction to this dissertation. But the English appropriation of the bardic figure was not a finite process, any more than—as the previous chapter demonstrated—ballad artifactualization was the death of the texts it objectified, and so in the late-nineteenth-century Banjo Bard we see a return to an emphasis on the “political function of literature” rather than the English Bard’s insistence “on literature’s social and political autonomy” (Trumpener 6).
But while bardic nationalism ties this “national history” to “literary form[s]” that are “the product of specific cultural institutions” (4), banjo bardic nationalism freely and openly appropriates literary forms, transferring them into new territories, and using them to tell new stories rather than national histories. A hundred years after English men of letters appropriated and transformed the figure of the bard, Kipling’s poetry brings about another transformation, restoring, in Tommy Atkins, the Celtic Bard’s political resonance and unifying voice. Just as the Bloemfontein soldier that Kipling describes in “The Uses of Reading” quotes from “Chevy Chase,” removing the ballad’s specific social and political context of pre-Union border conflict but retaining its vexed nationalism, so too does banjo bardic nationalism appropriate and recontextualize the characters and tropes of the kinds of ballads that were artifactualized by collectors and editors.

What is the evidence for this appropriation and recontextualization? Take, for instance, the level of plot: Kipling replaces historic or romantic ballads with Tommy’s “counter-songs” — *parodia*, in the Greek. While a book like Andrew Lang’s *A Collection of Ballads* (1897) might feature poems on Robin Hood stealing from the rich to give to the poor, in the “Barrack-Room Ballads” Tommy boisterously, even exuberantly, advises new recruits on “‘Ow to pay yourself for fightin’ overtime” by robbing innocent locals of their “loot” (32). Similarly, while ballads like “Barbara Allan” and “Earl Brand” or even Morris’s “Knight Aagen and Maiden Else” might have depicted a woman pining to death over the loss of a lover, in the “Barrack-Room Ballads” a chorus of soldiers efface the difference between “True love!” and “New love!”, advising a female auditor over and over again that “The dead they cannot rise, an’ you’d better dry your eyes, / An’ you’d best go look for a new love” (13). And while popular ballads may have featured heroic outlaws like Dick Turpin or James Hind, in the “Barrack-Room Ballads,” Danny Deever is executed for a murder that lacks heroic motive—it lacks, seemingly, any motive at all, as the speaker seems to know only that “’e shot a comrade sleepin’” (5). Rather than a celebration, Deever’s ballad-memorial uses ironically up-tempo anapests (see Parry 43) to highlight the disconnect between the “quickstep” of the band and the traumatized reactions of the soldier-witnesses:
For they’re done with Danny Deever, you can ‘ear the quickstep play,
The regiment’s in column, an’ they’re marchin’ us away;
Ho! the young recruits are shakin’, an’ they’ll want their beer to-day,
After hangin’ Danny Deever in the morn’in’. (5)

Given this kind of depiction, it’s unsurprising that in the early 1890s, as Keating has noted, “Kipling was widely regarded as a realist” (73): his representation of the soldiers focuses on interiority—it seems true to the shock of witnessing an execution—rather than the action and adventure of ‘hero bandit’ ballads. In his 1907 study, The Popular Ballad, Francis Barton Gummere claimed that “nothing but the law of copyright and the personal fame of Mr. Kipling” differentiated “Danny Deever” from the ballads collected by Francis James Child (14); this is overstatement, perhaps, but it demonstrates the similarity of the Tommy Atkins poems to those ballads that were collected and presented as exemplars of authentic ballad tradition.

But if Tommy’s songs are counter-songs, parodia, to the kinds of ballads collected in the 1890s, they are parodies in Linda Hutcheon’s sense: imitations that do not necessarily subject the text that they parody to critique. To demonstrate how parodies can take up a text without making that text the target of their critique, Hutcheon refers to Joyce’s Ulysses as an example: “while the Odyssey is clearly the formally backgrounded or parodied text here, it is not one to be mocked or ridiculed” (5). Hutcheon argues that the mocking impulse is the drive of satire, which makes its object social correction via ridicule; in parody, “no such negative judgment is necessarily suggested in the ironic contrasting of texts” (44). For Hutcheon, parody entails “revising, replaying, inverting, and ‘trans-contextualizing’” (11)—but not necessarily mocking—extant works of art.

It is in this “trans-contextualizing” that the Banjo Bard differs from the Celtic Bard. Neither the Romantic nor the late Victorian appropriation of the Celtic Bard—that is, the English Bard and the Banjo Bard, respectively—is invested in the “cultural practices and historical conditions” that Celtic antiquaries saw as central to aesthetic works (Trumpener xv). Trumpener argues: “Bardic nationalism insists on the rich fullness of national knowledge, on the anchoring of discursive traditions in landscape, in a way of life, in custom. The English, in comparison, have only borrowed words” (34). What is significant about banjo bardic nationalism is its insistence that those “borrowed
words” become English because they have been ‘borrowed’—the same mindset that drove imperialist expansion and made the colonies into “Greater Britain.”

3  “Borrowed Words”: Translation in and of the “Barrack-Room Ballads”

Critical discussions of Kipling’s early writing often speak of it as if speaking of a translation—or perhaps an incomplete translation. From T. S. Eliot’s famous declaration of the “universal foreignness” of Kipling’s ballads (23), to Lionel Johnson’s suggestion that the ballads are in “the dialect of ‘the common soldier’” (98), to Arata’s description of the Kipling who “conspicuously refuses [...] to decode” his early fiction (155), Kipling’s readers repeatedly return to the language of translation when discussing the language of his characters. Some critics use the term “translation” explicitly, including Matthew Bevis (26), Christie Davis (68-69), and Sue Walsh (117-138). In May 1890, W. E. Henley, the editor of the Scots Observer, described Kipling as writing his poetry not in “the tongue that Shakespeare spake”—that is, English—but rather in “Atkinsese” (55), a language named after the soldier-speaker (or perhaps soldier-singer) of Kipling’s “Barrack-Room Ballads.” Henley’s neologism is apt: in Tommy Atkins’s texts, English itself is transformed—in “Mandalay,” it is rendered as “Henglish” (52), a change that, in miniature, exemplifies Tommy’s approach to conventions of English language, genre, and attitudes.

By “translation,” I refer not only to the movement between two different languages, in what Roman Jakobson calls “interlingual translation” (114). Jakobson’s categories of “intralingual translation” and “intersemiotic translation”—discussed in the introduction to this dissertation—are likewise apt, the former referring to rephrasing, or “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language” and the latter to an interpretation that moves between verbal and nonverbal sign systems, between language and non-language (114). Jakobson’s categories recur in the arguments of other translation theorists; for instance, Umberto Eco retains Jakobson’s “translation proper” and “intersemiotic translation” but rejects “rewording” in favour of “reformulation” (123-31). While acknowledging that “the translation of English into English does feel like an
awkward thing to do,” Matthew Reynolds argues that, ultimately, “we must resist the pressure” to understand “translation” as only “translation between languages” and to exclude “rewording within a language” from theoretical discussions of the concept (14).

There are multiple senses in which “translation” is an appropriate critical term for interpreting Kipling’s ballads. As J. M. Brereton has noted, there was a significant distinction between the kinds of words that appeared in Kipling’s poems and the kinds of words that would have been heard in late-nineteenth-century barrack-halls located in the fringes of the empire:

Of course the Victorian public could never have stomached genuine barrack-room language with its repetitive four-letter words, even if Kipling had dared to reproduce it, and civilian readers who knew no better accepted the watered-down dialogue in good faith, as they did all the rest. (98)

Thus the exclamations “Whoopee! Tear ’im puppy!” in “Loot” (32), “Ow, poor beggars in red!” in “The Widow at Windsor” (39), and “Baa! Yah! Bah!” in “Gentlemen-Rankers” (65) can be read as acceptable euphemisms for the unprintable expletives that would have been heard in the barrack-rooms of India, Southeast Asia, and Africa. But Kipling’s translation of the real words of soldiers into the “watered-down dialogue” of his speakers is only one register in which translation operates in these poems. Tommy Atkins integrates foreign-language words that he only sometimes paraphrases; footnotes provide interpretations of both English and non-English terms, and interpretations of the speakers’ intentions as well; slang and neologisms are disguised as non-English works. In short, translation permeates the “Barrack-Room Ballads.”

Translation is not only a rhetorical trope within the ballads, though; Kipling also frames his ballads as themselves translations. Kipling creates an argot for Tommy—an exclusive language that serves to reinforce an in-group of Tommies. The poems transcribe this argot, which mixes repurposed and heavily-accented English words with a smattering of mispronounced, ungrammatical, non-English ones; the editor-figure, whose voice appears in the margins of the text, then translates the most striking aspects of Tommy’s language in his footnotes, as I will discuss in depth below. Like Morris, Kipling creates a cohesive social group by giving new language to experiences that he
depicts as belonging to a people, and positions these texts as originating in that people. While “Thomas Atkins” may have existed as a term before Kipling’s “Barrack-Room Ballads,” Kipling shifts the name from a representative singular to a shared, communal identity, as he suggests that the ballads “explain” Tommy’s shared “pleasure” and “pain” (Kipling 2)—words that are tellingly left in the singular. In bridging the gap between “genuine barrack-room language” (Brereton 98) and the language that can be printed in London publications—that is, in giving Tommy the argot of Atkinsese—Kipling also reinforces the divide between Tommy and a British reader, which in turn must be bridged by the editor-figure.

I describe Kipling’s poems as translations rather than, say, acts of ventriloquism or character study, because Kipling both creates and interprets the source for his poems. This is not to say that Kipling posits a fictionalized source text for the “Barrack-Room Ballads”: unlike Rider Haggard’s fictional manuscript for She, and unlike Robert Browning’s pseudo-translations of dramatic epistles (“A Death in the Desert” [1864], for instance), Kipling does not ask his readers to imagine that the book they read is a typeset of a manuscript, a bundle of letters, or scraps of paper. Rather, these poems are depicted as coming from the mouths of an archetypical character that the poems themselves create. Ventriloquism assumes a body that can be heard as if speaking; translation destabilizes the priority of the original, as Kipling posits Tommy’s words as coming from a figure that Kipling creates through the “Barrack-Room Ballads.” It is only through the repeated, emphatic stress on both the singularity of each soldier—the “single men in barricks” of “Tommy” (8)—and their unification under the shared experience of “the Revelly” (70) that Tommy is solidified as archetypal, and yet he speaks as a representative archetype—“Tommy ain’t a bloomin’ fool—you bet that Tommy sees!” (9)—right from the beginning of the text. Kipling undoes stereotypes of Tommy Atkins by replacing them with this archetypal figure who demonstrates his power and authority by unsettling the tongue of any outsiders in his audience. The translated original, as Homi Bhabha argues, 27

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27 Here I echo Homi Bhabha: “[T]ranslation is also a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense—imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it can be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum and so on” (210).
“is never finished or complete in itself” (210)—in this case, not complete in himself—and so Tommy’s voice refracts in broadsides and in imitations and in drawing-room musical scores of Kipling’s verses. Translation is thus not only a repeated trope in the poems but also a governing structure of them.

In Tommy’s argot, Kipling makes English strange. Tommy’s is the English of looting: of plundering other languages for verbal goods not available in English; of taking up those goods and making them one’s own. In describing Atkinese as a looted argot, I draw not only on Kipling’s “Loot”—a ‘how-to’ poem on pillaging—but also on the etymology of the verb, “to loot.” The Oxford English Dictionary traces “loot” as a verb back to the 1840s, but Henry Yule and Arthur C. Burnell’s dictionary Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases (1886) traces traders’ use of the term back further, to 1788. As Yule and Burnell note, the word “loot” has its roots in Hindi, and by the late nineteenth century it had “gradually found acceptance in England […] and [become] now a recognized constituent” of English-language slang, even in Britain (318-9). In crafting Atkinese, Kipling loots from Standard English, from class-inflected English, from military jargon, and from the languages of colonized peoples; he then presents this argot as the voice of Tommy Atkins, which he renders as acceptable and recognizable by being placed within the context of a conventional ballad collection. This artifactualization, however, is fairly superficial, and English readers took up Tommy’s words in drawing-room adaptations of the “Barrack-Room Ballads,” their own mouths singing the “Loo! loo! Lulu! Loot!” (32).

For Kipling, poetic translation is an essential part of the empire project. He prefaces his 1896 poem “The Flowers,” from The Seven Seas, with a quotation attributed to The Athenaeum that reads:

To our private taste, there is always something a little exotic, almost artificial, in songs which, under an English aspect and dress, are yet so manifestly the product of other skies. They affect us like translations; the very fauna and flora are alien, remote; the dog’s-tooth violet is but an ill substitute for the rathe primrose, nor can we ever believe that the wood-robin sings as sweetly in April as the English thrush. (111)
The dramatic monologue that follows this introductory passage takes up the floral metaphor, as the speaker, a flower-seller, offers “posies” from Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand to passers-by. While describing, in detail, the types of flowers available and their origins—from Australia, “a frond o’ fern / Gathered where the Erskine leaps” (113); from New Zealand, “kowhai’s gold / Flung for gift on Taupo’s face” (113-4)—the speaker repeatedly insists she is selling “English posies” (111). Playing on the pun of “posies” and “poesies,” “The Flowers” refutes The Athenaeum’s charge that English-language poetry composed outside of Britain is merely clothed in “English aspect and dress.” Blooms from Muizenberg and Melbourne are as much “English posies” as “Cowslips from a Devon combe” and “Violets of the Undercliff / Wet with Channel spray” (111).

There is, in this critique of The Athenaeum’s stance on the poetry of Greater Britain, implicitly also a critique of The Athenaeum’s stance on translations. Just as the flowers taken into England become “English posies,” so too do poems taken into English become “English poesies.” For Kipling, a translation is not an “ill substitute” for an original, nor is it “less sweet”: while “kowhai” (113) and “ratas” (114) may seem “alien” or “remote” to one Englishman, another, born overseas, “scorn[s]” the “Kent and Surrey may” (111) and turns instead to the kowhai or the ratas as a fount of nostalgia. In the penultimate stanza, the seller says, “Buy my English posies / […] And I’ll give you back your home!” (113-4): the emphasis here is on an exchange that is also a transformation, as, in the seller’s hands, her products are only “posies,” but, in the process of the transfer, a layer of additional significance accrues. This is Lawrence Venuti’s translation-as-domestication metaphor rendered as a domicile, as colonial “posies” / “poesies” are integrated into the English “home.”

In describing those theorists—for instance, Donald Carne-Ross and Clive Scott—who claim that translations cannot stand in as “substitutes” for their source text, Matthew Reynolds argues that “the desire to emphasize the difference between translation and source” forces this kind of criticism “into ignoring the source’s difference from itself, its openness to multiple readings, its final ungraspability” (22). The flower-seller’s repeated cry, “Take the flower and turn the hour, and kiss your love again” (112, 113, 114)
suggests the possibility of a kind of “graspability”—the buyer can “take” the flower—but, like the addictive fruits of Christina Rossetti’s goblin men, whose “Come buy, come buy” echoes in Kipling’s flower-seller’s refrain, the nostalgic reverie offered by these “English posies” is fleeting, and the hour’s backward turn only momentary. Translation is a product but it is also a process, and “home”—a domestic sphere with registers both personal and national—must be recreated, repeatedly, through the consumption of more and more “English posies” that forge the connections that cross “far […] round the Seven Seas” (114). In short: “The Flowers” suggests that imperial England is an imagined community that is held together not by print capitalism generally, as in Benedict Anderson’s formulation, but by a market of translated poems specifically.

4 Singing in “Atkinsese”

Tommy Atkins is aware of the power of rhetoric and the ways in which people can manipulate language to serve their desired ends. In the second poem of the collection, “Tommy,” the speaker describes how poorly civilians in Britain treat him; their hypocrisy, he points out, is epitomized by the names they call him. The chorus of the poem begins, variously, “O it’s Tommy this, an’ Tommy that, an ‘Tommy go away’; / But it’s ‘Thank you, Mister Atkins’, when the band begins to play” and, later, “it’s Tommy this, an’ Tommy that, an’ ‘Tommy, fall be’hind’, / But it’s “Please to walk in front, sir,” when there’s trouble in the wind” (6, 8). The repetition of “Tommy this, an’ Tommy that” underlines the infrequency with which the speaker hears the formal terms of address, “Mister Atkins” and “sir.” The poem’s aforementioned closing line, “Tommy ain’t a bloomin’ fool—you bet that Tommy sees!” (9), reads like a warning (Parry 41), as Tommy attests to his ability to understand these kinds of rhetorical moves. Not only is Tommy adept at understanding this kind of playing with language, manipulating language, he also identifies language as central to social power imbalances. It’s not just the way that Tommy is treated in public spaces, or the poor quality of his food and uniforms, that upsets this speaker. What he repeatedly turns to in the chorus is the disparity between different words that are used to name him. Thus, from an early point in the collection, Tommy foregrounds the importance of rhetorical moves, and language play remains a central issue in the rest of the “Barrack-Room Ballads.”
Tommy’s interlingual dexterity is evident in a number of places in the collection, most overtly in “Route Marchin’,” the first page of the first edition of which is reprinted here as Figure 8. Unlike the majority of the “Barrack-Room Ballads,” “Route Marchin’” did not appear in The Scots Observer before being collected, and thus this printing is its first instance of publication. In this poem, it is evident that Tommy is not only attuned to language play in others; he is also proud of his own linguistic abilities, as can be seen when he wonders aloud: “we thinks o’ friends in England, an’ we wonders what they’re at / An’ ‘ow they would admire for to hear us sling the bat” (67). By “sling the bat,” Tommy means, speak Hindi, a skill he demonstrates by slipping into the Hindi language.

Figure 8: “Route Marchin’.” Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses. London: Methuen, 1892. 66-7. Courtesy of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.
Tommy mispronounces the Hindi word for language, “baat”—pronounced correctly, it doesn’t rhyme with “at”—but his mispronunciation allows him to bring in an allusion to cricket, subtly paralleling athletic and verbal prowess.

Moreover, at the end of the first instance of the chorus, which is indented on the first page and which is understood to repeat after each verse, Tommy quotes the words of “the Big Drum”:

With its best foot first  
And the road a-sliding past,  
An’ every bloomin’ campin’-ground exactly like the last;  
While the Big Drum says,  
With ‘is ‘rowdy-dowdy-dow!’—  
‘Kiko kissywarsti don’t you hamsher argy jow?’” (66)

The drum’s “rowdy-dowdy-dow” can be described as intersemiotic translation, as it translates from non-language to language, from aural sounds (drum-beats) to verbally articulated words; significantly, when Tommy quotes from the drum, he not only uses onomatopoeia and transliteration: he’s also interpretive. “Rowdy-dowdy-dow,” when you think about it, sounds as much like a drum as “cock-a-doodle-doo” sounds like the noise a rooster makes. But just as we use “cock-a-doodle-doo” to indicate the type of bird that speaks—a cock—and the meter and rhythm of that bird’s ‘speech’—“doodle” being a placeholder that gives us the scan, but not the content, of the birdcall (because roosters don’t have the ability to say “doodle”)—so too is “rowdy-dowdy-dow” an instance of interpretive onomatopoeia. It’s likely that “rowdy”—meaning disorderly—and “dowdy”—meaning unkempt—are adjectives that could be applied to the sound and condition of the drum as much as they are placeholders that replicate the meter and rhythm of the drum’s ‘speech.’

So in “rowdy-dowdy-dow,” Tommy provides a meaningful translation of the drum beat’s rhythm, decibel, and condition. But the Big Drum doesn’t only say “rowdy-dowdy-dow,” as the line that follows, half in English and half in a garbled mixture of Hindi and Gujarati, is likewise within quotation marks. Tommy gives his interpretive quotation of the drum—“rowdy-dowdy-dow”—and then he provides a translation, saying what “rowdy-dowdy-dow” means. It means: “kiko kissywarsti don’t you hamsher argy jow?”
Recall that the Big Drum is speaking to the “bullock-man,” who can, Tommy seems to believe, understand this mangled patois. This second line is a translation of the first, because “With ‘is ‘rowdy-dowdy-dow’” is a prepositional phrase that describes how the Big Drum speaks; “Kiko kissywarsti don’t you hamsher argy jow?” is what the Big Drum means when he says “rowdy-dowdy-dow.” Of course, it takes the editor-figure’s annotation for you and me to understand what “Kiko kissywarsti don’t you hamsher argy jow?” means—“Why don’t you get on?”—but, then, you and I don’t “sling the bat.” Yes, you and I might speak Hindi, but not the way that Tommy does—only he “slings the bat,” combining English words with mispronunciations of Hindi (reading “kissy” as “kis,” which introduces a question, similar to “who, what, or which”; “hamsher” as “hamesha,” “always, ever”; and “argy jow” as “agey jao,” “go ahead” or “get on”) and Gujarati (reading “kiko” as “kaae,” “why,” with a Hindi tag of “-ko”; and “warsti” as “vaaste,” “reason”).

Another piece in which Tommy uses translation to demonstrate his intelligence and experience is “Gunga Din.” Figure 9 is an excerpt from the first instance of the poem’s publication in a June 1890 issue of The Scots Observer. Even the most cursory of glances shows the quantity of transliteration from Urdu in this poem, signaled by the use of italics: bhisti, slippy hiterao, panee lao, juldee, and marrow. We get translations for some of these words in the annotations; some Tommy translates, as in “Water, get it! Panee lao!” (71)—the Urdu words simply repeat the English command. Certainly these foreign-language words may be integrated to distance the experienced speaker from the inexperienced new recruits that he addresses—the “you” of the first line who are “quartered safe out ’ere.” But Tommy’s English is as innovative—and as confusing—as his non-English words.

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28 Translation assistance provided by Swathi Swaminathan, PhD Candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto. See also Wagenaar’s Transliterated Hindi-Hindi-English Dictionary.

29 Of these terms, only two—bhisti (the title of a water-carrying servant) and panee (“water”)—can be found in the Hobson-Jobson. In the second edition of the dictionary, William Crooke, who took over for Yule and Burnell, cited the last four lines of “Gunga Din” in his definition of “bheesty” (Yule and Burnell 98; see also Teltscher 45-6).
BARRACK-ROOM BALLADS.

IX.—GUNGA DIN.

The 'bhisti,' or water-carrier, attached to regiments in India is often one of the most devoted of the Queen's servants. He is also appreciated by the men.

[THIS BALLAD IS EXTENSIVELY PLAGIARISED.]

YOU may talk o' gin an' beer
When you 're quartered safe out 'ere,
An' you 're sent to penny-fights an' Aldershot it;
But if it comes to slaughter
You will do your work on water,
An' you 'll lick the bloomin' boots of 'im that 's got it.
Now in Injia's sunny clime,
Where I used to spend my time
A-servin' of 'Er Majesty the Queen,
Of all them blackfaced crew
The finest man I knew
Was our regimental bhisti, Gunga Din.

He was ' Din ! Din ! Din !
You limping lump o' brick-dust, Gunga Din !
Hi ! slippy hitherao !
Water, get it! Panae lao!*
You squidy-nosed old idol, Gunga Din.'

The uniform 'e wore
Was nothin' much before,
An' rather less than 'arf o' that be'ind,
For a twisty piece o' rag
An' a goatskin water-bag
Was all the field-equipment 'e could find.
When the sweatin' troop-train lay
In a sidin' through the day,
Where the 'eat would make your bloomin' eyebrows crawl,
We shouted ' Harry By !' †
Till our throats were bricky-dry,
Then we wopped 'im 'cause 'e couldn't serve us all.

It was ' Din ! Din ! Din !
You 'eathen, where the mischief 'ave you been?
You put some juldee in it
Or I 'll marry you this minute ‡
If you don't fill up my helmet, Gunga Din !'

* Bring water swiftly. † Mr. Atkins' equivalent for 'O Brother!' ‡ Hit you.

Figure 9: "Gunga Din." The Scots Observer. 7 June 1890: 71. Courtesy of the British Library.
Keating notes that Kipling’s “linguistic inventiveness” with the London accent was of the sort that “had been absent in literature since the death of Dickens twenty years earlier” (64-5), and that, in the opening verse to “Gunga Din,” Tommy tries to find the right terms to express his scorn for those of his listeners who have never experienced the ultimate test. As the terms are not ready to hand, he makes some up: “penny-fights” for small frontier wars, and, with true poetic flair, he turns Aldershot, the name of the army training camp in Hampshire, into a verb. (72)

Tommy’s distinctive argot is not limited to the opening lines in “Gunga Din.” The unitalicized phrase “Harry By!” also needs an intralingual translation in the paratexts, while the word “Slippy,” in the phrase “Slippy hitherao,” from the indented chorus in the middle of the page, has clearly confused the editors at *The Scots Observer*: it’s an English-language slang term of address directed at Gunga Din, correctly unitalicized in later collected editions of the poem, and rendered as “Slippery” in an early Heinemann and Balestier edition of the collection (27), a misspelling that persists even today in some nonscholarly editions of Kipling’s poetry (see, for example, Penguin’s *The Family Album of Favorite Poems* [1983], Dover Publications’ *Best Remembered Poems* [1992], or Hearthstone Publications’ *The Barrack-Room Ballads of Rudyard Kipling* [1995]). “Hitherao” is Tommy’s mispronunciation of an Urdu expression that means “come here” (Broadview edition 773n); into this Urdu expression he integrates the English archaism “hither,” bringing the sense of ‘here-ness’ into the expression. So “Slippy hitherao” isn’t a transliterated Urdu expression, as the *Scots Observer* copy editor seemed to think, and as the italics suggest—it’s just Tommy’s way of calling “Slippy” hither.

Linked to Tommy’s linguistic innovation, and to his use of translation, is his desire to communicate the experience of a soldier’s life in the empire. Tommy’s songs bear witness to contemporary events; he commemorates the monotony of route marching,

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30 Co-owned by William Heinemann and Wolcott Balestier, the dedicatee of *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses*, Heinemann and Balestier published the *Review of Reviews* in London, and, in Leipzig, the *English Library Series*, which were English-language editions of works by popular writers like Kipling, Stevenson, Sarah Grand, and Margaret Oliphant. Although Balestier had previously worked for publishing houses that had printed unauthorized editions of Kipling’s work, the Heinemann and Balestier edition was not pirated (Towheed 427).
and the deaths of Gunga Din and Danny Deever, and the deaths as well of scores of other unnamed Tommies who die in the closing verses of “Ooonts,” “Snarleyow,” “Ford o’ Kabul River,” and “The Widow at Windsor.” Tommy’s argot does not obscure his testimony. The bulk of “The Young British Soldier,” for instance, is marked by Cockney pronunciation; the poem begins: “When the ’arf-made recruity goes out to the East / ’E acts like a babe an’ ’e drinks like a beast” (46). There is a stark contrast, though, when Tommy’s Cockney accent drops out of the first two lines of the poem’s closing stanza, with speech as plain as the landscape it describes:

When you’re wounded and left on Afghanistan’s plains,  
And the women come out to cut up what remains,  
Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains  
An’ go to your Gawd like a soldier.  
Go, go, go like a soldier,  
Go, go, go like a soldier,  
Go, go, go like a soldier,  
So-oldier of the Queen! (49)

In the stanza’s first two lines, Tommy restores the “d”s to his “ands,” using formal, standard English to articulate the horror of the situation he describes, before turning again to the Cockney “Jest” in the opening of the third line. He thereby underlines the contrast between the horror of the wounded, “so-old” young British soldier’s abandonment and the simplicity of the solution offered—suicide—as if “blow[ing] out your brains” were the natural succession to the other duties described in the poem, like “march[ing] to your front like a soldier” (48) and “wait[ing] for supports like a soldier” (49). Corinne Fowler argues that this stanza is “far and away the most universally cited of Kipling’s writings” about Afghanistan in twenty-first-century media depictions of British military action in the region (166), and that, “clearly these four lines promote an essentialised notion of a ferocious Afghan spirit” (164). What these lines also promote, though, are the unheroic aspects of military service, and the possibility of death without dignity. Much of the poem serves to debunk the assumptions about military life made by “all you recruities what’s drafted to-day” (46), and the shift in tone—earlier stanzas advised about women and drinking—is reinforced by Tommy’s code-switching. Tommy’s flexibility with language, therefore, serves to enhance his verses’ status as testimony. Like the Celtic Bard, who was “the mouthpiece for a whole society, articulating its values, chronicling its
history, and mourning the inexpressible tragedy of its collapse” (Trumpener 6), Tommy Atkins speaks for “the young British soldier,” tells the sorrowful unofficial history of empire, and emphasizes personal suffering and the human costs of empire.

Tommy repeatedly returns to translation, in its various forms, to establish his authority, and thus to lend credence to the events he relates to audiences in both the barrack-room and the drawing-room. In this way, Tommy can be aligned with narrators in Kipling’s short stories, who, as Arata has demonstrated, use Hindi and Anglo-Indian jargon to position themselves as insiders in an ex-pat community of which the reader may or may not be a part (155). Speakers who integrate foreign-language terms—transliterations rendered using the English alphabet—into their speech are positioning themselves in relation to their audience in a particular way; whether or not they provide explanations of these transliterations likewise communicates more than simply the content of the words they use. Significantly, and unlike Kipling’s early short stories, Tommy’s ballads contain notes, authored in a distinctive voice that is not Tommy’s, which translate from Atkinsese into English, and which position Tommy’s utterances as incomprehensible to those who are not a part of his in-group, unless they have a scholar to guide their reading.

5 Para-phrases: The Voice of the Editor

Much of the force of Tommy Atkins’s verse comes from his skillful use, misuse, and abuse of language. However, in the margins of the “Barrack-Room Ballads” lies the paratextual voice of the collection’s editor-figure, who undermines the force of Tommy’s claims by using the same rhetorical technique that Tommy uses: translation. While Tommy attempts to establish himself as an authority—attempts that are enacted in large part by translation—the collection’s editor-figure frames himself as more authoritative, more knowledgeable than Tommy, and he does so by retranslating Tommy’s words.

Kipling has thus created two archetypes in his “Barrack-Room Ballads”: the soldier-speaker and the ballad editor. Kipling provides Tommy with a riotous, rebellious voice, and then artifactualizes Tommy’s ballads via the persona of the editor-figure, framing Tommy and his words as objects of study rather than vital subjects. I refer to the
author of the paratexts as an editor-figure rather than “Kipling,” despite the “R. K.” signature to the dedicatory poem, because of the obvious difference between the historical person named Rudyard Kipling and the fictive version of himself, “Kipling” the persona, whose voice may or may not be present in his writing, and may or may not be present in these specific paratexts. Indeed, there is good reason to avoid conflating Kipling with the editor-figure; if they shared the same political agenda—to neutralize Tommy’s riotous speech—why would Kipling have given Tommy the words that he did in the first place? In providing both Tommy’s words and the words of the editor-figure, Kipling is able to present Tommy’s words while still rendering them presentable, through the editor-figure’s annotations. Like the English public, as they are characterized in “Tommy,” the presence of the editor-figure shows another register in which the “makin’ mock o’ uniforms” takes place (7).

Kipling’s inclusion of a frame and an editor-figure in the “Barrack-Room Ballads” is consistent with the scholarly apparatus of ballad collections discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, and in his commentary on Tommy’s songs, the editor does not situate Tommy as having any authority. Like those ballad collectors and editors who “tended to interpret away any political or social commentary they found” (Boos 206), Kipling’s editor-figure treats Tommy’s songs as any editor might treat any ballad collection. Much like collections of objects in a museum, ballad collections framed their objects of study with editorial commentary, especially historical notes and explanations or translations of non-standard English terms. This approach distances the presumed audience from the subjects and singers of the ballads. “Fuzzy-Wuzzy” and “Oonts,” for instance, are incomprehensible titles for an outsider, and the parenthetical descriptions included below each texts’ title—“(Soudan Expeditionary Force)” (10) and “(Northern India Transport Train)” (27), respectively—only further distance a civilian reader from the Tommy who is paratextually sublimated as a nonhuman entity, a “force” or a “train.” The editor-figure’s commentary frames the soldier-singer as belonging to one of those excised groups—“the irrational, the superstitious, the a-temporal, the primitive” (Fielding 167)—that modern Britain constructs and then preserves in particular forms in order to have categories against which it can be contrasted (see Duncan). The editor-figure’s process—selection, translation, and artifactualization—follows the same pattern as the
English Bard’s treatment of the Celtic Bard: imitation, appropriation, political neutralization.

The editor-figure also intervenes in Tommy’s songs by adding in-text parenthetical directions that clarify the performative aspects of the ballads. In “The Widow’s Party,” a bugle-blast punctuates the end of the first and the last stanzas: “(Bugle: Ta—rara—ra-ra-rara!” (57). Likewise, “Loot” contains repeated italicized directions, including “(Cornet: Toot! toot!)” and “(Chorus) Loo! loo!” (31, 33). “Shillin’ a Day” closes its first stanza with lines spoken by a “(Chorus)”, and its second with lines by a “(Full Chorus)”, which close both the song and the whole set of “Barrack-Room Ballads” with the capitalized, subjunctive, heavily-accented call, “GAWD SAVE THE QUEEN” (71). I describe these parenthetical interjections as the work of the editor-figure, as he is positioned as mediating the texts; however, whether or not they can be attributed definitively to this figure’s voice and fictional hand, they are certainly paratexts of the poems, as they don’t fit the meter of the lines they introduce. These in-text annotations, functioning like unspoken stage directions, turn nonverbal utterances into comprehensible onomatopoeia, and distinguish the words of a single speaker who speaks for a group from the words of that group, speaking together. By clarifying the shifts between sounds and voices, these parenthetical interruptions provide structure for these poems, formally shaping them via contextual cues.

Significantly, when the editor-figure of this collection speaks of Tommy, he calls him either “Thomas” or “Mr. Atkins” (2, 24 n, 27 n, 67 n)—names that Tommy never uses for himself, with the exception of the moments in “Tommy” where he assumes the voice of the British citizen. The editor-figure’s voice comes through in footnotes to the poems that appear at the bottom of the page, and in a poetic dedication, “To T. A.”—that is, “To Thomas Atkins.” In this poem, the voice of the editor-figure offers the contents of the book as “a song” which he appeals to Thomas’s authority to judge: “only you can tell me if it’s true” (2). It is, significantly, “Thomas” who is addressed in this poem—“And, Thomas, here’s my best respects to you!” is the repeated refrain of the dedication (2).

Gérard Genette has described dedications as acts of “demonstration, ostentation, and exhibition” that “proclaim a relationship” between the writer and the dedicatee (135)—so
the use of the name “Thomas” in the dedication, as well as elsewhere in the paratexts, perhaps suggests that the relationship between editor-figure and soldier-singer is closer to the relationship that Tommy has with the British public than to an equal relationship between peers. So although the poem is addressed “To T. A.,” a name marked by initials, and signed in parallel by the initials “R. K.” (2), there remains a disparity between this poem’s speaker and its subject, and between the voice of the paratexts and the voice of the poems that form the core of the “Barrack-Room Ballads.”

Many of the poems in the “Barrack-Room Ballads” are addressed to an incoming cohort of Tommies; however, Tommy’s intended audience is not the same as the editor-figure’s intended audience, as the editor translates for a readership that is unfamiliar with army activities, situations and slang. As T. S. Eliot noted, “the audience for the ballad includes many who are, according to the rules, highly educated; it includes many of the powerful, the learned, the highly specialized, the inheritors of prosperity” (10): this is the audience to whom the editor-figure addresses his words. Despite the collection’s dedication “To T. A.,” the “Barrack-Room Ballads” are aimed at a middle-class audience (see Dentith 166). With Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses, Kipling began his publishing relationship with Methuen and Co, and began putting out “high-priced, special issues in addition to the 6 shilling trade issue, printed on Dutch hand-made paper (225 copies, priced at 1 guinea [1 pound 1 shilling]), and on Japan paper (20 copies, signed by the publisher, at 2 guineas)” (Richards 51); these “special issue” editions hint at the range of readership there was for his poetry. Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses, when it was first published, was “a book which only the middle class could afford to buy,” and the editor-figure’s intervening frame rendered it appropriate for middle-class drawing-rooms (Parry 47).

While Tommy uses translation to establish himself as an authority, and to communicate his experiences effectively, the editor-figure retranslates in order to re-inscribe conventional social orders. The editor-figure takes the words of a societal outlier who is in the margins of the empire and turns these words back into formal, conventional English. To illustrate, I return to “Route Marchin’” and to Figure 8: “Kiko kissywarsti don’t you hamsher argy jow” is translated in the paratextual note as “Why don’t you get
on?” (66 n). For such a long line, this footnote is suspiciously short: Tommy’s five Hindi words are rendered in three English words, with the “don’t you” simply repeated. The editor-figure glosses over Tommy’s attempt to use Hindi and Gujarati intensifiers—a more literal translation would likely also note that Tommy is attempting to express exasperation by using the intensifiers, “kis vaaste” and “hamesha.” So Tommy is not just trying to say “Why don’t you get on?”—what he wants to say is perhaps closer to something like, “Why oh why don’t you ever get on?” The editor-figure simplifies Tommy’s mangled patois line, and takes out some of the suggested exasperation.

But the editor-figure’s role in this poem is more than that of simply translating; as the note on page 67—the annotation to the word “baat,” “language”—reveals, the editor-figure cannot help but interject with a comment on Tommy’s attempts at linguistic flair. The editor-figure writes: “Tommy’s first and firmest conviction is that he is a profound Orientalist and a fluent speaker of Hindustani. As a matter of fact, he depends largely on the sign-language” (67 n). While the “kiko kissywarsti” line would suggest that Tommy is aware of his lack of fluency—surely he knows that he must resort to English—here the editor-figure presents himself as the one with the access to “fact[s],” as the one with a more complete knowledge of Tommy’s situation than the soldier himself. So just as Tommy’s iteration of the drum’s speech is both an intersemiotic translation and an interpretation, in these annotations the editor-figure likewise provides both a translation and an interpretive commentary, but to a very different end from Tommy’s use of the same move.

Again, though, the technique that Tommy uses to flex his authoritative muscles—translation—is the same technique that the editor-figure uses to take away from Tommy’s power. In looking at “Gunga Din,” Figure 9, note not only the annotations, including one that translates from unconventional English to conventional English, but also the opening

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31 Wageneer translates “vaaste” as “for the sake of; in the name of” (707) and “kis” as the “oblique singular form of “kaun” (317), which means “who, which, what” (301). Wageneer’s example statements involving “kis” suggest the force with which it can be used, including “kis munh se,” “to have the cheek” and “kis khet kî múli ho,” “what are you worth, what do I care for you” (317). “Hamesha” is translated as “always, ever” (233).
comment at the top of the page: “The ‘bhisti’, or water-carrier, attached to regiments in India is often one of the most devoted of the Queen’s servants. He is also appreciated by the men” (71). Here, the editor-figure establishes himself as an authority on both para-regimental figures and “the men,” and he does this by translating and interpreting the word “bhisti.” The explanatory note, along with the series number, contextualizes the poem, presenting it to the public like a label on an object out of the South Kensington Museum, “packaged […] for easy consumption […], its truths revealed in a systematic manner” (Arata 166). The ambiguous parenthetical line, “This ballad is extensively plagiarised,” could suggest that Tommy has been looting other texts, or that other authors have tried to pass “Gunga Din” off as their own—a problem that Kipling frequently faced, as both small broadside producers and larger publishing houses made money out of pirated copies of his work (see Towheed).

It is not only in “Gunga Din” and “Route Marchin’” that the editor-figure condescends to Tommy. A note to the poem “Oonts” claims that Tommy repeatedly mispronounces the word “oont”—a transliteration of the Urdu word for “camel”—and provides the ‘correct’ pronunciation: “oo is pronounced like u in ‘bull,’ but by Mr. Atkins to rhyme with ‘front’” (27). The assumption underlying this comment is that the editor and his reader share the same, Standard English pronunciation of the words “bull” and “front.” In this annotation, the editor again calls Tommy “Mr. Atkins,” which is the name that Tommy chastises the public for using, hypocritically, in public celebrations of military service. The editor also again demonstrates that he has an authoritative knowledge not only of an Indian language but also “Atkinsese,” and he unpacks both languages for his audience.

As the dedicatory poem “To T. A.” shows, the editor-figure has confidence in the British public and British institutions—he says to Tommy, “oh there’ll surely come a day when they’ll give you all your pay / and treat you as a Christian ought to do” (2). This is an optimism that Tommy doesn’t seem to share. Tommy’s attempts at subversion, evident in more riotous pieces like “Shillin’ a Day” and “Loot,” still remain on the page, and his attempts at establishing himself as an authority—attempts that are enacted by translation—remain there to be read. Importantly, these attempts at subversion are not
erased or elided. The editor-figure, however, frames himself as more authoritative, more knowledgeable than Tommy, and he does so by retranslating Tommy’s words. Thus, Tommy’s destabilizing power that comes from the margins, and comes from pushing English into unfamiliar territory, is undermined by the voice that appears in the literal margins of the page.

6 Musical Settings: From “The Mouthpiece of a Whole Society” to a Whole Society’s Mouths

Even with the editor’s undercutting commentary, Tommy Atkins’s verses remain powerful sources of testimony, resisting the amnesia that Trumpener traces in Romantic-era “coming home” narratives (161). Trumpener follows the “imperial amnesia” (159) she attributes to the English appropriation of the Celtic Bard through novels like Mansfield Park and Guy Mannering, arguing that the “main strategy” of these Romantic novels is to present the empire “only as a kind of memory theater, which is entered indirectly” (191), the “final effect” of which is “to allow domestic concerns to drown out imperial ones” (192). While the editor-figure frames the ballads so as to try to make them presentable to the domestic sphere—England; the home—Tommy’s rousing, catchy rhythms resist the editor’s attempts to pin them to the page. Unlike ballad artifacts, Tommy’s words can be easily picked up and taken home; their stringing in the trendy rhythms of the music hall suggests they are not secured artifacts, but rather were made to be looted. Instead of then accessing Tommy’s voice “indirectly,” via the editor, the ballads facilitate a reader’s direct engagement with Tommy, as any reader can sing Tommy’s words in their own voice.

As ballads, with their catchy, predictable rhythms and repeated refrains, the poems easily facilitate singing along: sections of the chorus of “Loot!” are even marked with the musician’s annotations “((f))” (32)—fortissimo, from the Italian for “very loud”—and “((ff))” (34)—fortississimo, “as loudly as possible.” Innumerable versions of individual “Barrack-Room Ballads” have been put to music, in settings by Gerard Francis Cobb, Arthur Whiting, and Oley Speaks, to name only a few; the sheet music for these settings have been sold, either individually or in series. And while a series of sheet music
may seem to do as much as to make Tommy’s verses collectable as Kipling’s book does, the sheet music editions elide the editor-figure’s presence. In, for instance, George Chardwick Stock’s 1915 setting of “Route Marchin’” (Figures 10a and 10b), an annotation to aid pronunciation is included (5), with the aim of helping the singer to better take up Tommy’s voice, while the editor’s undercutting comment on Tommy’s language skills is omitted: in the sheet music footnote, Tommy is not “Mr. Atkins” but is “us” (7).

Of the approximately two thousand different versions and editions of musical settings of Kipling’s work compiled by Brian Mattinson for The Kipling Society, many of which are from the 1892 series of “Barrack-Room Ballads,” there is only one version of “To T. A.” listed, which suggests that singers were much more likely to repeat “Oh it’s Tommy this an’ Tommy that” than the editor’s confident “O there’ll surely come a day /
When they’ll give you all your pay.” This is not to suggest that the singing public necessarily used Tommy’s words as rallying calls to enact the kind of change that Tommy’s verses implicitly call for; nonetheless, when the “Barrack-Room Ballads” are set to music to be sung in the drawing-room, these songs become a means for imperial concerns to drown out, in *fortissimo* and then *fortississimo*, domestic concerns; thus, the Banjo Bard resists the containment strategies of collectors, editors, and publishers.

Just like “Chevy Chase,” which, over centuries, continually moved back and forth between oral and print culture (Fox 3), Kipling’s ballads shift from the printed page to a singer’s mouth—sung to original settings like those of Cobb, Whiting, Speaks, or Stock, or to well-known popular or traditional tunes—and back again into print via sheet music, or via unauthorized ephemera—pirated pamphlets, broadsides, and small books—that were published without permission and sold at a low cost. The movement from print to non-print and back to print again unfixes the editor-figure, restoring the primacy of Tommy’s voice and its ability to speak authoritatively about life in Greater Britain. Some soldiers stationed in the empire wrote their own poetry in the style of the “Barrack-Room Ballads” (MacDonald 148), and others “set the *Ballads* to old tunes and sang them on foreign expeditions” (Attridge 72), suggesting that, like the Celtic Bard before him, the Banjo Bard is “the mouthpiece for a whole society, articulating its values, [and] chronicling its history” (Trumpener 6). Trumpener argues that “bardic composition not only bears witness to but resists English cultural violence” (5). The ability of the “Barrack-Room Ballads” to resist the editor-figure’s containment strategies speaks to the persistence of this aspect of bardic nationalism in the Banjo Bard’s verses.

7  “Other Verses,” Other Ballads

Ann Parry suggests that the *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* reflects Kipling’s change of attitude in the few short years between the poems’ first instances of publication in the *Scots Observer* and their later reissue in the 1892 edition, as the “critic of the dominant culture by the *Barrack-Room Ballads* appeared […] by 1892 to have been contained within the more law-abiding framework of the *Other Verses*” (50). Parry finds evidence for this “more law-abiding framework” in the increased number of higher-
ranking members of the military that appear in the “Other Verses”: the Colonel in “The Ballad of East and West”; Captain O’Neil in “The Ballad of Boh Da Thone”; the titular figures of “The Rhyme of the Three Captains,” and so on. And while, as I have argued, the 1892 “Barrack-Room Ballads” take up the conventions of the ballad and the politics of the Celtic Bard, the “Other Verses,” as Dentith has shown, pastiche the ballad, and present “a knowing simulacrum” which is “enjoyed for its own sake” (159). While critics often point to Kipling’s transposition of the Scottish Border to the borders of empire in, for instance, the pseudo-reiver ballad “The Lament of the Border Cattle Thief”—whose “winsome wife / […] weeps at Shalimar” (125) rather than Selkirk—what is significant for my purposes is the lack of a Banjo Bard in these poems. Rather than being voiced by a single figure with whom soldiers and citizens identified and empathized, the “Other Verses” come from a range of perspectives and comment on a range of topics. They lack, too, an editor-figure whose consistent voice and tone creates a frame that, though undercutting, serves to unify a series of verses as a collection.

In 1896, Kipling put out a second series called “Barrack-Room Ballads,” this time within the volume The Seven Seas. Keating has noted that the first piece in this series describes not only another Tommy Atkins but also Kipling’s own process: “The first poem of the group is ‘Back to the Army Again’, in which a reservist, disillusioned with civilian life, pretends he hasn’t been in the army before and re-enlisted: by writing more Barrack-Room Ballads, Kipling, like the reservist, is going ‘back to the army again’” (76). This second series, however, doesn’t feature the same editor-figure, framing and containing Tommy’s verses. The introductory poem, rather than a dedication that separates the compiler from the speaker like “To T. A.,” is instead an untitled piece:

When ‘Omer smote ‘is bloomin’ lyre,
He’d ‘eard men sing by land an’ sea;
An’ what he thought ‘e might require,
‘E went an’ took—the same as me!

The market-girls an’ fishermen,
The shepherds an’ the sailors, too,
They ‘eard old songs turn up again,
But kep’ it quiet—same as you!
They knew ‘e stole; ‘e knew they knowed.
They didn’t tell, nor make a fuss,
But winked at ‘Omer down the road,
An’ ‘e winked back—the same as us! (162)

In Tommy’s voice, this prefatory poem celebrates a tradition of literary borrowing that stretches back to a Cockneyfied Homer, who is rendered as a lyre-strumming bard, in line with Newman’s balladic *Iliad*. While the poems that follow this introduction do sometimes contain annotations, none comment on Tommy, and none undermine his authority. Figure 11, of the first page of “The ‘Eathen,” contains three of the series’ nine footnotes, which are representative of all nine: in them, individual words are translated without additional comment. Unlike the 1892 collection, this series doesn’t have an editor-figure with a distinctive voice.

But while this second series of “Barrack-Room Ballads” is presented as Kipling’s return to the army, with the same “old songs turn[ing] up again” (162), they do so without
the sting of Tommy’s first series. In the 1896 series, there are no poems depicting all ranks of servicemen stealing from natives, no poems describing motiveless murders. While there are poems describing violent death and unheroic actions, the series as a whole is less unified in its purpose; unlike the earlier “Barrack-Room Ballads,” the second series doesn’t combine to emphasize Tommy’s authority, or the importance of his testimony. The speakers of the 1896 “Barrack-Room Ballads” are much more individualized than the 1892 series. In the second series, different poems are dedicated to different positions within the military: the Engineer in “Sappers,” the Horse-Gunner in “The Jacket,” the Royal Marines in “Soldier an’ a Sailor Too.” With this differentiation goes Tommy’s unified and unifying voice, and, along with it, the banjo bardic notion of speaking as “the mouthpiece for a whole society” (Trumpener 6). As Keating points out, “two of the eighteen new poems (“Bill ‘Awkins” and “Mary, Pity Women”) are music-hall songs with nothing to do with the army; and “The Mother-Lodge,” though set in India and given army connections, is more a spirited personal tribute to the egalitarian atmosphere of freemasonry than a barrack-room ballad” (76). There is, in short, little need for an editor-figure to undercut the 1896 series’ speaker.

Drawing on a line from Edward FitzGerald’s The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, Richard Cronin argues that translation was “important to Victorian poets, perhaps, […] because it allowed them to take a stance ‘neither Here nor There’” (124). By giving voice to the vulgar, sometime riotous words of the 1892 Tommy Atkins—words that both translate and are “watered-down” (Brereton 98), translated argot—and then undercutting these same words via the editor-figure’s translating frame, Kipling is able to stand “neither Here nor There,” neither fully condemning nor fully supporting Tommy’s view of life in the empire. In the ballads in which translation figures less prominently—the “Other Verses” and the second series of “Barrack-Room Ballads”—Kipling’s message is manifested less ambiguously, and the Tommy Atkins whose voice was so readily taken up by both soldiers and the English-speaking masses becomes, in “The Ballad of Boh Da Thone,” simply a silent, obedient, doomed collective:

The worn white soldiers in Khaki dress,
Who tramped through the jungle and camped in the byre,  
Who died in the swamp and were tombed in the mire,  

Who gave up their lives, at the Queen’s Command,  
For the Pride of the Race and the Peace of the Land. (113)

8 Conclusions

The 1892 series of “Barrack-Room Ballads” suggest not the decline and death of the ballad, but rather the genre’s perseverance, its strength to break free from editorial framing techniques, and its ability to convey bardic testimony even after over a century of political neutralization and increasing artifactualization. And while these ballads are the end-product of the same process of colonization and appropriation that brought about both the Empire and the English Bard, this narrative of decline is countered by the ballad’s persistence as a genre of unofficial history and of individual testimony that speaks for a whole society. An overemphasis on the narrative of increasingly successful, systemic artifactualization fails to account for previous shifts the genre has undergone—those changes to the bardic institution that Trumpener traces in the Romantic period—and so interprets the shift to banjo bardic nationalism as part of the ballad’s death-throes.

This is not to say that reading the “Barrack-Room Ballads” as reflecting another shift in the history of the ballad is not a politically problematic move. The Banjo Bard is as much an appropriation of a Celtic institution as the English Bard; this appropriation simply leads to a different end, suited to a different time. Kipling, however, didn’t see appropriation as problematic. For him, the ballad represents yet another piece of loot that the English can take and make their own. The “Barrack-Room Ballads” do not call the project of colonialism into question, but merely its practice. Kipling offers a critique of the way in which empire is enacted—the treatment of Tommy, the conditions that set up the justification of looting—without offering a critique of empire itself.

Dentith concludes his chapter on Kipling as follows: “He was an unconscionable man, who professed some ferocious and insupportable political views, which were at the heart of his poetry. But he nevertheless solved some artistic problems which defeated most of his contemporaries” (174). Thomas Pinney has described this kind of move as the
“yes, but” approach to Kipling criticism (119). My intention, in this chapter, has been to offer a new approach, replacing “yes, but,” with “yes, and so.” Kipling believed that poets of Muizenberg and Melbourne wrote true “English poesy”—as we have seen in “The Flowers”—and that, to “know England,” you had to “know” her empire as well—as we have seen in “The English Flag.” Kipling was, as Dentith notes, a man with “some ferocious and insupportable political views”—racism, colonialism—“which were at the heart of his poetry.” And so I read Kipling’s creation of the Atkinese argot as a promiscuous looting, and read as well an appropriating cultural violence in his approach to the ballad genre. With this “yes, and so” approach, we can find evidence for a counter-narrative to the trajectory of ballad containment and artifactualization.

Reading Kipling as the Banjo Bard of Empire, and reading the “Barrack-Room Ballads” as participating in a new iteration of the bardic tradition, counters the narrative of the death of balladry that pervaded late-nineteenth-century conceptions of the ballad artifact. While Morris’s ballad translations suggest that the ballad is a genre that won’t stay dead, Kipling’s early ballads show that, even when combined with the rhythms of the music hall, even when transported to new territories, even when parodying the subject matter of the ballad, and even when not entirely in English, the genre is still politically vital, and can still be put to bardic purposes.
Chapter 3
Englishing Boldly: Robert Louis Stevenson’s Polynesian Ballads

No case for literalness [in translations] can be based on a desire to retain the meaning. Meaning is served far better—and literature and language far worse—by the unrestrained license of bad translators. (Benjamin 78)

In a letter to Edmund Gosse dated April 1891, Robert Louis Stevenson succinctly summed up the critical response to the collection of ballads he had published five months earlier: “By the by, my Ballads seem to have been dam bad” (Letters 7: 106). His critics were more long-winded: in the Spectator, R.H. Hutton wrote, “[t]here is not one of these ballads which does not leave the reader with a sense of disappointment” (qtd. in Maixner 369); Cosmo Monkhouse, in Academy, professed that he could not believe that the celebrated author of Kidnapped would include such “infelicities of expression and defects of style” in his ballads, “except by way of a joke” (qtd. in Maixner 372). Even Stevenson’s friend Gosse hated the book, writing in a letter to George Armour, “the versification is atrocious” (qtd. in Maixner 374). Particularly lambasted was the first of the five poems in the collection, “Song of Rahéro: A Legend of Tahiti,” which was faulted for its stumbling verse, awkward phrasing, and confusing transitions. This criticism is not without basis: one of many examples of strikingly awkward versification in the poem is the image of the titular character, who, at a climactic moment—facing death, trapped in a burning building with his entire extended family—is described by Stevenson as follows: “Rahéro stooped and groped. He handled his womankind” (24).

It is possible that the dearth of literary criticism on Ballads can be attributed as much to the collection’s aesthetic defects as to the collection’s contemporary unpopularity; however, this chapter argues, in keeping with Walter Benjamin, that while “literature and language” might not have been well-served by Stevenson, the “bad translator” nonetheless strived “to retain the meaning” of his sources. By examining the features of Stevenson’s Polynesian translations explicitly identified by his critics as “bad,” I show that Stevenson attempted to translate ethically, and that his particular type of translation—an adaptation that attempts to retain markers of its source text while still
emphasizing Tahitian and Anglophone cultural parity—enabled him to produce a work that was radically different from other contemporary depictions of Tahitian people, such as those found in the writings of evolutionary anthropologists. For Stevenson, ethical translation entailed responsibility to his Tahitian sources—collecting and preserving traditional stories that he believed were going to be lost—and entailed as well responsibility to his readers in the UK and US, to whom he targeted his ballads, and for whom he emphasized the similarities of Indigenous Tahitians. Stevenson’s translations undo assumptions about invisible and visible translation proposed by translation theorists like Lawrence Venuti, who claims that translators who write themselves out of their work cannot produce ethical or politically progressive texts.

Stevenson’s *Ballads*—and especially his Polynesian poems—represent an attempt to force new directions for the genre. Rather than align the ballad with Scottish, English, or British national identity, as did poets like W. E. Aytoun (*Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers*), A. C. Swinburne (*Ballads of the English Border*), and Robert Buchanan (*The New Rome: Poems and Ballads of Our Empire*), Stevenson played on the genre’s malleability, producing a highly hybridized text that emphasizes cross-cultural similarities. The meter of “Song of Rahéro” is unique, and, I shall argue, is influenced by Tahitian oral poetry; the poem’s irregular rhythms ensure that the hexameters sound like long lines, rather than two trimeters. This chapter argues that Stevenson brings Tahitian rhythms into his hexameters, and hexameters into the ballad, in an attempt to challenge conventional ideas about ‘savage’ people and cultures to his Anglophone readers.

This attempted challenge, however, failed. Although he tried to translate in a way that made the legend comprehensible to an Anglophone audience, “A Song of Rahéro” baffled Stevenson’s readers. Hutton called it unintelligible (qtd. in Maixner 374). Critics hated *Ballads*, and buyers snubbed it. In a letter to his former schoolmate H. B. Baildon, Stevenson derided “the average man at home” who was so “sunk over the ears in Roman civilization” that he could not comprehend the legends of non-classical peoples, with the result that “a tale like that of ‘Rahéro’ falls on his ears inarticulate” (Letters 7: 187). Responding, perhaps, to his disappointment with readers at home, Stevenson did not persevere in his attempt to translate the ballad form. “Song of Rahéro” was to be Stevenson’s last ballad, as he turned to the lyric in *Songs of Travel* and to prose for the
majority of his South Seas works. What Stevenson’s Polynesian translations provide, therefore, is a particular depiction of Indigenous people and culture unique in Stevenson’s oeuvre and counter to contemporary ideas—indeed, so counter as to be at best unpopular and at worst incomprehensible.

Stevenson’s impetus in translating “Rahéro” and the associated legends was the desire to collect and preserve the cultural productions of a group of people whom he perceived to be dying out. The end result is not necessarily an artifactualized ballad; while certain aspects of Stevenson’s *Ballads* conform to the conventions of the ballad collection, a significant portion of the criticism in the reviews of the work point to its being insufficiently artifactualized, insufficiently “domesticated […] for genteel consumption,” to borrow Michael Cohen’s description of ballad artifacts (“Whittier” 15). Ballad artifacts are necessarily distanced from the reader, and while “Rahéro” is presented as a decidedly exotic text, the poem also includes a series of moves that both emphasize the differences between reader and subject and yet collapse these distinctions—for instance, Stevenson’s poem puts English words in the mouths of Tahitians, and, in his paratexts, Tahitian words in the mouths of his readers, rendering the text embodied rather than encased and untouchable. While Morris’s paratexts serve to underscore the vitality of the poems he translates, and while Kipling’s paratexts are written in the voice of an editor-figure whose studious, dismissive retranslations of Tommy Atkins’ words serve both to undercut Tommy’s authority and to parody the conventions of the ballad collection, Stevenson’s paratexts make visible the process of translation, restoring Stevenson as an authorial presence, and thus complicating the radical politics of the core text.

1 Ballads in Stevenson’s Oeuvre

Canonically considered an author of adventure fiction, and known best for *Treasure Island* (1883), *Kidnapped* (1886), and the Gothic novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Robert Louis Stevenson was also a poet. His *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (1885) is still a popular book of children’s poetry, while his other collections, *Underwoods* (1887), written in English and Scots, and *Songs of Travel and Other Verses*
(1896), do not circulate much outside of a small scholarly audience. In both Underwoods and Songs of Travel, the genre used more than any other is the short ode—lyric gifts of two or three stanzas dedicated “To Will H. Low,” “To H. F. Brown,” “To Andrew Lang,” “To W. E. Henley,” “To My Father,” “To A Gardener,” “To an Island Princess,” “To Mother Maryanne,” “To My Old Familiars,” and so on. While A Child’s Garden of Verses and Songs of Travel are entirely lyric, Underwoods does contain some examples of narrative poetry in the Scots section: “A Lowden Sabbath Morn,” “Embro Hie Kirk,” and “Late in the nicht in bed I lay,” for instance. Stevenson, however, doesn’t refer to any of these poems as “ballads.”

Before delving into an analysis of the ways in which Stevenson translated the ballad genre with his 1890 collection, some context for his specific use of the term is necessary. Stevenson explicitly discussed the ballad in an 1874 book review in Academy, describing “the object of the ballad” as “quite at the other end of the scale from any of the realistic arts” (142). For Stevenson, particular tropes, themes, and characters are balladic, rather than particular rhythms or verse forms. Although he certainly would have associated the term “ballad” with songs and poetry, his references to the ballad tend to emphasize the genre’s conventional characters and plotlines: for instance, early in Kidnapped, shortly after finding himself on the Covenant, Mr. Riach describes David Balfour’s disinherited position as “like a ballad” (64), and, at the novel’s conclusion, David sums up his situation by proclaiming that “the beggar in the ballad had come home” (272). Even at his Vailima estate in Samoa, Stevenson saw echoes of ballad types, noting in an August 1892 letter to Sidney Colvin that Bazett Haggard (brother of Rider, and Land Commissioner in Samoa) once overtook him on horse, “shouting ‘Ride, ride!’ like a hero in a ballad” (Letters 7: 360).

Weir of Hermiston, Stevenson’s unfinished final novel, is frequently discussed in criticism as a text highly influenced by the ballad (for example, see Fielding 196, Hasler 4, Reid 168-9). In Weir of Hermiston, the third-person narrator, who looks back to the setting of the novel, imagines its protagonists as “ballad heroes” displaced in prose:

Some century earlier the last of the minstrels might have fashioned the last of the ballads out of that Homeric fight and chase; but the spirit was dead […] and the
While David Balfour can picture himself to be a ballad hero, Hob, Gib, Clem, and Dand Elliott—the “Four Black Brothers” of the narrator’s imagined prose-ballad—belong to a time in which balladry is a thing of the past. It is unclear whether the distinction between Kidnapped’s balladic-hero and Weir’s proclamation of the death of balladry is due to the different settings of the two novels—David Balfour’s narrative is set in 1751, and the death of Gilbert Elliot section of Weir in 1804—or to a difference between the perspective of the teenage Balfour, who narrates his story, and the perspective of the backwards-looking omniscient narrator of Weir. While almost a decade separates the composition of these two texts, it does not seem to be the case that Stevenson’s opinion of the cultural resonance of the ballad genre changed with time, as, within a year of the publication of the earlier novel Kidnapped, Stevenson wrote an essay titled “The Day After To-morrow” in which he posited a “New-Old” future of rural rebellion and, potentially, “a return of ballad literature” (479). This suggests that Stevenson, like the narrator of his unfinished novel, believed that “the last of the minstrels” had stopped composing ballads. Stevenson’s Ballads are thus written in a dead genre.

Stevenson also seems to have associated the genre of the ballad with Scotland, although this connection is not stated explicitly in his writing. The aforementioned ballad allusions come from novels set in Scotland, while the subtitles of “Ticonderoga” and “Heather Ale”—two of the poems in Stevenson’s Ballads—indicate their origins lie in the West Highlands and Galloway, respectively. Stevenson drew comparisons between Scotland and the South Pacific in In the South Seas—he parallels Polynesian and Scots pronunciation (13) and geography (18)—and, as Jenni Calder has demonstrated,

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32 As Catherine Kerrigan has noted, the reference to Dumas’ The Three Musketeers (1844) is an anachronism.

33 The idea of the ballad as a dead genre was not unique to Stevenson at the close of the nineteenth century. Thomas Hardy, for instance, claimed that the ballad was “slain at a stroke by […] London comic songs” (25).
Stevenson’s travels in the South Pacific islands caused him to look anew at, and represent anew, his homeland. Again, however, it is an overtone of death that unites Stevenson’s descriptions of these two cultural groups. In his prefatory comments to *Underwoods*, Stevenson describes the Scottish poets that preceded him as having written in “the ghosts of speech,” the Scots that is “our own dying language” (xii); he laments, “[t]he day draws near when this illustrious and malleable tongue shall be quite forgotten” (xi). In parallel, in *In the South Seas*, the populations of a number of islands are described as being in rapid decline, with the result that “pleasures are neglected, the dance languishes, the songs are forgotten” (27). At one point, Stevenson posits “a graveyard with its humble crosses” as “the aptest symbol of the future” of the Marquesas (102). In Polynesia, the metaphor of cultural ‘death’ is literalized: “the houses are down, the people dead, their lineage extinct; and the sweepings and fugitives of distant bays and islands encamp upon their graves” (58). “In both cases”—Polynesian and Scottish—the source of this death is colonialism: “an alien authority enforced, the clans disarmed, the chiefs deposed, new customs introduced” (12). The pervasive tone in Stevenson’s interconnected discussions of Polynesian cultures, Scots language, and the ballad genre, is one of an inevitable decline towards death.

2 Composition of the *Ballads*

First published in 1890, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Ballads* contains five original narrative poems: “The Song of Rahéro: A Legend of Tahiti,” “The Feast of Famine: Marquesan Manners,” “Ticonderoga: A Legend of the West Highlands,” “Heather Ale: A Galloway Legend,” and “Christmas at Sea.” The collection was published simultaneously in the UK, with Chatto & Windus, and in the US, with Charles Scribner’s Sons. The first two poems, which feature Polynesian subjects, make up the majority of the work—53 of the 85 pages in the Scribner’s edition. “Ticonderoga” (first published in Scribner’s Magazine in December 1887) and “Heather Ale” are shorter Scottish ballads about murder and guilt, and “Christmas at Sea” (first published in Scots Observer in December 1888) is about a young sailor who misses his family at Christmastime.

Stevenson had planned a project much larger than the one he ended up publishing. He sought to write “the big book on the South Seas” (Letters 6: 401), and imagined it to
be divided into two volumes of South Seas stories, one in poetry and the other in prose (see Edmond 186; Hillier 58). Around the time that he was writing “Song of Rahééro,” Stevenson imagined that it would belong to a collection called *South Seas Ballads*, which he described in a letter to E. L. Burlingame, the editor of Scribner’s Magazine, as consisting of “Feast of Famine,” “Song of Rahééro,” and “A Hawaiian fellow […] ‘The Priest’s Drought’, or some such name” (Letters 6: 246). However, as Claire Harman’s biography shows, over the course of his life Stevenson frequently imagined novels, collections, and other books that went unfinished (xvi, 44). By August of 1890, Stevenson had decided that “[t]he deuce is in this volume,” and that the five poems already composed could be published together until the title of *Ballads* (Letters 6: 411). Despite the frustration that composing the volume caused him, Stevenson repeatedly defended his Polynesian ballads, saying in a letter to Baildon: “I do know how to tell a yarn, and two of the yarns [in Ballads] are great” (Letters 7: 187). This chapter will thus focus on Stevenson’s two “great yarns”—his first attempts at depicting Polynesian people, culture, and language in narrative form.

Stevenson began writing his Polynesian ballads while in Tahiti, an early stop on his South Seas tour on the hired yacht the *Casco*. After years of fragile health, Stevenson left San Francisco for the South Pacific in late June 1888, travelling with a small party that included his wife Fanny, adult stepson Lloyd, and mother Margaret. Marquesas was their first port of call, and the first Polynesian poem that Stevenson wrote, “The Feast of Famine: Marquesan Manners”—dated 5-16 October 1888 in the Morgan Library autograph manuscript, and thus dating from Stevenson’s stay in the Tahitian capital, Papeete—accords with the descriptions of Stevenson’s first encounters with Indigenous Polynesians contained in his posthumously published *In the South Seas*.34 “Feast of

34 In her 1905 “Preface to the Biographic Edition of Underwoods and Ballads,” Fanny Stevenson claims that “Feast of Famine” was written after “Song of Rahééro”: “My husband found the change from his usual work so restful and pleasant that he was encouraged to attempt another South Sea ballad, the scene to be laid in the Marquesas. This ballad, begun in Tautira, was finished on board the yacht Casco, between Tahiti and Hawaii, amid every possible discomfort” (82). The manuscript evidence, however, suggests otherwise, as does a letter Stevenson wrote to Burlingame in January 1889 (Letters 6: 246). The seventeen years that passed between the date of the composition of the poems and Fanny’s Preface may have reversed the events in her memory.
Famine” depicts an “ignorant crowd” of cannibals who “glee for a diet of man” so much that they murder one of their own, a young man who returned to the village, in spite of warnings from his lover, to warn of an impending attack by enemy raiders (46). The depiction of the “ignorant crowd” resonates strongly with Stevenson’s descriptions, in In the South Seas, of his earliest impressions of Indigenous Polynesians: just as the villagers in the ballad are depicted with “a bestial droop of the lip and a swinish rheum in the eye” (53), so too does Stevenson imagine the Marquesans he meets to be “something bestial […] like furred animals” (ISS 8, 9)—at first. As In the South Seas shows, subsequent encounters with Indigenous Polynesians leads Stevenson to believe that his initial impression gave “a very false opinion of Marquesan manners” (15); nonetheless, the ballad with the ironic subtitle of “Marquesan Manners”—ironic so long as “manners” implies a code of polite social conduct, as it does in this quotation from In the South Seas—draws on these first impressions, and depicts its subjects as base savages.

As his first literary production in the South Pacific, “Feast of Famine” represents an attempt to marry the traveller’s first impressions of Polynesia with the tourist’s pre-existing ideas of what the South Pacific should look like.35 As Tulloch notes, “Stevenson did not approach the South Sea islands with a blank mind; he had already surrounded them with stories and literary images” (76)—“literary images” from works like Herman Melville’s Omoo: A Narrative of the South Seas, which Stevenson carried with him on his travels and heavily annotated (Hillier 10). While the paratextual comments that follow “Feast of Famine” note the ballad’s fictional status—it “rests upon no authority” (55)—the poem’s eight footnotes function similarly to the footnotes in “Rahéro,” pointing to the accuracy of the ethnographic details in the poem: the priest’s eyes are “ruby-red” because of “the abuse of kava”; “the one-stringed harp” is “[u]sually employed for serenades”; the final footnote points to a discrepancy between “fact” and poetic license (53). While these footnotes seem to suggest the careful observations of a traveller, the poem as a whole is

35 Stevenson’s use of the word “tourist” in In the South Seas is usually pejorative, as in, for instance, his comment that his acquaintance with the Marshall Islands is “no more than that of a tourist” (70), or his reference to “a Highland hamlet, quite out of reach of any tourist” (15). In his commentary on “Feast of Famine,” Stevenson describes himself as “a traveller” (55).
indebted as much to its literary precedents as to Stevenson’s own experience in Polynesia: Robert Hillier notes that a number of the ethnographic details that appear in the poem overlap with Melville’s *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (61-2), while the dominance of character stereotypes—the noble and ignoble savage—attest to the influence of the literature that Stevenson consulted in advance of his Polynesian travels, including Charles Warren Stoddard’s *South Sea Idylls*, Pierre Loti’s *The Marriage of Loti*, Alexander G. Findlay’s *A Directory for the Navigations of the South Pacific*, amongst others (Hillier 10-13).  

With time, however, Stevenson’s perspective shifted, and his characterization of Native Polynesian people and cultures became more nuanced. While his letters of 1889 defend the quality of “Feast of Famine”—it has more “fire” than “Rahéro,” he tells Colvin (*Letters* 6: 239)—by 1891 he no longer writes of the Marquesan ballad. Calder has described the Pacific as “Mr. Hyde territory” (16); in “Feast of Famine,” Stevenson locates Edward Hyde in an ‘Other’ race, but, with time and experience, he comes to find that Hyde is, as in *The Strange Case*, not found in the Other but in the self. In his later works, Stevenson depicts the negative “savage” traits evident in “Feast of Famine”—greed, gluttony, disloyalty—in white men like “The Beach of Falesá”’s own strange Case, a trader who acts the “gentleman” while manipulating local superstition in order to continue his monopoly on copra (117), and *The Ebb-Tide*’s Attwater, who, as Oliver Buckton has demonstrated, has only a veneer of Cambridge education and Christian manners covering an interiority “‘gone native,’ acting out his primitive and acquisitive impulses and setting free his aggression from moral restraint” (173). In his later Pacific works, Stevenson’s villains are not cannibals but rather those greedy white men whose lust for fortune parallels the lust for flesh of the ballad’s Natives. While “Feast of Famine” reinforces stereotypes of the noble and the ignoble savage, with “Song of Rahéro” Stevenson sought to present a more complicated picture of “savage psychology” (*Letters* 7: 187).

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36 In describing his first encounter with Marquesans in *In the South Seas*, Stevenson states that Findlay’s “Directory (my only guide) was full of timid cautions” (9).
“Song of Rahéro,” written a few months after “Feast of Famine,” nuances his first impressions, and strives for a “high[er] degree of accuracy” in its representation of Polynesian people and cultures (55). Whereas “Feast of Famine” is described in Stevenson’s notes to the poem as “rest[ing] upon no authority” (55), “Song of Rahéro” is a “native story” (55), “received from tradition” (31) when Stevenson was in the rural Tahitian village of Tautira, between 28 October and 25 December 1888. “Song of Rahéro” is the longest of a number of translations that Stevenson made of the literature of the Tevas. These translations are unique amongst Stevenson’s South Seas writing: unlike his Pacific letters, essays, short stories, or journals, “Song of Rahéro” is a pre-contact narrative—an adaptation of a Tahitian story. The translations are also the only pieces in Stevenson’s Polynesian oeuvre that are set in Tahiti and are concerned with Tahitian culture. This poem, as Rod Edmond notes, represented “something quite new” in Stevenson’s work (186). As the manuscript for “Rahéro” is no longer extant, its composition process can only be inferred; however, archival material held in the Beinecke Rare Books Library at Yale University suggests that Stevenson worked with Tahitian friends on the translation of related poems, and in the notes to “Rahéro” Stevenson claims that “as many as five different persons have helped me with details” (31).

There is no critical consensus as to whom Stevenson collaborated with on the composition of “Song of Rahéro.” Fanny Stevenson’s 1905 “Preface to the Biographic Edition of Underwoods and Ballads” suggests that, while Princess Moë—a friend and nurse to Stevenson, and the dedicatee of his poem “To an Island Princess,” from Songs of Travel—first explained the story, it was “afterwards corroborated and enriched by the high chief Tati [Salmon],” who was Moë’s brother (82). Ben Finney and Edmond claim Princess Moë was Stevenson’s primary source for “Rahéro” (94; 186). Vanessa Smith suggests that the Tahitian handwriting on the manuscript pages held in the Beinecke Collection at Yale University may belong to Ori a Ori, the sub-chief who lent his house to

37 While the first two chapters of The Ebb-Tide focus on Robert Herrick’s arrival in Tahiti, his is not a specifically Tahitian story; while Herrick lands on Papeete, the beach could just have easily have been any one of the Samoan, Hawaiian, or Gilbert Islands (Edmond 180). Native Tahitians do not figure prominently in the story, and the setting soon shifts to the uncharted “New Island.”
the Stevensons during their stay in Tautira (142), while Finney suggests that some of this handwriting on these manuscripts may have belonged to Queen Joanne Marau Ta’aroa Tepau Salmon (usually called Queen Marau), sister of Tati and Moë and ex-wife of the French Governor King Pomare V, with whom Stevenson exchanged letters after his departure from Tahiti (95-6). Ori a Ori, Princess Moë, Queen Marau, and Tati Salmon: these are possibly four of Stevenson’s “five different persons [who] have helped” him to produce “Rahéro.”

There is no way to determine how faithful Stevenson’s translation was to the version of the story told to him by these five persons, nor should that proximity be the criterion by which Stevenson’s poem is judged, as my discussion of Morris’s translations in Chapter One, above, makes clear. On a theoretical level, as Linda Hutcheon notes, a text like “Rahéro” is “a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary” (9); and, on a practical level, one would need first to construct an ‘original’ in order to have something against which to measure Stevenson’s poem. The purpose of describing, in detail, the kind of source material that Stevenson would have drawn from, then, is not to demand fidelity to that source material, but rather to consider how it was reworked in Stevenson’s text, how it shaped “Song of Rahero,” and how “Song of Rahéro” is unique because of this source material. Taking up Hutcheon’s call to consider “adaptations as adaptations” (6, emphasis in original), the following description of Stevenson’s source material is provided in order to better illuminate the process and product of Stevenson’s translation, rather than simply to test his text’s fidelity—which is, anyway, an impossible task.

On October 16, 1890, Stevenson first met two Americans who were travelling through Polynesia: the writer and historian Henry Adams, and the artist John La Farge. Adams and La Farge called on the Stevensons in Apia a few times during their five-month stay in Samoa; when the two men said they would be leaving Samoa to visit Tahiti, Stevenson gave them letters of introduction that they could give to members of one of the elite families in Tahiti, the Tevas. It is because of Stevenson that, in early 1891, Adams and La Farge were able to form friendships with Ari’i Taimai, the elderly matriarch of the Teva clan, and her adult children, including Queen Marau and Tati
Salmon, the aforementioned “the high chief of the Tevas” (Letters 6: 239). Marau and Tati were fluent in English, French, and Tahitian, and Tati had been educated in England, perhaps thanks in part to his British father, Alexander Salmon (Solomon); while Marau lived in the Tahitian capital, Papeete, Ari’i Taimai and Tati lived in Papara, about a three-hour wagon-drive south of Papeete. Although they also visited Ori a Ori in Tautira in March 1891, La Farge and Adams preferred Papara and their companions there; in a name-exchange ceremony in April 1891, they were adopted into the Teva clan, as Stevenson had been years before. Both Adams and La Farge wrote down Teva legends and poems told to them by Ari’i Taimai and her children: Adams privately printed Tahiti: Memoirs of Ari’i Taimai in 1901, and La Farge’s Reminiscences of the South Seas, which was compiled from diary entries and letters to his son, Bancel La Farge, was published posthumously in 1912.

In his discussion of the difficulties of studying Indigenous Tahitian customs and folklore, Niel Gunson describes La Farge as “probably the more accurate observer” of the two, and “more likely to be recording what the old chieftainess [Ari’i Taimai] really said” (416). Gunson’s conclusions are supportable not only by a consideration of Adams’ alterations and omissions—Adams’ book has the pretense of being narrated only by Ari’i Taimai, and makes no mention of her daughter’s or his own interventions—but also by evidence from La Farge’s notebooks and sketchbooks, now held at the Yale University Art Gallery. In Reminiscences, La Farge repeatedly states that he has not edited the words of his sources: “This is the story exactly as Queen Marau told it” (323); “I leave it as I first wrote it down” (364); “[The above contains] words that I do not quite understand, as given by Marau” (371); “I give you Marau’s own copy [of a poem in English]” (374). Unlike Adams’ work, La Farge’s claims seem credible, as the rough notes in La Farge’s sketchbook attest: the closing section of the “Story of the Limits of the Tevas” in Reminiscences, for example—the section beginning “So the father, like a madman” (324) and ending “This is the downfall of Vairai and the rise of Papara” (325)—is almost a transcription of pages 31v, 32r and 32v of Sketchbook 8, save a few additions for grammatical comprehension. The strong similarity between the notebooks and the published account suggests a minimal degree of mediation on the part of La Farge and his publishers. Of course, Marau would have been self-editing the story, telling it as it could
be received and understood by La Farge—in English, with some indeterminable degree of consideration for the conventions of English-language story-telling. Still, the apparent lack of editorial intervention on the part of La Farge’s text gives us access to what appear to be quotations from a woman who may have been one of Stevenson’s sources.

From La Farge’s text, a few inferences can be made about the kind of work that Stevenson translated into “The Song of Rahéro.” There appear to be a number of genres of Tahitian literature in the late nineteenth century, of which four rough categories are apparent: *himene*, or songs for performance; oratory, of which a part includes “methods of address […]—that is to say, […] the poems or words in order recited upon occasions of visiting, or that serve as tribe cries and slogans” (La Farge, *Reminiscences* 349)³⁸; poetry or “chant[s] of praise” that commemorate historical events and personages (Edmond 188); and mytho-historical legends, “the story of the family and […] its record” (La Farge, *Reminiscences* 349) told as a narrative, and roughly “compatible” with “western genres of the folk tale and fable” (Edmond 188). What I call “categories” should not be regarded as necessarily discrete, as figures in a legend can recite pieces of oratory, and songs can be performed based on legends or poems. La Farge’s *Reminiscences* include a number of stories that seem to belong to the fourth genre: “Story of the Limits of the Tevas,” mentioned above (323); “Lament of Aromaiterai” (331); “The Origin of the Tevas” (353); “The Story of Taurua or the Loan of a Wife” (364). Given that Stevenson had also worked on a translation called “Lament of Aromaiterai,” and given that one of the figures who appears in Stevenson’s poem likewise appear in La Farge’s stories—Ahupu Vahine (La Farge, *Reminiscences* 328; Stevenson, *Ballads 7*)—it seems safe to conclude that the stories told to La Farge by Marau, Tati, Ari’i Taimai, and Moetia (Steveson’s “Princess Moë”) share qualities with the story that Stevenson translated into

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³⁸ Teuira Henry’s “The Revenge of Maraa” supports La Farge’s depiction of “methods of address” oratory, describing a group of men from Taiarapu as travelling to Maraa and being met as follows: “Soon they were met and cordially greeted by the inhabitants, who had been on the lookout for their visit for several days, and their orator Te-fa’a’hira (Make-bashful) […] greeted them” (243–4); when the groups come together to feast, “the orator Te-fa’a’hira stood up in their midst” and gave a speech, which was replied to by “Tavi, the orator of the guests” (245). The orators’ speeches are the only parts of the text provided in both English and Tahitian.
“Song of Rahéro.” That is, like La Farge, Stevenson likely would have heard the story that he translated as “Rahéro” as a linear narrative, following chronological ordering, in English, mixed with elements of oratory and poetry or song.

The fact that neither La Farge nor Adams included versions of the Rahéro story in their texts should not be considered surprising. In a *New York Times* article published within a month of Stevenson’s death, La Farge claims that Stevenson gave to Adams the proof sheet of “Song of Rahéro,” which they both “had the pleasure of reading […] in the places which had inspired” its composition (par. 8); La Farge also refers to Stevenson’s *Ballads* in his *Reminiscences* (328). By the time that Tati and Moetia were relating their stories to Adams and La Farge, they may have already received their copies of the first edition of *Ballads* (Hillier 67). Both parties—American and Tahitian—knew that Stevenson had worked on a version of this legend. There was, therefore, no need to have it translated again.

*Reminiscences* also includes verses, none of which La Farge professes to have authored; the longest of these is by Moetia, and is described by La Farge as a “revised translation” made by “conferring with the others”—that is, her siblings. La Farge describes the poem as “difficult to render” in English (373) and as a “song of reproof, cherished by the Teva [sic], as a protest against fate” (376).39 It begins:

| A standard is raised at Tooarai               |
| Like the crash of thunder                     |
| And flashes of lightning                      |
| And the rays of the midday sun                |
| Surround the standard of the King             |
| The King of the thousand skies.              |
| Honour the standard                           |
| Of the King of the thousand skies! (374)      |

La Farge describes the difficulty he had settling on a single translation of the poetic source material especially: “[w]here one [person] sees, for instance, a love song, another

39 Of the nineteenth-century writers discussed in this chapter, La Farge is unique in using “Teva” for both singular and plural; he is also inconsistent, having once described Adams as “more Teva than the Tevas” (qtd. in Gunson 416).
sees a song of war” (349); he provides an example of a translation made by Adams that Tati Salmon “made mincemeat” of, “describing as frivolous the feminine connection, and giving the whole a martial character” (350). The poetic fragments in Stevenson’s manuscripts may be attempts at translating “chant of praise” poems like Moetia’s (Edmond 188), or they may have been translations of pieces of oratory—a title like “Song of Clan Departure” is suggestive of “poems or words in order recited upon occasions of visiting” (La Farge, Reminiscences 349). While Moetia’s poem draws on legendary events, it is not, like “Song of Rahéro,” a narrative of those events. The story that Stevenson translated as “Song of Rahéro” was likely told to him as a piece of prose, as were the stories that La Farge prints.

There is one other nineteenth-century text of the legend available in English, but it is as much a reconstruction of the story as is Stevenson’s. This version of the legend, “The Revenge of Maraa,” is one of dozens of traditional stories detailed in Teuira Henry’s Ancient Tahiti; the collection also contains versions of the legends of Honorura (516-536) and Pai (578-591), the intertexts to Rahéro discussed in detail below. Although published in 1928, thirteen years after Henry’s death, much of the work that went into Ancient Tahiti seems to have been done in the late 1890s and early 1900s, when Henry was living in Honolulu and was writing in publications like The Journal of the Polynesian Society (see, for example, Henry “Ari’is,” “Folk-lore,” and “Wallis”)—a journal that also published articles in English by Tati Salmon.

Of the five prefaces to the collection, none were written by Henry: three are dated after her death, by editors associated with the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, which published Ancient Tahiti; one is undated; and one is from 1848, the year after Henry’s birth. The 1848 preface is by J. M. Orsmond, an English missionary who arrived in Tahiti in 1817, and who was Henry’s grandfather. Orsmond’s preface states: “This folklore I have carefully revised with the aid of the best native scholars of all classes, and to it I have added the modern history of Tahiti from authentic sources and from my own observation” (i). Henry finished the project that her grandfather began, working, according to the third preface, from “all her grandfather’s personal notes and original manuscripts and completing it through her own minute researches” (iii); the second
preface explicitly labels this project as one of translation, noting that “it is fortunate that so much of the invaluable manuscript records made by Rev. J. M. Orsmond during the early part of the last century should have been preserved and that his granddaughter, Miss Teuira Henry, should possess the special qualifications required to translate and edit them” (ii). The fifth preface describes Henry’s project as “completing and correcting the voluminous papers of her grandfather” (v). From Orsmond’s “best native scholars” to Henry’s “completing and correcting,” “translat[ing]” and “edit[ing],” to the four Bishop Museum editors’ unstated roles, there are multiple layers of construction in the text of Henry’s version of the Rahéro legend. It is, therefore, no more ‘authentic’ than Stevenson’s version.

It also is worth noting that J. M. Orsmond’s main source for his material was Pōmare II, and the Pōmares and Tevas were historical rivals (Gunson 417; La Farge, *Reminiscences* 310). Whether the source of “The Revenge of Maraa” was Pōmare or Teva is not noted; the footnote simply states that the story was “[r]eceived in 1843 in Tai’arapu from the lips of the high priest, Tamera” (241 n1). “The Revenge of Maraa” is told largely in English and in prose, with some pieces of oratory written in both Tahitian and English, in parallel columns.

Palimpsests, like translations, are intriguing not because the newer text traces and attempts to reproduce precisely the underwriting, but because elements of the underwriting show through in the newer text, and inform how we read it. As I shall demonstrate, Stevenson was trying to put forward a particular message about Tahitian culture and people in “Song of Rahéro”—a counter-narrative to the depictions of Indigenous Tahitians put forward by proponents of the burgeoning field of anthropology—and part of the way in which that message is shaped is by the source material to “Rahéro.”

3 “The Song of Rahéro: A Legend of Tahiti”: Revenge and *Erimatua*

“Song of Rahéro” begins with the titular character, “laughing and lazy,” in the role of the inadvertent anti-hero (8). Rahéro insults a jealous king, which leads to the death of
another man, Támatéa. With the help of a neighbouring king, Hiopa, Támatéa’s mother seeks revenge on Rahéro: his entire tribe—“forty score” men, women, and children (18)—is killed in a massive fire, and only Rahéro escapes. The poem concludes as Rahério murders one of the tribe that killed his relatives, takes the wife of the dead man, and declares that she shall “bear the babes of a kinless man,” thus enabling him to repopulate his tribe (30). The anti-hero turns into the hero; indeed, the tribe that Rahéro sires, the Tevas, is the tribe of the prince, Ori a Ori, to whom the poem is dedicated.

“Rahéro” is thus a story of spiralling revenge: first the nameless king kills Támatéa for presenting an improper offering, not knowing that the insult was caused by Rahéro; then, Támatéa’s mother and Hiopa’s tribe conspire to kill the Tevas; finally, Rahéro murders the spear-fisher, who had been a member of Hiopa’s tribe. At these moments, explicit calls for revenge-taking are foregrounded. For instance, as Támatéa’s mother watches Rahéro’s tribe burn in their sleep, she cries out: “Pyre of my son […] debited vengeance of God / […] Tenfold precious the vengeance that comes after lingering years!” (22-3); her speech meets the approval of Hiopa’s tribe: “Thus she spoke, and her stature grew in the people’s sight” (23). Similarly, immediately after his escape from the burning building, the reader is presented with this image of Rahéro:

Thus in the dusk of the night, […]
Pacing and gnawing his fists, Rahéro raged by the shore.
Vengeance: that must be his. But much was to do before;
And first a single life to be snatched from a deadly place,
A life, the root of revenge, surviving plant of the race:
And next the race to be raised anew, and the lands of the clan
Repeopled. So Rahéro designed, a prudent man
Even in wrath, and turned for the means of revenge and escape:
A boat to be seized by stealth, a wife to be taken by rape. (26)

Rahéro’s desires are for taking life and for sustaining it. Although he mourns for his family and friends, he is not acquiescent in the face of death. Having faced near-annihilation, Rahéro’s first thoughts are of “vengeance” and “repeop[ing]”—the significance of these goals is marked by their grammatical separation at the beginning of a new line of verse. Focalized through Rahéro’s perspective, and emphasizing “vengeance,” “revenge,” and “vengeance” again, this passage shows how integrally the
desire for retribution is part of his survival process. At this moment, Rahéro is “mother-
naked, and marred with the marks of fire” (30); even with the pressing needs of continued
survival, he seeks both “revenge and escape” simultaneously.

The centrality of revenge to the narrative suggests parallels to Stevenson’s other
works: the dead Cameron in “Ticonderoga” calls to his brother to avenge his murder; in
Kidnapped, David Balfour’s desire for revenge is replaced by Christian forgiveness; the
unfinished Weir of Hermiston breaks off before the Four Black Brothers, presumably,
seek revenge on Archie for their sister’s betrayal. The dominance of the revenge trope in
“Rahéro,” however, need not be read as part of Stevenson’s adaptive process. Although
“Ticonderoga” is a ballad, and although both Kidnapped and Weir of Hermiston share
features that Stevenson identified as balladic, as discussed above, the revenge spiral that
drives the plot of “Rahéro” is not necessarily translated into Stevenson’s version of the
story in order to conform to his ideas about the genre. Recall that Teuira Henry’s version
of the Rahéro story is called “The Revenge of Maraa” (241); the story’s heavy focus on
revenge may have been part of Stevenson’s reason for selecting this legend before others
for translation.

The ballad’s sequential revenges and Rahéro’s phoenix-like emergence from ashes
present a marked contrast with the depictions of Tahitians in In the South Seas. Rahéro,
like contemporary Tahitians, belongs to a people nearly annihilated—but in the face of
dwindling numbers, the Tahitians of ISS don’t seem to be riling, don’t seem to be seeking
vengeance:

The Polynesian are subject to a disease seemingly rather of the will than of the
body. I was told the Tahitians have a word for it, erimatua, but cannot find it in
my dictionary. […] It may be conceived how easily they meet death when it
approaches naturally. I heard one example, grim and picturesque. In the time of
the small-pox in Hapaa [a region in western Tahiti], an old man was seized with
the disease; he had no thought of recovery; had his grave dug by a wayside, and
lived in it for near a fortnight, eating, drinking, and smoking with the passers-by,
talking mostly of his end, and equally unconcerned for himself and careless of the
friends whom he infected. (26)

Death by small-pox, a disease of colonialism, is met “easily.” In Rahéro, Stevenson
presents a Tahitian hero who is not afflicted with “erimatua,” who has no thought but
recovery, and whose desire for revenge brings him into line with the balladic values that Stevenson was attracted to. In Támatéa’s mother, in King Hiopa, and even in the unnamed king who is fueled by nothing more honorable than “impotent anger and shame” (12), “Song of Rahéro” depicts one character after another driven to extremes of emotion-charged reaction and retribution. But the story of the ballad is one that “fell in the days of old,” as the opening line of the poem notes (5). In contrast, the Tahitians of ISS—the Tahitians of Stevenson’s present-day—cannot be imagined shouting, as Támatéa’s mother does, “The lust that famished my soul now eats and drinks its desire, / And they that encompassed my son shrivel alive in the fire” (23).

The tone of “Song of Rahéro”—evident in these repeated references to, and calls for, revenge—is thus markedly different from that of Stevenson’s later depictions of Indigenous Polynesian people. While In the South Seas presents village after village and island after island as quiet, still, vacant, where “sleep and silence and companies of mosquitoes brood upon the towns” (156), the people and places of “Rahéro” are passionately, even violently, charged with life. “Rahéro” is the poem of the founding of a people; Stevenson’s subsequent works focus on decline and death. But while pride and passion drive the characters in “Rahéro,” Stevenson blends into this depiction an ominous undertone that aligns the ballad with some of the overarching themes of his later texts. While “Song of Rahéro” is a kind of origin story—Rahéro, phoenix-like, emerges from the ashes of his dead clan to “rais[e] anew” the Tevas (26)—Stevenson infuses the legend with a formal fatalism. As an extinct genre, the ballad seems an appropriate mode for narrating the legends of a race perceived by Stevenson to be dying. Just as the ballad is a dead genre, so too are the Tevas already doomed, already facing an end that Stevenson saw as inevitable. “Song of Rahéro” closes with Rahéro telling the woman he has kidnapped, “Before your mother was born, the die of to-day was thrown / And you selected” (30); the ballad form reinforces the idea that the same fatalism holds for the descendants of the poem’s central figure. The poem’s tone—impassioned, violent, driven—is part of the history of the tribe; its undertone—resigned, fatalistic, already dead—depicts how Stevenson saw Tahitians of his present-day. This tension, however, can’t simply be mapped on to the content and form, respectively, of the text.
Prosody and Tahitian Rhythms

In his analysis of “Song of Rahéro,” John Charlot argues that

Stevenson must really impose the verse on a good narrative. [...] [T]he heavy, insistent ballad rhythms and long lines are very unpolynesian and could not satisfy an aesthetic aim of Stevenson’s observed elsewhere: to give in English an impression of the Polynesian languages themselves. (93)

In contrast to Charlot—and in contrast too to Edmond, who repeats Charlot’s charge (188)—I would suggest that Stevenson was attempting to “give in English an impression of the Polynesian language,” not by literal translation, but rather by infusing his adaptation with both formal markers of the epic, and with a feature of the Tahitian poetic tradition: its rhythm. The formal characteristics of the poem that Stevenson termed a “ballad” are not “heavy insistent ballad rhythms,” as Charlot claims, but rather are rhythmically irregular hexameters.

Although grouped within a collection called Ballads, “Song of Rahéro” bears little resemblance to Stevenson’s other poems in this genre. Formally, “Song of Rahéro” does not resemble his other ballad-metre poetry, such as the mostly-anapestic trimeter ABAB lines of “Ticonderoga” and the largely iambic trimeter ABCB lines of “Heather Ale,” or the alternating tetrameter and trimeter ABAB lines of two of the Scots poems in Underwoods, “The Counterblast Ironical” and “It’s an Owercome Sooth for Age an’ Youth.” Rather, “Song of Rahéro” is in hexameter, with rhyming pairs that make up verse paragraphs of varying length. While hexameters in English may frequently sound like two trimeter lines, this kind of neat division is not possible in “Rahéro,” with its irregular metre mixing iambs, anapests and dactyls. Many lines in “Song of Rahéro” do not have strong caesuras in the center, as is evident in the following pairs:

And now was the hour of the bath in Taiárapu: far and near
The lovely laughter of bathers rose and delighted his ear. (13)

And tempt her kings—for Vaiau was a rich and prosperous land,
And flatter—for who would attempt it but warriors mighty of hand? (15)

Rahéro was there in the hall asleep: beside him his wife,
Comely, a mirthful woman, one that delighted in life (23)
In these lines and others, the punctuation requires a reader to pause at a point in the line other than after the third stressed beat. Although these lines may be read with a central caesura, the punctuation necessitates another pause; lines with forced additional pauses like those quoted above appear at irregular intervals, interrupting any attempt to read the poem with a smooth, regular rhythm. The result of the inconsistency of the pauses is that the lines sound as long as they are: that is, they read like AA hexameters rather than ABCB trimeters. This point is demonstrated best, perhaps, by contrast.

The closing poem of *Ballads*, “Christmas at Sea,” which is also written in hexameter lines, follows a regular metre—iamb-iamb-iamb-anapest-iamb-iamb—which give the lines a consistently strong caesura. This rhythm is evident in the opening stanza:

The sheets were frozen hard, and they cut the naked hand;
The decks were like a slide, where a seaman scarce could stand;
The wind was a nor’wester, blowing squally off the sea;
And cliffs and spouting breakers were the only things a-lee. (83)

Unlike “Song of Rahéro,” the regular beat and pronounced caesuras of “Christmas at Sea” give the lines a three-stress rather than a six-stress sound, thus reproducing the rhythm and rhyme scheme of “Heather Ale”—“Christmas at Sea” sounds like an ABCB trimeter poem—as well as the rhythm of “Ticonderoga.” Moreover, the consistent use of quatrains in “Christmas at Sea” means that the poem has a more balladic look than the irregular verse paragraphs of “Rahéro.”

The annotations to “Song of Rahéro” likewise suggest a self-consciously long metrical line. A number of the notes to “Song of Rahéro” provide suggestions for pronunciation: “yottowas” is “so spelt for convenience of pronunciation” while “Námunu” is “pronounced [...] dactylically” (32). Stevenson switches to the imperative for his notes on “Ómare”—he directs his reader: “pronounce as a dactyl”—and on “Paea”—“pronounce to rhyme with the Indian *ayah*” (32). This emphasis on pronunciation may gesture towards the practice of reading aloud; Stevenson may have imagined his readers as reciters, embodying the words of Rahéro and his enemies. These particular paratexts may also point to Stevenson’s status as an authority on Tahitian
language and culture. Significantly, they also suggest that the irregular metre of the lines was constructed deliberately, by one with an ear for Tahitian rhythms.

Archival evidence suggests that, in some of Steveson’s unpublished poetic translations—discussed in greater depth below—he did attempt to determine the rhythms of Tahitian forms. Figure 12 (below), which appears to be in Stevenson’s hand, is a page of scansion from the reverse side of a page of English-language translations of Teva songs. The scansion does not correspond to the English-language versions of the poems, and the columns of numbers on the right, which appear to count numbers of syllables (one column reads “10,” “12,” “12,” “7,” “12,” “12,” “8”) and numbers of metrical feet (the other column reads “4 feet,” “6,” “6,” “6,” “6,” “6”), indicates that the lines that Stevenson heard in Tahiti were, to his ear at least, long lines, frequently of six feet. While it may be a stretch to suggest, based on a single page of archival evidence, that Stevenson’s Polynesian ballads do replicate Polynesian forms, to argue the contrary and claim that the rhythms are entirely “unpolynesian” fails to account for the obvious attention that Stevenson paid to Polynesian metres. The long line of “Rahéro” can be paralleled to the long lines that Stevenson heard on the day that he made this page of scansion.

Whether Stevenson’s attempt at transcribing Tahitian scansion was correct—whether Figure 12 is even an instance of Stevenson attempting to record Tahitian rhythms—is not possible to determine, as late-nineteenth-century descriptions of Tahitian oral poetry and song by European writers tend to characterize the singing as simple cacophony; that is, there is no musical notation to which Stevenson’s page of scansion may be compared. Henry Adams described the difficulty that Europeans had in understanding Tahitian verse patterns:
Figure 12: Reverse of “Song of Tefari [2],” Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
Polynesian rhythm is, if anything, rather more unintelligible to European ears than the images which are presented by the words. Tahitian poetry has rhythm, but it is chiefly caused by closing each strophe or stanza by an artificial, long-drawn, é-é-é-é! The song is sung with such rapidity of articulation that no European can approach it or even represent it in musical notation. (36)

Traditional music and oral poetry are still sung in Tahiti today—the country’s largest cultural festival, the Heiva, includes performances of different types of traditional song—but what qualities contemporary choirs may have in common with any singers Stevenson may have heard in Tautira in 1888 cannot be determined definitively. As Amy Ku’leialoha Stillman has noted, the rise of “tiki culture” in the United States in the 1950s was only one of a series of cultural forces that changed how Tahitian and other Polynesian people, influenced by tourist dollars, represented their traditional cultural productions and performances (262).

Certainly Stevenson was an able musician: he played the flageolet and composed occasional tunes, including one called “Farewell to Tautira,” and the manuscript collections of the Beinecke, Huntington, and Stevenson House Collection in Monterey, California, all contain pages of musical notation and composition in Stevenson’s hand (see R. Stevenson, “Musical Interests”). Later in his essay, Charlot claims that “Stevenson had a very sensitive ear and was able, for instance, to compare interestingly the sounds of Hawaiian and Tahitian” (88); arguably, the “very sensitive ear” was skilled at detecting subtle differences in music as well as subtle differences in language. Again, though, that Stevenson was an able amateur composer and musician does not mean that his page of scansion should be regarded as necessarily accurate; the skills of composing and playing do not necessarily transfer to the skill of recording rhythms.

Having said that, studies of Polynesian poetic performance in the twentieth century suggest that the Tahitian singers whom Stevenson heard when making his page of scansion would have been practicing the same song over and over. We know that Stevenson listened to choruses in Tautira because he says so in his letters (6: 223; 6: 239). Ruth Finnegan’s analysis of Polynesian oral literature demonstrates that, contrary to scholarly assumptions about common characteristics of orality, “much Pacific poetry is composed prior to performance, depends for its performance on a fixed and memorized
version, and does involve the concept of a verbally ‘correct’ text” (90). By “Pacific poetry”—what I have described above as the first of four categories of Tahitian literary genres—Finnegan refers to performances that combine words with music, dance, or gestures, in which “the stylistic forms, appropriate themes and accompanying actions may be clearly laid down by convention (or ‘tradition’) but the detailed wording, form of phrase and insertion of particular content frequently depend on the circumstances of the actual performance” (92). Unlike those scholars who rigidly divide oral from written traditions, and who assert that “the text of oral literature is variable and dependent on the occasion of performance, unlike the fixed text of a written book” (88), Finnegan asserts Polynesian oral literature is memorized, not improvised, and tends to follow a pattern: “composition followed by a series of rehearsals—sometimes over many months—followed by performance” (101, emphasis in original). When Finnegan places an emphasis on “a local concept of the ‘correct’ and ‘authentic’ version” (102), the word “version” is key: performers will work to perfect a specific iteration of a composition—thus there is a notion of ‘correct’ wording and movement within that specific performance—but individual composers and choirs may come up with different versions of the same story. Finnegan argues that the emphasis on correctness in Polynesian poetic performance is in keeping with “the emphasis in many aspects of Pacific culture on the concept of memorization and correctness” (102). If Stevenson was listening to a practicing chorus when he took down his scansion—as Sir Edmund Radcliffe Pears was invited to do in 1889, when he attempted to follow in Stevenson’s footsteps (Pears 18)—he would have heard the singers repeating the same song multiple times, as they perfected their performance. Rather than hastily jotting down rhythms, struggling to keep up with the song, Stevenson may have had time to revise his scansion as he listened to the chorus’s repetitions; his corrections, revisions, and attempts at finding patterns in the rhythm may have been based on listening to the same passage multiple times.

40 Although focused on eighteenth-century Tahitian theatrical performances, Diana Looser comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that “the drama of the Mā‘ohi (native Islanders of the entire Society [Islands] group) […] were] usually rehearsed though augmented with extempore additions” (526).
Again, however, this is speculation, as Stevenson’s manuscript page offers no explanation of the scansion. The only contextual clues—the translations on reverse of the page, and on attached pages—suggest that the rhythms were recorded while Stevenson was in Tahiti. Nothing more can be said with certainty. Even with this uncertainty, Charlot’s claim—that the poem’s “heavy, insistent ballad rhythms and long lines are very unpolynesian” (93)—begins to break down. The rhythms of “Song of Rahéro” aren’t ballad rhythms, as Charlot claims, since they are so different from other Stevenson ballads; while they may be “heavy,” they are too metrically varied to be “insistent.” Moreover, archival and ethnographic evidence combine to suggest, but cannot prove, that their “long lines” may have been, if not Polynesian, at least representative of one type of Tahitian singing, which Stevenson’s musically-inclined “very sensitive ear” (Charlot 88) took down while listening to the same song being practiced multiple times.

Hexameters, however, are significant not only in their possible relationship to Tahitian poetry, as they connote as well the classical epic. With its long-sounding lines, Stevenson’s Polynesian ballad appears to be more indebted, formally, to the epic than either the ballad metre or the common metre. The ways in which “Song of Rahéro” resembles an epyllion—a miniature epic—extend beyond line length, moreover. Epithets are scattered throughout the poem: Támatéa is, variously, “the fair” (5), “the pliable” (6, 10), “the placable” (6), and “the fool” (12), while Rahéro is “the laughing and lazy” (8). The man responsible for the death of Rahéro’s tribe is “Hiopa the king” (15, 21), and, ironically, “Hiopa the wise” (22). Moreover, Rahéro is granted the status of an epic hero: his history of heroic deeds is traced (5, 7), and his status as a member of the “godly race” of Ahupu, Pai, and Honoura acknowledged (7). Rahéro possesses “the stuff of which legendary heroes are made,” as the critic Monkhouse acknowledges (qtd. in Maixner 373). Monkhouse picked up on this mixing of ballad and epic, arguing that Stevenson was posing as “the Walter Scott of Tahiti or even the Homer of the Cannibal Islands” (qtd. in Maixner 374). The structure of the poem thus blends formal markers of the epic

41 The quotation from Weir of Hermiston above likewise links the two genres, suggesting that “minstrels” composed “ballads” on “Homeric” subjects (58).
with Tahitian rhythms. Given the national importance of the Tevas’ legend, the inclusion of epic characteristics within a ballad serves to translate appropriately the sense of the poem from its original Tahitian form into English; that is, the epic characteristics are appropriate for a legend of clan formation that features a hero as mentally and physically strong as Rahéro. The hexameters of “Rahéro” thus can be read as echoing, in connotation, rather than formally replicating the metre of the original Tahitian. In his discussion of narrative poetry of the 1840s and 50s, Erik Gray argues that hexameter poetry in English “explicitly play[s] on the sometimes jarring juxtaposition of cultures” (200); to read Stevenson’s hexameters as influenced by Tahitian rhythms is perhaps one way to place this work in line with an earlier Victorian hexameter revival tradition.

The poem’s form is integral to an appreciation of the politics behind Stevenson’s translation of “Rahéro.” The epic is a foundational text, and by rendering “Rahéro” with the conventions of the epic, Stevenson shows that the founding of Tahiti pre-dates colonial contact—and indeed that the Tahitians are not ahistorical. By back-dating Tahitian history, “Rahéro” runs counter to the frequently tendency of Victorian travel-writers—Stevenson included—to depict Indigenous people and cultures as living history.

In In the South Seas, Stevenson repeatedly depicts the Polynesian islands as displaced in time, as in, for instance, his description of passing a village early in the morning: “the impression received was not so much of foreign travel—rather of past ages; it seemed not so much degrees of latitude that we had crossed, as centuries of time that we had re-ascended; leaving, by the same steps, home and to-day” (174). This technique—described by Anne McClintock in Imperial Leather as the creation of “anachronistic space” (30) and by Johannes Fabian in Time and the Other as the “denial

Formally, “Feast of Famine” resembles “Song of Rahéro” with its long hexameter verse paragraphs; however, the lines of “Feast of Famine” are slightly more regular in their largely-iambic rhythm, as, for instance, the forced grammatical shifts in caesura that pepper “Rahéro” do not appear at all in the first section of “Feast of Famine,” four of eighteen pages in the Scribner’s first edition (37-40). Aside from hexameters, this poem contains none of the markers of the epic that “Rahéro” has, which may suggest that “Feast of Famine” is, if epic at all, the kind of “sugar candy sham epic,” “carried away by the romance” of the South Pacific, that Stevenson later derided in a letter to Colvin (Letters 7: 161).
of coevalness” (30)—is evoked by Julia Reid in her discussion of the following passage in Stevenson’s Pacific travelogue:

I hit upon a means of communication which I recommend to travellers. When I desired any detail of savage custom, or of superstitious belief, I cast back in the story of my fathers, and fished for what I wanted with some trait of equal barbarism: […] the black bull’s head of Stirling procured me the legend of Rahéro; and what I knew of the Cluny Macphersons, or the Appin Stewarts, enabled me to learn, and helped me to understand, about the Tevas of Tahiti. The native was no longer ashamed, his sense of kinship grew warmer, and his lips were opened. It is this sense of kinship that the traveller must rouse and share. (13)

Reid argues that “Stevenson must ‘cast back in the story of [his] fathers’ to find folk tales which match those of contemporary Polynesia: it is the Scottish past which allows him to enter imaginatively into modern Pacific culture” (107). Similarly, Vanessa Smith points to this passage to demonstrate “the unevenness of such attempts at cross-cultural barter” (110). However, the analyses by Smith and by Reid do not take into account the equally archaic status of the Teva legends. While Stevenson’s comment on the poem indicates that “Song of Rahéro” was “popular” in Taiárapi (31), his annotations suggest the difficulty he had in piecing together certain aspects of Teva folklore, such as the story of Rahéro’s ancestor Ahupu. Like Stevenson, “the native” of this passage is also attempting to “cast back in the story of [his] fathers”; in the case of Ahupu’s story, this attempt is only partially successful. Moreover, “Song of Rahéro” is subtitled “A Legend of Tahiti,” in parallel to other poems in Ballads, “Heather Ale: A Galloway Legend” and “Ticonderoga: A Legend of the West Highlands.” All three are equally old stories. The Tevas legends are not, as Reid claims, representative of “contemporary Polynesia” or “modern Pacific culture” (107).

“Modern Pacific culture” at the close of the nineteenth century involved the appropriation and adaptation of cultural influences from a range of sources: in a 1923 article, Sir Edmund Radcliffe Pears recalls visiting Tahiti in May 1889, and watching Tati

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43 The Appin Stewarts figure prominently in “Ticonderoga,” which was published with “Rahéro” in Ballads.
Salmon “conducting” a chorus of himene singers who were learning “the Toreador’s song from ‘Carmen’”—to be sung, of course, in Tahitian style (18). The hybrid song was sung in a hybrid genre, as well: Frederick O’Brien, who met Ori a Ori in Tahiti in the early 1910s, describes the himene as

the offspring of the original efforts of the Polynesians to adapt the songs of the sailormen, the national airs of the adventurers of many countries, the rollicking obscenities and drinking doggerel of the navies, and the religious hymns drilled into their ears by the missionaries, English and French. (498)

Similarly, Pears suggests that the term himene is a hybrid, derived from the English word “‘hymn,’ introduced by the missionaries, but […] now applied to all choral singing, sacred or otherwise” (16). Pears describes himene singing as a popular form of entertainment in Tahiti, with “an annual contest” in Papeete “among the districts and villages […] to produce the best ‘Himini’ [sic] singing” (16); Henry Adams called it the “one social amusement” of the Tahitians (248). La Farge and Adams listened to himene singers nightly in April 1891. In a letter to J. A. Symonds in November 1888, Stevenson describes hearing, but not fully understanding, a “rattling Tahitian chorus” who likely sung himene (Letters 6: 223). Himene are the type of performed poetry that Finnegan

44 In either a happy coincidence or an example of brilliant selection, Hutcheon expands on her idea of “transculturation” (146)—intercultural recontextualization and adaptation—using the example of Carmen.

45 O’Brien describes one instance of the “Tahitian style” as follows:

A woman in the center of a row suddenly struck a high note, beginning a few words from a hymn, or an improvisation. She sang through a phrase, and then others joined in, singly or in pairs or in tens, without any apparent rule except close harmony. These voices burst in from any point, a perfect glee chorus, some high, some low, some singing words, and others merely humming resonantly, a deep, booming bass. (497)

Pears describes the Tahitian singing style as “strange, thrilling, and unlike any other singing in the world outside Polynesia. […] It was like Bach’s “Fugue in G Minor” gone mad, or a performance of giant bagpipes” (16). Stevenson, it seems, was not the only one to draw parallels between late-nineteenth-century Polynesia and Scotland. Fanny Stevenson said, in a letter to Sidney Colvin: “The singing of these people is very strange. […] Such a thing as a soprano is unknown among the women, though some of them use falsetto in a chorus. The man, always a baritone, takes a higher part than the woman, who is the principal singer and gives the air. In some extraordinary manner the voices meet and seem to strike together producing a crackling sound which is very curious, and not at all unpleasant” (Letters 6: 234-5).

46 Pears’ spelling, “himini,” is unconventional; the English transliteration is usually “himene” and the French, “himéné.”
refers to in her discussion of memorization and the notion of a ‘correct’ oral text. By the
time of Stevenson’s arrival in Tahiti, the hybrid *himene* seems to have supplanted the
popularity of earlier traditional forms of music and theatre, such as the *heiva*, which had
been performed for Captain Cook by a group of spiritualist-entertainers, the ‘*arioi*, who
were later banned by missionaries (Salmond 28-31, 172).

The man who conducted the chorus that Pears heard, Tati Salmon, was the
English-educated chief of the Tevas, and was characterized by Adams as representative
of the “new Tahiti” (Lamb et al. 317); indeed, Adams regarded much of Tahitian society
as following its chief’s model, and so regarded Salmon’s mother, Ari’i Taimai, as “the
only living representative of old Tahiti” (Galligan 457). Given Salmon and the chorus’s
interest in the hybrid *himene*—and given as well Stevenson’s description of the difficulty
he had in piecing together the aspects of Teva legends related to Ahupu, Honoura, and
Pai, discussed in detail below—it is an oversimplification to assert that the traditional
stories that Stevenson translated represent “contemporary Polynesia” and “modern
Polynesian culture” (Reid 107). Modern Tahitian culture in the late nineteenth century
was a hybrid culture that appropriated and transculturated texts; when Stevenson “cast
back in the story of [his] fathers” to think of Scottish folk-tales, so too did his Tahitian
hosts “cast back in the story of [their] fathers” to respond in kind. The exchange of stories
described in *In the South Seas*—Scottish legends for Teva legends—is thus significantly
not an instance of the denial of coevalness. Scottish past for Tahitian past: this reciprocity
bears some resemblance to Stevenson’s repeated, explicit parallels in *ISS* between “South
Sea people and some of my own folk at home” in Scotland (13)—but while *ISS* regularly
turns to the denial of coevalness, the exchange of legends, old stories for old stories,
stands out as unique in “Song of Rahéro.” This is yet another way in which the Tevas
translations represented “something quite new” in Stevenson’s work (Edmond 186): they
do not deny coevalness.

5  “Savage and Yet Fine”: The Ab-Use of Language

Discussing “The Song of Rahéro,” Edmond argues that Stevenson “ignored the problem
of form” when he claimed not to have changed any of the features of the legend that he
translated, because he wrote in verse (188). However, “the problem of form” can be read as adaptation or translation in the Benjaminian sense. Stevenson’s ability to mirror Tahitian forms need not be the barometer by which his text is measured. For Benjamin, the most accurate translations are those that interpret the “sense” rather than focus on the word-by-word, line-by-line content:

A literal rendering of the syntax [of the original, in the translation …] is a direct threat to comprehensibility. [...] It is self-evident how greatly fidelity in reproducing the form impedes the rendering of the sense. (78)

In separating “the form” from “the sense,” Benjamin’s theory of translation may not fit well with current scholarly understandings of these concepts; however, as Hutcheon argues, this division is inherent in the practice of adaptation, as it “commits the heresy of showing that form (expression) can be separated from content (ideas) —something both mainstream aesthetic and semiotic theories have resisted or denied” (9). Adaptations—“deliberate, announced, and extended revisions of prior works” (Hutcheon xiv)—of which translations like “Rahéro” are one type, shift stories from one mode of representation to another: text to film, epic to novel, traditional legend to ballad. “The form changes with adaptation,” Hutcheon writes; “the content persists” (10). In his “‘Conclusions’ on Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’,” Paul de Man refers to this division of “the form” and “the sense” as “the difficult relationship between the hermeneutics and the poetics of literature,” claiming that, when translating, “it is impossible to do hermeneutics and poetics at the same time” (28). Benjamin’s separation of “form” from “sense” is not the only division he creates in his essay, though; in order to articulate “the task of the translator,” Benjamin also separates “sense” from “meaning.”

To forge the latter distinction, Benjamin repeatedly returns to the metaphor of the echo in his essay, arguing that the translator’s job “consists in finding that intended effect [Intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original” (76). This “intended effect”—the “sense” of the original—“is not limited to [literal] meaning, but derives from the connotation” of words in their original language and their formal context (78). In order to differentiate “sense” and “meaning,” Benjamin uses the examples of “Brot” and “pain,” words which “‘intend’ the same object”—that is,
bread—but which “are not interchangeable” terms (74). De Man expands on the difference between “Brot” and “pain,” noting the contrast between French connotation of “pain et vin”—“what you get for free in a restaurant, in a cheap restaurant” (28)—and *Brot und Wein*, which connotes not only a simple meal but also Friedrich Hölderlin’s poem concerning the absence of gods in a modern era. So, while both “Brot” and “pain” may refer to the same thing that bread refers to—while both “intend” bread—these terms do not have the same “sense.” In turn, the English word bread suggests not only “daily bread” but also “the idiom ‘bread’ for money” (de Man 28); “bread,” “Brot” and “pain” share an “object of intention,” share the same literal meaning—that of a soft, wheat-based baked loaf—but not a “mode of intention,” elsewhere a “sense” (74).

When Benjamin argues, therefore, that a “literal rendering of the syntax [of the original, in the translation] completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning” (78, emphasis mine), his claim is that a too-literal, too-strictly-word-for-word translation of an original text not only does not do justice to the meaning of individual words, but also makes the rendering of the sense of the whole impossible. For Benjamin, translation should look “for other things […] than reproduction of meaning” in order to convey the sense of the text across languages (78). Evoking again the metaphor of the echo, Benjamin writes:

"Translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one." (76)

This “reverberation” need not formally or literally resemble the source text, but rather should provide an “echo”; in Stevenson’s poetic echo, what is important is that the “sense” of the original reverberates. Hutcheon concurs with Benjamin (16), arguing in *A Theory of Adaptation* that “[c]ontext conditions meaning” (145), and thus “[a]dapting across cultures is not simply a matter of translating words” (149). These statements are as true for Stevenson as they are for any of the twentieth- or twenty-first-century examples that Hutcheon cites. Stevenson’s versions of the Teva legends both translate and adapt Tahitian language and forms, aiming for an echo of Benjaminian “sense” by blending Tahitian rhythmic reverberations with Western epic conventions.
Whereas Benjamin argued that translation is “an engagement with the original text” (Hutcheon 16), translation theory before Benjamin traditionally revolved around a debate between fidelity to form and fidelity to words. This was as true for the Victorians as it was for any other period: in On Translating Homer, for instance, the crux of Matthew Arnold’s complaint with F. W. Newman’s translation of the Iliad was that Newman’s choice of the ballad metre was not sufficiently noble to convey Homer’s text. As Edwin Gentzler has shown, this “‘faithful’ vs ‘free’” debate has continued to resonate in postmodern translation theories, including in the works of Lawrence Venuti (Contemporary 41). While Venuti emphasizes the violence of Derrida’s claim that “une ‘bonne’ traduction doit toujours abuser,” Gentzler notes that the verb “abuser” carries connotations of playfulness that are not carried over into the English, “a ‘good’ translation must always commit abuses” (“Power” 202). In French, “abuser” may connote violence, but it also connotes “ab-use,” or, as Gentzler puts it, an “un-usual, non-normative, mis-leading or de-familiar form of writing” (“Power” 201). It is in this sense that I seek to examine Stevenson’s translation—building on Benjamin’s reformulation of the translator’s task and responding to Hutcheon’s call to analyze “adaptations as adaptations” (6, emphasis in original), I draw on Gentzler’s alternative to the “faithful vs. free” binary. By focusing on ab-used language, translation analysis is freed from the faithful/free binary, and, potentially, is better able to articulate the “non-normative” and “de-familiar” ends to which English may be put.

Ab-used language abounds in “Rahéro.” The dialogue of the poem frequently sounds incongruous with the setting, as Tahitians, naked “to the loins” (8), use dialogue like “the lads when I was a lad” (10), “it’s time to be jogging” (11), and the typically British “Tut!” of dismissive unconcern (9). In these instances, Polynesian expressions and exclamations are exchanged for their English counter-parts; the original Tahitian has been translated into English language and adapted to an English style. When speaking casually, the characters in “Rahéro” use the vocabulary of nineteenth-century Britain: consider, for example, the people of Paea plotting the genocide of Rahéro’s tribe:

‘Load the canoe to the gunwale with all that is toothsome to eat; And all day long on the sea the jaws are crushing the meat,
The steersman eats at the helm, the rowers munch at the oar,  
And at length, when their bellies are full, overboard with the store!’ (17)

Or consider Rahéro mourning the loss of his tribe:

“[M]y friends and my fathers—the silver heads of yore  
That trooped to the council, the children that ran to the open door  
Crying with innocent voices and clasping a father’s knees!  
And mine, my wife—my daughter—my sturdy climber of trees  
Ah, never to climb again!” (26)

At these moments, as in others, the vocabulary choices resonate more with Victorian Britons than they do with any late-nineteenth-century clichés of savagery, and yet these are Indigenous Tahitian characters who wear loin-cloths (24) and are covered in tattoos (8).

At other moments in the text, Tahitian metaphor and language is retained within an English grammar, as in Hiopa’s proclamation of war, in which he compares the people of Taiárapu—Rahéro’s village—to pigs:

“Then shall the pigs of Taiárapu raise their snouts in the air;  
But we sit quiet and wait, as the fowler sits by the snare,  
And tranquilly fold our hands, till the pigs come nosing the food:  
But meanwhile build us a house of Trotéa, the stubborn wood, […]  
And there, when the pigs come trotting, there shall the feast be spread,  
There shall the eye of the morn enlighten the feasters dead.” (16)

The metaphors and similes in this passage are clear and comprehensible, and the one Tahitian word that is used (“Trotéa”) is translated immediately (“the stubborn wood”). This kind of dialogue need only be contrasted with the “Beach-la-Mar” pidgin used by the Samoan Uma in “The Beach of Falesá” for the full effect to be clear: “White man he come here, I marry him all-e-same kanaka; very well then, he marry me all-e-same white woman. Suppose he no marry, he go ‘way, woman he stop. All-e-same thief; empty hand, Tonga-heart—no can love!” (145). Uma’s language in “Falesá” marks her as exotic, as foreign; Hiopa’s dialogue, even when it includes Tahitian words (“Trotéa”) and
metaphors (“the pigs of Taiárapu”), is more similar than it is dissimilar to English. Unlike in “Falesá,” in “Rahéro” Polynesian speech patterns are translated into late-nineteenth-century English speech patterns.

Stevenson’s choice to translate Teva legends with an emphasis on an Anglophone reader’s comprehension has significant political implications. In his adaptation, Stevenson writes against the ideas of evolutionary anthropology, which ranked Tahitians below Western cultures on a unilinear scale of evolution. In *Primitive Culture* (1871), the “father of anthropology” (Stocking 299) E. B. Tylor claimed that “Few would dispute that the following races are arranged rightly in order of culture:— Australian, Tahitian, Aztec, Chinese, Italian” (I: 24). Tylor’s “rough scale of civilization” ranges from “savagery” to “barbarism” to “modern educated life” (I: 24); the popular science writer and proponent of evolutionary anthropology Grant Allen provides a similar scale, with the notable addition of “the cave-men,” whom he ranks “considerably in advance of many existing savages” (308). Quoting from Edward Gibbon, Tylor claims that “savages” are “naked both in mind and body” (I: 30), linking external and internal characteristics. While the idea of unilineal social progress dates back to the Scottish Enlightenment, evolutionary anthropology attempted to bring scientific formality to the idea, by conceiving of societies in terms analogous to biological evolution.

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47 “Of all the stock insults that are most resented throughout Polynesia, one of the worst is to call a man a pig. Such a man is, like a pig, fit only for sacrifice. Many a death and not a few wars have sprung from this word *puaa*” (Adams 78, emphasis in original).

48 Hiopa’s speech has sounded, to scholars with whom I have had casual conversations, variously like Swinburne, like Morris, and like Homer. These intertextual echoes may suggest an archaizing aspect of Stevenson’s verse, may be a result of Stevenson’s use of hexameter (a meter common to these three poets), or, as I suspect is most likely, may reflect the formality of this speech in particular. Few readers would hear Swinburne, Morris, or Homer in “it is time to be jogging, my lad” or “the rowers munch at the oar.”

49 A second dominant image of Tahiti that has existed since European contact with the island was first established in the late 1760s is that of the paradise myth. As Alexander Bolyanatz has shown, late-eighteenth-century depictions of Tahitian life tend to follow in line with the precedent set by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, who depicted Tahiti as a place of “edenic conditions and leisurely sex” (6), and by Joseph Banks, who described Tahiti as an arcadia. Geoffrey Quilley has shown that, in England in the 1840s, sympathetic depictions of Tahiti as a paradise in the Greco-Roman fashion abounded in England, in part as a response to the Franco-Tahiti War of 1844-47. The myth of an Elysium in Tahiti, however, is the flip side of the same coin of ahistorical othering perpetuated by evolutionary anthropologists. Whether a Tahitian is
While, as Richard Ambrosini has noted, many scholars have “assessed [Stevenson’s] indebtedness to Edward Tylor’s theories on primitive culture” in his Polynesian writing (23), there is no debt to Tylor evident in the content of “Rahéro.” Unlike, for instance, the Kukuanas of Rider Haggard’s King Solomon’s Mines, Rahéro and his relatives do not speak in the “full panoply of epic diction—elevated language, inversion, periphrasis and epic simile” (Dentith 181). While the poem’s echoes of epic form convey the importance of this particular story to a Tahitian tribe, the characters in “Rahéro” are depicted as akin to Victorian Brits. Stevenson described “Song of Rahéro” as “savage and yet fine”: while epic marks the story’s antiquity, “ancient as the granite rocks,” the characters’ speech and actions speak to those aspects that are “yet fine” (Letters 7: 187).

Stevenson’s description of the poem as “savage and yet fine” exemplifies the bind he is trying to work through in “Rahéro”: how can a writer express a sentiment that isn’t racist when the only language available is racialist? Although attempting to avoid the hierarchy of races in evolutionary anthropology, Stevenson’s poem is still racialist, a term defined by Kwame Anthony Appiah as the idea, prominent from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, “that we could divide human beings into a small number of groups, called ‘races,’ in such a way that all the members of these races shared certain fundamental, biologically heritable, moral and intellectual characteristics with each other” (276). Appiah notes that, along with, for example, hair and skin colour, “other important inherited characteristics” were associated with race, “including, for example, literary ‘genius,’ intelligence, and honesty” (276). Appiah furthermore argues that the “scientific conception of biological heredity” shaped a “distinctively modern” and

50 For instance, Julia Reid demonstrates Stevenson’s “important—and deeply ambivalent—engagement with fin-de-siècle anthropology” in his Pacific works (142), and Roslyn Jolly argues that Primitive Culture “influenced Stevenson’s early anthropological interests […] which] fed into Stevenson’s fiction and poetry, particularly Ballads” (39).
distinctively nineteenth-century conception of what it meant to be a people and a race—
with the helpful qualification that, in the twenty-first century, “there is a fairly wide-
spread consensus in the sciences of biology and anthropology that the word ‘race,’ at
least as it is used in most unscientific discussions, refers to nothing that science should
recognize as real” (277).

Interested as he was in contemporary scientific notions of what it means to be
human—an interest evident in Jekyll and Hyde—Stevenson sought to express, in the
language of his time, concepts alien to the words he had at his disposal. “Rahéro” plays
out this conflict. The “and yet” of “savage and yet fine” demonstrates Stevenson’s
attempt to describe Indigenous Polynesians without the connotations that were
inextricably linked with ‘savagery’. This attempt is, necessarily, a failure; Stevenson
cannot write his way outside of the ideology that shaped late-nineteenth-century English.

That “Rahéro” is racialist is evident in the way in which the term “race” is used in
the poem. In “Song of Rahéro,” “race” seems to be interchangeable with terms like
“people,” “tribe,” or “folk,” as in, for example, Rahéro’s explanation of his motive for
killing the spear-fisherman: “Woman,” said he, “last night the men of your folk / – Man,
woman, and maid, smothered my race in smoke” (30). The term “race” is used in the
poem to refer to a people with a common set of characteristics that are inheritable:
Rahéro descends from “a godly race” from whom he “inherited cunning of spirit and
beauty of body and face” (7); when looking at the woman at the end of the poem, he
judges her “fitness to mother a warlike race” (30). Significantly, this is “race” ab-used,
and this is “savagery” ab-used. While the epic conventions connote the barbarous stage of
civilization, the poem’s dialogue connotes civilization. While still racialist, Stevenson’s
poem strives to avoid being racist, tries to avoid collapsing “naked […] to the loins” (8)
and “naked […] in mind” (Tylor I: 30).

6 The Intertexts to “Rahéro”: Other Teva Translations

“Rahéro” is only one of a series of Tahitian legends translated by Stevenson: he also
published two short intertexts to “Rahéro” in the March 1892 edition of Longman’s
Magazine—“Of the Making of Pai’s Spear” and “Honoura and the Weird Women”—and worked on a series of incomplete, unpublished translations: “Let Us Come and Join the Clan of the Tevas,” “Song of Clan Departure,” “Song of Tepari,”51 “Song of the Two Chiefs,” and “The Tantia People.”52

While “Rahéro” is in verse, the two short stories published in Longman’s Magazine are in prose. These two legends—“Of the Making of Pai’s Spear” and “Honoura and the Weird Women”—are intertexts to “Rahéro.” References to these figures appear early in the ballad: “a haunt of Pai”; the place where “Honoura lived like a beast”; the site where “Ahupu, the woman of song, walked on high on the hills” (7). These, we are told, are the ancestors of Rahéro. The Longman’s article fleshes out these narratives, describing the ways in which both Pai and Honoura defeated “weird women” in the forest (568, 570) and left their marks on the landscape. Unlike Rahéro, Pai and Honoura possess something akin to superhuman strength: Pai overpowers two witches and can throw his spear over entire islands, and Honoura, who also defeats two witches, “could bend a fruit tree to the earth and strip it of fruit before he let it rise again” (570). As with “Rahéro,” both these legends are published alongside commentary by Stevenson—explanatory annotations to clarify Tahitian concepts for his British and American readership.53

51 Erroneously transcribed as “Song of Tefari” in the Beinecke collection. Stevenson translates the place-name “Tepari” as “the sea-cliffs” in his notes to “Song of Rahéro”—“the eastern fastness of the isle” and the dwelling-place of Ahupu (31; see also Finney 94).

52 These unfinished poems are part of the Edwin J. Beinecke Collection of Robert Louis Stevenson (GEN MSS 664) of Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

53 Stevenson’s intended audience for the Tahitian legends—and for Ballads specifically—is a topic of some debate. Certainly there was a Tahitian audience for the poems: Stevenson speaks directly to Tati Salmon in one of his annotations (32-3), and Hillier lists the high-ranking Tahitians who received complimentary copies of Ballads (67). Smith argues that “Stevenson’s annotations to the published poem [Rahéro] testify that he directed this composition primarily to the literate Tahitian” (143); however, given that the annotations explain concepts that would be clear to “the literate Tahitian”—including the note that “the cooking fire is made in a hole in the ground, and is then buried” (31), and that “[b]right-hook fishing, and that with the spear, appear to be the favourite native methods” (32)—this claim ought to be qualified. While Stevenson had, “for the first time in his life,” a number of “non-western readers in mind” (Edmond 186), his translations also certainly were targeted towards a British and American audience.
As they exist only in fragments, the unpublished Tahitian poems are more difficult to locate precisely in a framework. The short poems are unrhymed and in first-person. The “Song of Tepari,” which exists in three forms, makes reference to “the woman Ahupu” or “Ahupu Vehine,”54 and “Song of Clan Departure” includes the line “Ahupu has put to sea.” Ahupu is the third of the figures associated with the “place Taiárapu honoured the most” that is referenced in “Rahéro” in the passage quoted above; in a footnote to that passage, Stevenson notes that his “anxiety to learn more of ‘Ahupu Vehine’ became [...] a cause of some diversion” to his sources (31). Ahupu’s appearance in the unpublished manuscripts suggests that these poems may be further intertexts to the Rahéro legend.55

Many of the poetic fragments are drafted alongside a Tahitian-language text, and appear to be direct translations of this language; as noted above, critics have speculated as to whose handwriting the Tahitian may be, although in places the hand for both English and Tahitian appears to be Stevenson’s own (see Figure 13, below). Appearing as they do without additional commentary, it is difficult to determine if the unpublished fragments constitute a portion of the “ethnographically authoritative” text that Stevenson sought to write (V. Smith 14), or if they were simply part of a personal collection, a Polynesian version of the ballad collecting popular in Britain throughout the Victorian period. Pears’ article gestures towards the possibility of the latter, as he claims that Stevenson requested that he—Pears—record some of the himene and send them on to Samoa, where Stevenson was then residing; the manuscript evidence also suggests, however, that Stevenson understood the word himene to mean, quite generally, “song,” rather than a specific kind of hybrid song, so what he may have meant by asking Pears to record and pass along himene is unclear, if indeed he did make this request.

54 “Vehine,” sometimes transliterated “vahine,” is Tahitian for “woman.”
55 Both Hillier (64) and Lowell Don Holmes (97) incorrectly identify Ahupu as Támatéa’s mother, but the latter is nameless in the poem, referred to only as either “the mother” (5, 6) or “the mother of Támatéa” (13, 22).
Given that several versions of some of the songs exist in manuscript form—there are, for instance, three drafts of “Song of Tepari,” and a more polished version in an undated letter to Tati Salmon (incorrectly transcribed as “Salson, Tati” in the Beinecke database; see Finney 94-5)—it is evident that Stevenson regarded this translation project with sustained interest. And, as with his published paratextual commentary, Stevenson’s comments on his translations speak to his interest in accurately rendering the Tahitian ‘sense’ in the English version: in a transcription of one of the poems in a letter to Salmon, Stevenson heavily annotates his translation, justifying his word choices: “This rendering makes the whole sense clearer”; “I say Seaward as more poetical than Outer as well as more literal,” etc (qtd. in Finney 95).

Unlike the manuscript fragments, the two short stories published in Longman’s are narratives. Again, for Stevenson the translation of “sense”—in Benjamin’s use of the term—takes precedence over a translation of form. Longman’s Magazine, as Reid notes, had “the avowed aim of providing reading matter for the newly literate classes” (18). Longman’s was published for a specific audience, and so Stevenson needed to write in such a way as to convey the legends to this target readership. The resultant pieces, with their simplistic language, regular use of “and,” “but,” or “so” at the beginning of sentences, and concluding emphasis on the visible, physical evidence of the truth of the tale, are structured similarly to Rudyard Kipling’s Just So Stories, which were published ten years after the Longman’s pieces. Translating for this particular group of readers shaped the way in which the two short stories were written; gone are the rhythmic markers of the Tahitian source material, replaced instead with simplicity in vocabulary and sentence structure. As with “Rahéero,” the emphasis is placed on accurately translating sense.
Figure 13: “Song of Clan Departure,” “Song of Tefari [1],” “Another [Song],” and “Song of the Two Chiefs,” Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
7 Paratext and Text

When Rahéro mourns his son, his “sturdy climber of trees / Ah, never to climb again!” (26), the reader is presented with a figure with whom she can sympathize, rather than an exotic ‘Other’-figure. As Jason Marc Harris has argued in reference to Stevenson’s Pacific fiction, Stevenson used “folklore to blur racial difference, rather than to demarcate strict cultural categories” (386). This is not to say that Stevenson was not interested in the Tevas legends because of their “primitive” aspects; certainly the annotations and commentary reflect Stevenson’s interests in the savage as savage. While the central text of “Rahéro” offers Stevenson the space to attempt to depict Indigenous Tahitians in unconventional ways, his own presence as an authorial, first-person voice in the paratexts complicates his attempt to work outside of the parameters imposed by contemporary scientific ideas of ‘savagery.’ While Stevenson’s translations of the Teva legends do not, in the bodies of their pieces, reflect the contemporary scientific principles of evolutionary anthropologists, Stevenson’s paratexts complicate a straight-forward reading of the translations.

In addition to Ballads’ title page, frontismatter, and so on, the paratexts to “Song of Rahéro” include a dedication to the poem, a short commentary at its conclusion, and fifteen annotations to particular words or lines used in the poem, all authored by Stevenson. In Paratexts: The Thresholds of Interpretation, Gérard Genette describes the paratext as “a threshold […] a zone without any hard and fast boundary […] a zone not only of transition but also of transaction” (2, emphasis in original). Stevenson’s paratexts to the Teva legends are no exception: the dedications, notes, and annotations that frame the stories serve not only to translate their contents but also to transact between Stevenson, his Tahitian sources, and his audiences in the English-speaking world. The dedication to “Song of Rahéro,” for instance, offers the text of the poem as a gift to Ori a Ori, a Teva sub-chief with whom the Stevensons stayed in Tautira:

Ori, my brother in the island mode,  
In every tongue and meaning much my friend,  
This story of your country and your clan,  
In your loved house, your too much honoured guest,  
I made in English. Take it, being done;
AND let me sign it with the name you gave.

TERIITERA. (3)

This dedication simultaneously speaks to Ori (who, as Hillier notes, received a complimentary copy of the first edition [67]), to whom Stevenson expresses gratitude, and to Stevenson’s non-Tahitian audience, for whom the dedication, and especially its Tahitian signature, signifies authority and authenticity. In keeping with Genette’s description, the paratext signals a text at the threshold between Tahitian “story” and “made in English” translation; it sets up the transition between the Stevenson of the title page and the “Teriitera” who has “made” the poem; and it offers a transaction, although one that is phrased in the imperative—“Take it.” The paratext thus opens up a liminal space around the Tevas legend that was otherwise presented unambiguously, reasserting Stevenson’s authorial status in an act of “demonstration, ostentation, [and] exhibition” (Genette 135). Stevenson’s paratexts translate his translations, and frame the works for a marketplace with specific audiences.

The condescension evident in Stevenson’s commentary undermines the anti-evolutionary anthropological impulse of the texts. For instance, Stevenson claims in his annotations to “Rahééro” that the Tahitians have reported seeing a “ribbon of light” that can be “seen (and heard) spinning from one maræ to another on Tahiti”; however, he qualifies this claim by adding, “or so I have it upon evidence that would rejoice the Psychical Society” (32, emphasis in original). Given that the remit of the Society for Psychical Research was to study phenomena like haunted houses, mesmerism, and telepathy, Stevenson implies that “the ribbon of light” may be a mass hallucination, not a natural phenomenon. Likewise, of the feast that preceded the murder of Rahééro’s relatives, Stevenson asks in his notes, “How did king, commons, women, and all come to

56 Stevenson and Ori a Ori exchanged names, with Ori becoming “Rui”—“the nearest they can come to Louis, for they have no L and no S in their language” (Letters 6: 238)—and Stevenson taking Ori’s clan name, Teriitera. See also Smith, 142. The signature thus places the poem on an authorial threshold—by signing the poem “Teriitera,” Stevenson not only signs the poem “with the name you gave,” but also with the name of the man who helped him in the composition process, as the name “Teriitera” is both men’s name.

57 Presumably the Society for Psychical Research, which was founded in 1882 by Frederic W.H. Myers, Henry Sidgwick, Edmond Gurney and others.
eat together at this feast?” (33). His response to his own question: “But [this detail] troubled none of my numerous authorities; so there must certainly be some natural explanation” (33). The presentation and subsequent dismissal of an issue that calls into question the validity of a key scene in the story positions Stevenson as one more capable of sophisticated literary analysis than his Tahitian sources. While Tahitians simply repeat the story, “untroubled” by this detail, Stevenson has the sophistication to question it. And while the Tahitians are described as “authorities” on their legend, they are, significantly, “my numerous authorities”: simultaneously both granting expertise to his sources and yet objectifying them, and claiming them, with the use of the possessive pronoun. It is both an avowal and rejection of Tahitian authority. More overtly condescending is Stevenson’s description of his source material for the legend of Honoura as “a tissue of undecipherable drivel” (571), privileging the Western linear narrative over what is simply a different form of narration. In these notes, Stevenson plays the role of the ethnographer, attuned to the nuances of culture to which the subjects of his study are oblivious.

In the *Longman’s Magazine* stories, Stevenson’s commentary reveals a particular self-consciousness about the conflict between fidelity to “a literal rendering” in contrast to a fidelity to “sense” (Benjamin 78). In his commentary on “Pai’s Spear,” Stevenson describes the setting for the legend as follows: “The vale of waters—Vaitapiha—more literally (as I was told) chamber of waters—is one of the loveliest ravines on earth, close beset with strange mountains, filled full of forest and the sound of rivers and the wind” (569, emphasis in original). While “chamber of waters” may be the more technically precise translation, Stevenson evidently believed that it did not convey the meaning of the word in the same way that “vale of waters” did, and the accompanying explanatory text ensured that the subtleties of the name were correctly conveyed. By presenting both possible interpretations of the term, Stevenson demonstrates his comprehension of the nuances of the language, and foregrounds the translator’s struggle between a fidelity to words and a fidelity to sense.

At times, however, Stevenson was obliged to defer to the authority of his source. In his notes on the legend of “Honoura,” Stevenson professes to have preferred the “Tautira version” of the legend, in which “the champion’s name was Fanoura [...] but the
orders of my chief are not to be disregarded, and he insists upon the H” (571). While Stevenson yields to the authority of his chief (presumably referring here to Salmon, who was not located in Tautira), using the “H-” spelling in “Rahéro” as well as the title and body of the Longman’s story, his inclusion of this annotation undermines the authority of the man to whom he supposedly defers. Stevenson prefers “Fanoura,” and the audience will be made aware of this preference. Stevenson’s commentary may be relegated to the textual margins, but it will not be suppressed. The struggle for authority over the source text is apparent as well in the commentary to “Pai,” in which Stevenson ambivalently presents one of his sources as “my author” (570), simultaneously both granting authorial importance to his source and yet objectifying him with the use of the possessive pronoun. The imbalance of power between Tahitian and translator is presented ambivalently, and thus introduces a layer of interchange not evident in the text alone.

The translations in Stevenson’s travel-memoir-meets-ethnography, *In the South Seas*, more overtly situate authority not in the Polynesians but in the translator-interpreter. For example, when discussing the derisive nickname of a Marquesan prince, Stevenson writes: “he was dubbed […] by the expressive byword, Taipi-Kikino—‘Highwater man-of-no-account’—or, Englishing more boldly, ‘Beggar on horseback’—a witty and a wicked cut” (37). Stevenson provides a series of translations of “Taipi-Kikino”: first a literal, word-for-word translation, then a comparable idiomatic equivalent, and finally a loose explanation. Stevenson thus shifts between what Roman Jakobson termed “interlingual translation”—that is, “translation proper” between languages—and “intra-lingual translation”—that is, “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language” (114, emphasis in original). These kinds of multiple translations occur throughout the text: “Taahauku, on the south-westerly coast of the island of Hiva-oa—Tahuku, say the slovenly whites—may be called the port of [the village of] Atuona” (77); “our chief visitor was one Mapiao, a great tuhuka—which seems to mean priest, wizard, tattooer, practiser of any art, or, in a word, esoteric person” (88). In each example, Stevenson gives the transliterated Polynesian words, a comparable “Englishing” and a summary explanation. Demonstrating translation thus allows Stevenson the opportunity to flex his authoritative muscles and to demonstrate the depths
of his cultural understanding. By “Englishing” a word, Stevenson demonstrates his mastery of it.

Certainly Stevenson believed that his translations were accurate. In the commentary on “Rahéro,” he claimed that he had “not consciously changed a single feature” of the story, of which, seemingly paradoxically, he had “heard from end to end [in] two versions” (31). Stevenson also claimed to have translated “Pai” “without embellishment” (570), and to have “slavishly reproduced” the story of Honoura (571). Stevenson did not believe that his adaptations altered the content of the stories. Moreover, in the manuscripts, Stevenson’s attempts at “reproduction” are apparent. The unpublished poetic fragments, with their shorter, unrhymed lines, mirror the Tahitian syntax and line length. As his interpretations moved towards targeting a specific audience, Stevenson used what Benjamin called “unrestrained license” in manipulating form to convey sense accurately (78). In the shift between text and paratext, though, Stevenson’s position moves from invisible translator to foregrounded interpreter.

8 Conclusions: Visible and Invisible Translation

In The Translator’s Invisibility, Venuti argues that ethical translations must demonstrate their status as translations. For Venuti, a fluent translation renders the translator “invisible” and thus “at once enacts and masks an insidious domestication of foreign texts” (16-17). In opposition to fluent, domesticating translations, Venuti favours “foreignizing translation” that “in English can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations” (20). This strategy “avoids fluency” and in so doing “challenges the target-language culture” (24). Stevenson’s translations undo Venuti’s binary.

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58 In her Introduction to the Oxford edition of Stevenson’s collected South Seas short fiction, South Sea Tales, Roslyn Jolly suggests that the translation is so true to the original that the Longman’s stories should not count as authored by Stevenson: “I do not count as works by Stevenson the ‘Two Tahitian Legends’ published over his name in Andrew Lang’s column ‘At the Sign of the Ship’ in Longman’s Magazine 19 (1892), 568-72, in which Stevenson has merely ‘slavishly reproduced’ local tales told him in Tahiti (p. 571)” (x n3).
Whether “Rahéro” is fluent or not depends on which feature or section of the poem you examine. The moments of awkwardness pointed to by reviewers like Monkhouse and Hutton suggest that the poem is not fluent, and yet much of the verse features the modern, widely-used and “immediately […] intelligible” language that Venuti points to as a marker of fluency (5). Certainly the poem lacks the phonetic markers of dialect that appear in his later Pacific prose and also in his earlier Scots poems which, in his prefatory comments to Underwoods, Stevenson called a “stumbling-block for English readers” (x). Describing those of Browning’s dramatic monologues that feature non-English-speaking characters like Andrea del Sarto, Matthew Reynolds argues, “They [these poems] offer us a vividly imagined impossibility: speakers indubitably foreign whose command of English is—more than fluent—native” (101).

Stevenson’s Tahitian characters are presented in the same way: “indubitably foreign” but speaking English with the ease of a native speaker. According to Venuti’s formula, this fluent translation should render Stevenson invisible, and should in turn lead to the re-inscribing of “dominant target-language cultural values” (23)—values like those of E. B. Tylor and Grant Allen. In this case, however, Stevenson’s absence from the text of the poem—an absence signaled by fluent and thus invisible translation—frees him to craft a work with an unambiguous core that, unlike the rest of his Pacific oeuvre, does not accommodate evolutionary anthropology. While, as Reid has demonstrated, much of Stevenson’s Pacific oeuvre maintains an “equivocal negotiation of contemporary evolutionary narratives” (143), in “Rahéro” the progressivist narratives of evolutionary anthropology are absent from the central text.

As in In the South Seas, however, in his commentary to the poem Stevenson becomes visible as a first-person speaker: “I received from tradition” (31); “I have heard” (31); “I have collected” (31, 33); “I hope soon” (31); “My anxiety to learn more” (31); “I suppose to form” (32); “I have attributed” (32); “I have always” (32); “I could never learn” (32); “I may remark that” (33); and so on. The translations that occur in his annotations are performative acts. Thus even a dedication—an expression of gratitude—is also an exercise in authority, and a negotiation of that authority. Significantly, it is the invisibility that Venuti denigrates, rather than visibility, that gives Stevenson the space to craft a translation that resists the dominant cultural values of the target-language.
Of the potential for cultural violence in translation, Venuti writes: “The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text” (18). The responses to “Rahéro”—in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries—suggest that Stevenson’s text does not “domesticate” its characters or story. Referring, for example, to the massacre of Rahéro’s tribe, the Spectator reviewer Hutton writes:

Doubtless such acts of reckless butchery are committed amongst men in the stage of civilisation or barbarism in which Tahiti was at the time of the legend; but then, they are not proper subjects for a poem until they are in some adequate way made intelligible by being connected with the recognised passions of men. (qtd. in Maixner 370)

That the men of Hiopa’s tribe who carry out Tamatea’s mother’s revenge killing are not “in some adequate way made intelligible” suggests that, although Stevenson has fluently translated the poem, he has not domesticated the Tahitian characters. The motives of the characters in the poem remain foreign, remain unconnected from “the recognised”—or recognizable, comprehensible—“passions of men.” Hutton looks for, but does not see, himself in the characters of “Rahéro.” Charlot similarly criticizes the poem for not seeming “natural and inevitable,” according to his standards of naturalness and inevitability (93). This story defies expectations; it is no conventional, aestheticized ballad object. Venuti claims that, when the translator is invisible, a fluent translation will “invisibly inscribe foreign texts with English-language values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other” (15); Hutton and Charlot’s critiques suggests that they desire, but are not given, this “narcissistic experience.”

This is not to say that the erasure of essential differences between Indigenous and Western cultures is not a problematic move. Stevenson’s adaptation creates hybridized characters that he then posits as accurate representations of Polynesian folklore. It is paradoxical to claim that one has “not consciously changed a single feature” of a story that one has translated (31) and, to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term, “transculturated” (6). “Song of Rahéro” and the associated legends can be viewed as works of literary assimilation, acts of appropriation that efface central features of Tahitian storytelling in
order to produce stories that are—or, at least, were intended to be—palatable for Anglophone readers. Stevenson’s translations are yet another incarnation of colonial mimesis, as the process of translation necessitates repetition with difference; Rahé is “almost the same, but not quite [...] almost the same, but not white” (Bhabha 89, emphasis in original). However, to therefore conclude that “Song of Rahé” is simply yet another piece of ambivalent colonial literature is to overlook a political resonance in the poem that was radical for the time. In Roger Robinson’s 2004 collected edition Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writing, an extract of “Feast of Famine” is chosen instead of one from “Song of Rahé,” with the explanation that the poem about gluttonous cannibals is politically preferable because it is an “original, not a version of an inherited story, since we now have different views about the appropriation of Indigenous legend, however ‘corroborated’” (301-2). My hope is that our “different view” doesn’t necessitate overlooking the unambiguous core of Stevenson’s poem.

Another problem with viewing “Song of Rahé” solely as an act of cultural appropriation is that to do so denies any possible agency to the Polynesian text. Stevenson’s Polynesian ballads may be read as translations of the ballad form, moving the genre across an ocean and, in the process of that geographical transfer, introducing change into the genre. Translation is a point of cultural contact; necessarily, both cultures are touched in the process. By bringing Polynesian people, rhythms, and words into the ballad genre, Stevenson shapes the genre to accommodate his subject-matter. The result is the ballad ab-used, in Gentzler’s sense: an “un-usual, non-normative, mis-leading or de-familiar form” of the genre that resembles none of his other poetry (“Power” 201).

Indeed, if the rhythms that Stevenson recorded on his page of scansion were based on the songs of himene singers, then “Rahé” is the product of multiple “transculturations” (Pratt 6), and is doubly hybrid. Both the critic Monkhouse and the poet Gosse read the ballads in hybrid terms, deriding Stevenson for guising himself as “the Walter Scott of Tahiti” (qtd. in Maixner 374) or “a Polynesian Walter Scott” (qtd. in Maixner 375). If Ballads is to be read as a Minstrelsy of the Polynesian Border, then either the Scottish-English border has swollen in size, or Polynesia has been moved,
brought right up close to Great Britain. Neither of these options suggests that ballads are the model of “cultural stability” they were purported to be earlier in the century.

Like Kipling, Stevenson makes use of the ballad to write against forgetting, re-locating the ballad as a site of memory—in this case, a memory that crosses national borders: a Teva cultural production is preserved for posterity in the English language, in a Scottish genre (or, at least, what Stevenson considered to be a Scottish genre). While bardic literature in the late-eighteenth-century empire evoked “amnesia, dissociation, and forgetfulness” (Trumpener 222), this late-nineteenth-century ballad is a kind of haunting, as it is written in an ostensibly dead genre, and features a people and a culture who are, in Stevenson’s eyes, as good as dead. So while Morris’s ballad-ghosts refuse to acknowledge their murder, Stevenson’s ballad haunts because it asserts its history as history, and refuses assimilation into conventional British understandings of this culture and this genre.

Monica Bungaro has argued that, under late-nineteenth-century colonialist expansion, the “appropriation of other cultures and territories was instrumental to the project of maintaining and reinforcing national identity” (94). In Stevenson’s case, however, the appropriated culture was one that he perceived to be near extinction, and the national identity into which it was appropriated—the Scottish genre of the ballad—was likewise being irreversibly changed by the forces of colonialism. What occurs in Stevenson’s translations, therefore, is more akin to sharing in mourning than it is to bolstering nationalist norms. There’s a moment in In the South Seas where Stevenson describes meeting a young Marquesan mother who says to him, “‘Ici pas de kanaques [...] ‘Tenez—a little baby like this; then dead. All the Kanaques die. Then no more.’” To this, Stevenson’s unspoken response is: “in a perspective of centuries, I saw their case as ours, death coming in like a tide, and the day already numbered when there should be no more Beretani, and no more of any race whatever, and (what oddly touched me) no more literary works and no more readers” (22-3, emphasis in original). Bungaro argues that the “widespread belief in the extinction of other cultures was in part a displaced expression of fear of the extinction of European culture” (93); in Stevenson’s work, this fear is not displaced but explicit. The inevitability of cultural death produces an empathetic response
that manifests itself in what, for an author, is the most precious product of culture: literary works.

Stevenson admitted to being a poor judge of his own abilities as a poet, claiming in a letter to Edmund Gosse about the poor critical reception of *Ballads* that verse was “always to me the unknowable” (*Letters* 7: 106). While his 1890 collection may not have been well received by the British or American critics or public, this chapter posits that a consideration of the poems’ critically faulted features—irregular metre, incongruous dialogue—helps to reveal the intriguing and vexed politics of Stevenson’s Polynesian translations.
Chapter 4
E. Pauline Johnson’s “Verse-Wampum”

When Margaret Atwood first began to write the libretto for the opera that would become *Pauline*, she called her draft *The River Door*. The title came from E. Pauline Johnson’s childhood home—Chiefswood, now a National Historic Site in Ohsweken, Ontario—which Johnson’s Mohawk father built for her English mother before their marriage. Chiefswood has two front doors: one facing the road, for white guests who travelled by coach, the other facing the river, for Native guests who travelled by canoe. Johnson, Atwood suggested, preferred the river door, and the Haudenosaunee world to which it opened.

In this chapter, I read Johnson’s first collection of poetry, *The White Wampum* (1895), as—like Chiefswood—facing two audiences. I argue that Johnson’s book challenges earlier nineteenth-century conceptions of “the Indian,” bringing together the ballad and the dramatic monologue to interpret Indigenous Canadian voices and an Indigenous form, the wampum, for a British audience. The poems in *The White Wampum* emphasize the modernity of Indigenous peoples, subverting the false binary of ‘traditional vs. modern’; Johnson translates Indigenous voices into fluent English in a hybridized balladic monologue in order to subvert depictions of Native people as primitive or as anachronistic Tylorian survivals. In parallel, though, her poems also speak to a Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) audience, demonstrating culturally correct models of behavior, purporting to represent the views of the Haudenosaunee people, and intervening in an important political and cultural debate that raged on the Six Nations Reserve well into the twentieth century.

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59 In this dissertation, I use the Indigenous autonym term “Haudenosaunee”—meaning “People of the Longhouse”—rather than “Iroquois,” which was the name the French gave to the Haudenosaunee people. Terms similar to “Haudenosaunee” began to be used in English as early as the mid-nineteenth century—as in, for instance, Lewis Henry Morgan’s *League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* (1851)—but “Iroquois” was far more common in the period, and was the term that Johnson used.
Johnson’s Native North American ballads don’t conform to non-Native expectations of Indigenous balladry—the songs “so plain and childlike” of *The Song of Hiawatha* (Longfellow 8), discussed below—but rather emphasize the modernity of Indigenous peoples and the continuation of Indigenous forms of knowledge and cultural traditions even at the *fin-de-siècle*. Rather than translating legends, Johnson interprets contemporary Native Canadian lives and cultures, drawing on an Indigenous form of artistic recording, the wampum belt. Her balladic monologues refuse to provide British readers with the trope of the dying Indian and its commensurate “nostalgia for the chivalric ideals of an imaginary past” (McGill 6). I argue that, like Stevenson’s Indigenous Tahitian ballad translation discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation, Johnson writes in a hybridized ballad form in order to counter contemporary stereotypes of Indigenous peoples; unlike Stevenson, however, her ballad hybrids aren’t set in the distant past, and she translates the non-English words of contemporary Native peoples—often, but not exclusively, Native women—in order to depict the lived experience of late-nineteenth-century Canada.

Moreover, I argue in naming her collection after a belt of white wampum, Johnson positions her poetry—and notably her balladic monologues—as facilitating a nation-to-nation relationship between the Mohawk and the English (as well as their English-Canadian descendants). With these poems, Johnson takes up a traditionally Mohawk position—that of interpreter—in order to represent the experience of contemporary Indigenous Canadian peoples; she uses translation to engender empathy in her British readership, to move them to respond to the needs, the concerns, and the humanity of the peoples she depicts. By looking at the ways that Johnson takes up the ballad tradition, reinterprets it for a Canadian context, and returns it to Britain, we can see how she wrote against a national myth—the ‘civilized’ Briton who could be contrasted with the ‘uncivilized’ Iroquois—by revealing the contemporaneity of a genre that was supposed to be marked by historical alterity.

Finally, this chapter will also show that, while Johnson’s poetry carried a political message for her British readers, it also participated in a contemporary debate on the Six Nations Reserve. In 1876, the federal government of Canada passed the Indian Act,
which codified Indian status and set out rules for reserve governments, and which had the explicit purpose of destroying tribal customs and assimilating Indigenous peoples; in 1884, the Canadian government passed the Indian Advancement Act, which required tribal councils to be elected rather than chosen by traditional means, and placed the local Indian Agent—a federal government representative—in charge of counting the votes. In the aftermath of these acts, concerned about the effects of explicitly assimilationist laws, a number of individuals on the Six Nations Reserve began to write down the history of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which had previously been held in the overlapping modes of the oral tradition and wampum strings and belts. The different versions that were produced by these writers exacerbated a religious divide in the community—a divide between followers of the traditional ways of the Longhouse faith and followers of Christian faiths, including Mohawk Anglicans. The two groups disagreed as to what constituted Haudenosaunee history and tradition, and thus disagreed as to how the Haudenosaunee should move forward to maintain their culture in face of assimilationist policies. For an audience in the know, Johnson’s *The White Wampum* carries a particular resonance: it supports the Mohawk version of Haudenosaunee history, and positions Mohawk characters as defenders of Indigenous traditions.

*The White Wampum*, like Johnson’s childhood home, has front doors for two different audiences. This chapter proposes a Haudenosaunee reading of her poetry, but argues as well that a Haudenosaunee text can also be read as a work of Victorian literature. If Johnson is a Victorian poet, then what is Victorian poetry?

## 1 Pauline Johnson, Victorian Poet

Emily Pauline Johnson was born in the Province of Canada, a North American British colony now known as the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, in 1861, six years before the federal Dominion of Canada was formed. Johnson’s father, George H. M. Johnson (Onwanonsyshon), was elected Teyonhehkon—one of the fifty *rotiiane* (chiefs) of the

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60 The titles of the fifty chiefs of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy come from the names of the original founders; Teyonhehkon means “Double-Life” (Hale 136). Alternate spellings of this title include
Haudenosaunee Confederacy—and was also a government interpreter on the Six Nations reserve (Anderson and Robertson 103); her mother, Emily Susanna Howells, was an Englishwoman and a distant cousin of the American writer William Dean Howells. Johnson spoke Mohawk (Weaver *Atlantic*: 211) and was raised on both the stories of her father and grandfather—John “Smoke” Johnson—as well as the literature of her mother’s homeland: Shakespeare, Byron, Scott, and Tennyson. She began publishing poetry in American and Canadian periodicals in the mid-1880s, and, by the turn of the twentieth century, had become “as important to Canada as Mark Twain was to the United States” (Evans 184); in the 1940s, ’50s, and ’60s, elementary school students across Canada memorized her poem “The Song My Paddle Sings” for formal recitations. She died of breast cancer in Vancouver in March 1913, and newspapers across the country carried her obituary and reprinted her better-known poems to commemorate her death (see Anderson and Robertson 106-15).

Studies of Victorian literature do not usually include authors like Pauline Johnson, even though her books circulated in Britain in the late nineteenth century. In including Johnson’s *The White Wampum* in a dissertation on Victorian poetry, this chapter follows the network model of scholars like Alison Chapman, Regenia Gagnier, Caroline Levine, Tricia Lootens, Meredith Martin, and Meredith McGill, all of whom argue for the necessity of including non-British poets in studies of Victorian verse. In the Summer 2013 issue of *Victorian Studies*, and following the 2012 NAVSA conference on “Networks,” Levine proposed that scholars of Victorian studies shift the basis of their scholarship, abandoning “the logic of nativity” and following instead “the links that connect nodes” (664). Those scholars who write on British-born authors, Levine argued, ought to justify their selections as much as those who write on non-British authors: “even when scholars ask other radically unsettling questions about power and social hierarchies,

Teyonhehkwen, Teyonhekwia, Deyonhegweb and Deyonhehgon. I use the spelling used by the anthropologist Horatio Hale in his 1885 article, “Chief George H. M. Johnson, Onwanonsyshon: His Life and Work among the Six Nations.” Annemarie Shimony lists the full roster of fifty titles (104-116).
they should justify their reliance on birthplace and birth-time, just as they justify their choice of some texts and some methods over others” (654). Levine’s point—that scholars of Victorian literature not take for granted what ‘counts’ as a Victorian text—highlights the problematic “attachment between a land and its culture” (654) and argues that Victorian cultures and values did not “grow as a coherent group, as if out of the ground” (653). In addition, Levine argued that writers not born in Britain be included in scholarly conversations about the Victorian era, in order to “conceive of a Victorian Britain that was not so much a literary homeland as a bounded space crisscrossed by world literature” (664). Alison Chapman has made a similar argument in suggesting that Victorian poetry ought to include “misfit” figures—English-language writers who published British books but were not themselves British—as, by excluding them, “we may have conceived a Victorian poetry that is anachronistic and drawn imaginary lines around poetry that overly circumscribe our field. […] Victorian poetry is more elastic, more transnational, more ‘beyond Britain’ […] than we have yet dreamed of” (“Why” par. 3). Meredith Martin, too, has argued that “Victorian poetry and poetics are not simply British (or English) phenomena, but are enmeshed in American and European literary cultures and beyond, and are also crucially part of a reciprocal exchange between these cultures” (“Trans” 380). Meredith McGill notes the dominance of studies of women poets in her collection of essays, *The Traffic in Poems*, suggesting that “transatlantic approaches to nineteenth-century poetry might well produce a literary history in which women poets are not the exception—marginal figures who need solicitously to be brought back into national canons—but figures who […] make it possible to track the shifting currents of cultural exchange” (4).

This dissertation—and this chapter specifically—responds to these recent transnational arguments by shifting the basis of its approach from the model of the nation to the model of the network. Johnson, though she was born in a British colony and spent most of her life in Canada, ought to be considered in conversations about Victorian literature generally and Victorian balladry specifically: she grew up reading Walter Scott in a home with William Morris papers on the walls, and published her first collection of poetry with the most important British press of the 1890s, the Bodley Head. If Johnson is a Victorian poet, then Victorian poetry is more outward-looking than we had previously
considered, working within our narrow critical focus, and imagining the field to be a “static, nation-based canonical category” (Chapman, “Sonnet” 597); if Johnson is a Victorian poet, then Victorian poetry may also, like Chiefswood, be accessed through multiple front doors.

Johnson’s contribution to the late Victorian conception of balladry is especially striking, as she figures the ballad as a modern form, in contrast to conventional nineteenth-century associations of the ballad with the ‘primitive’—as we saw, for instance, in Stevenson, and as I will show in Longfellow’s Hiawatha. By “modern,” I mean a form that has not been left behind by a progressivist view of human cultural evolution; Johnson’s ballads only seemingly divide ‘traditional’ from ‘contemporary.’ One significant means Johnson used to emphasize the modernity of the form was to blend it with the dramatic monologue, creating a hybridized balladic monologue.

2 The Balladic Monologue in The White Wampum

Pauline Johnson subscribed to a newspaper clipping service, and the excerpted snippets of reviews provided by this service are held in the Johnson Fonds at McMaster University’s Mills Memorial Library. These reviews show that British critics described The White Wampum as a ballad collection. One reviewer wrote that the book was “for the most part, made up of pseudo-Indian ballads”; another noted that “a few ballads […] are concerned with the noble savage of America—the red variety”; a third said that “her songs of love in a canoe have swing and passion, and her ballads of Indian heroism are vigorous.”

A number of the reviewers compare her poems to those of the English poet and journalist G. R. Sims, whose name is now largely forgotten, but whose The Dagonet

61 Johnson’s clipping service, Romeike & Curtice, cut these articles from their context, and so it is often difficult to provide an author, a page number, or even a journal name to these reviews, which makes it difficult to cite these pieces appropriately; the third can be attributed to the April 12, 1895 issue of Daily Chronicle. They can, however, be identified definitively as British reviews, because, as footnote 5 below explains, The White Wampum was published by different houses in the UK, the US, and Canada, and these reviews all identify Johnson’s book as coming from John Lane’s Bodley Head. Reviews of The White Wampum are held in the E. Pauline Johnson Fonds in the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University.
Ballads (1879) and Ballads of Babylon (1880) remained in print well into the early 1900s.

What the reviewers note less often is that The White Wampum includes poems in a range of forms: not only ballads, but also dramatic monologues, apostrophes and lyric meditations in a range of nonce stanzas. Rather than presenting a straightforward ballad collection, Johnson’s first collection’s opening poems, which focus specifically on Native characters, are narrative hybrids of the ballad and the dramatic monologue, while the rest of the collection—mostly sketches of rural life and encounters with nature—are lyrics. Later in life, while living in British Columbia, Johnson did plan on writing a collection of translated ballads, but she died before completing that project; the one ballad that she was able to complete, “The Ballad of Yaada: A Legend of the Pacific Coast,” was the last poem that Johnson lived to see published.

Johnson’s formal and generic choices have received little scholarly attention, despite their important relationship to the politics of her poems. Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson have argued that

Johnson’s use of popular narrative forms (sometimes in ballad metre) for her overtly Indian poems was a calculated choice. Not only did she select a medium well-suited to performance, but the resulting accessibility of these poems guaranteed that, like the verses of Robert Burns, Robert Service, and W. H. Drummond, and similar poets grounded in oral traditions, they would engrave themselves in public memory. (Paddling 149)

For Strong-Boag and Gerson, Johnson’s formal choices are significant only in terms of how the poems were read aloud. In thinking about Johnson’s form as it is read rather than in its performative context, though, it becomes evident that Johnson not only chose “popular narrative forms” for her Native poems; she also chose to write these poems exclusively as ballads and dramatic monologues.

These two forms of poetry aren’t usually discussed together in criticism. Ballads were usually thought of as ‘primitive’ poems, distant in time and/or location from the modern Victorian present; ballads are narrative poems in which an objective speaker presents a story in clear and simple language, often presenting dialogue without
commenting on the interiority of the person who delivers it. The motivation or psychology behind the action of the story is, conventionally, absent from the ballad. Dramatic monologues, however, were a strikingly contemporary genre. Usually considered to have emerged in the poetry of Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning, dramatic monologues were a modern form, even newer than the novel; they were spoken in the first person by a character other than the poet, and delivered to a silent listener or audience. The effect of the dramatic monologue is one of immersion: both the silent auditor and the reader are overwhelmed by the speaker’s perspective, but the speaker too is often overwhelmed by the significance of their own experience. And while critics since Robert Langbaum have emphasized the seemingly unconscious, often reprehensible, revelations that dramatic monologue speakers have exposed, Cornelia Pearsall argues that “a range of premeditated and prescribed consequences arises from the speech act that is the monologue,” even if the speaker is not necessarily capable of anticipating all of the effects of his or her speech (24). Pearsall’s central claim is that Victorian dramatic monologues after Tennyson were politically engaged texts, featuring speakers whose acts of enraptured and enrapturing speaking called into effect “social and political transformations by inciting personal ones” (10). The conventional balladic speaker’s detachment seems irreconcilable with the monologist’s entrancement, unless one imagines the enraptured dramatic monologue speaker as having undergone a “violent rapture” or a “swift and sudden seizure” (Pearsall 11), which affects a kind of distancing from the self.

It is in these moments of aggressive, even transgressive, transportation that a few Victorian poets—notably women, writing politically charged verses—did bring these two forms together. Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point” (1848)—an abolitionist poem in which the titular slave commits infanticide after being raped by white men—is one such hybrid poem; Mathilde Blind’s “The Song of the Willi” (1891)—a subversively passionate poem spoken by the ghost of a woman who dies just before she is to be married—is another. Johnson’s hybrid “balladic monologues” blend the genres in different ways: one poem quotes a first-person story told in ballad meter; one detached ballad speaker relays the action of a story, but none of the reasons for its occurrence, in iambic pentameter couplets; a third appends a dramatic monologue to a
ballad story, interrupting the narrative in order to provide the personal insight or lyrical commentary that a fast-paced ballad story can exclude. In each instance, the effect of Johnson’s “balladic monologues” is a double distancing. With ballad speakers, Johnson can present a story without implicating herself in its action; with dramatic monologue speakers, Johnson can introduce characters who are not representative of her own thoughts. These characters can be angry; they can make harsh demands and condemn the actions of others, and they can do so without speaking in Johnson’s voice. Her politics are always ventriloquized, always mediated.

For Johnson, the ballad is not a genre of preservation but a genre of testimony: a way of telling contemporary stories in a contemporary form. One effect of bringing together the ballad and the dramatic monologue is that Johnson’s Native poems don’t reproduce the paradigm of “the denial of coevalness” (Fabian 30). Johnson’s poems do not depict Native people as living embodiments of the past, anachronistically still alive in the present, nor does *The White Wampum* imagine Native people and cultures as vanishing. These poems depict the experiences of living people, rather than legendary eras. Johnson was not the first nineteenth-century poet to write in a hybridized ballad form; Kate Flint, for one, has argued that “Romantic and Victorian women’s poetry is packed with interventionist dramatic monologues,” including ballads (“Rule” 159). What is intriguing about Johnson’s balladic monologues is her selection of these two genres to translate an Indigenous Canadian form of ‘text’ or ‘writing’—the wampum belt—as not a ‘traditional object’ nor an artifact of an exotic, foreign culture, but as a vital, relevant mode of Indigenous storytelling that thrives by repeated rereading, by finding fresh language to reinforce extant relationships. The clearest example of Johnson’s balladic monologue being used to subvert expectations of Indigenous poetry and to call for a reappraisal of settler-Indigenous relations is the collection’s fourth poem, “The Cattle Thief.”

3 “The Cattle Thief”

The title of “The Cattle Thief” sets up the poem to belong to the tradition of reiver (meaning “robber” or “marauder”) ballads—poems like “Dick o’ the Cow” and “Kinmont
Willie,” published in Walter Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), in which the title characters cross the border into English territory to steal cattle. The reiver ballad tradition continued in late-nineteenth-century adaptations of the subgenre, such as Rudyard Kipling’s “The Lament of the Border Cattle Thief” (1888), in which an unrepentant cattle thief on the Indian-Afghan frontier rages at the dishonour of his arrest. Johnson, however, sets up her poem as a straightforward reiver ballad, only to turn away from the expected narrative and undermine the convention. Rather than celebrate the life of a plunderer, Johnson reveals that the title of “Cattle Thief” is a misnomer, as the true thieves in the poem are those who “robbed him [a starving Cree man] first of bread” (14): English settlers.

“The Cattle Thief” is narrative poem in a hexameter that is largely anapestic; like Browning’s “How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix,” the opening lines of “The Cattle Thief”—which feature “desperate English settlers” on horseback who are “galloping hard and fast” (11)—rhythmically reproduce the sound of horse-hooves. This poem retells the story of the death of a Cree bandit-hero, the eponymous “Cattle Thief.” Although narrated in third person, the poem opens in the perspective of the riders, with the Cattle Thief characterized as a typical reiver:

Mistake him? Never! – Mistake him? the famous Eagle Chief!  
That terror to all the settlers, that desperate Cattle Thief—
That monstrous, fearless Indian, who lorded it over the plain,
Who thieved and raided, and scouted, who rode like a hurricane. (11)

These lines depict the Cattle Thief through “the eyes of those desperate riders [who] had sighted their man at last”—and he is “their man” in the sense that he is characterized as they see him (11). While the parallel descriptions of both the Cattle Thief and his pursuers as “desperate” may hint at an underlying affinity or humanity shared between the men, the multiple noun phrases and relative clauses appended to “the famous Eagle Chief” overwhelmingly suggest that the speaker’s voice is focalized through the

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62 George W. Lyon reads the poem as being in “ballad meter, iambic tetrameter/trimeter,” with “the lines [...] stretched out to incorporate all seven beats in one line” (142), but I’d argue that an anapestic six-beat line, with occasional iambic substitutions, better fits the scansion.
Englishmen’s perspective in these opening lines. Even the meter reproduces their sensory experience. As Rick Monture has argued of “Ojistoh” and “As Red Men Die,” at moments like these, Johnson “signals the attempt to capture attention by fulfilling readers’ expectations of stereotypical images” (125); however, in this case, Johnson only sets up her poems as if to affirm these stereotypes before turning away from the conventional and subverting her audience’s expectations.

Johnson’s poem turns away from the expected when, standing in the open, “unarmed,” the Cattle Thief’s starved body is put on poetic display:

Scarce fifty years had rolled
Over that fleshless, hungry frame, starved to the bone and old;
Over that wrinkled, tawny skin, unfed by the warmth of blood.
Over those hungry, hollow eyes that glared for the sight of food. (12)

In these lines, the speaker turns from the absolute definitions of the English settlers to an observational blazon; instead of seeing “their man,” the speaker here begins to suggest that the men on horseback have “mistake[n] him” for a character out of a poem instead of a real, and famished, man (11). Just as he begins to speak “in the language of the Cree” (12), however, the “band of cursing settlers” shoots the Eagle Chief dead, and, giving “one triumphant yell,” approach the body with the explicit intention of desecrating it (13). They are stopped, though, by the dead man’s daughter, who, speaking in Cree, “rave[s] of the wrongs she had suffered since her earliest babyhood”—words that the settlers “scarcely understood” (14), but which are translated for the reading audience into fluent English.

The Eagle Chief’s daughter’s closing speech chastises her father’s killers, and implicates them in the appropriation of Indigenous peoples’ land and food:

“Stand back, stand back, you white-skins, touch that dead man to your shame;
You have stolen my father’s spirit, but his body I only claim!
You have killed him, but you shall not dare to touch him now he’s dead.
You have cursed, and called him a Cattle Thief, though you robbed him first of bread—
[...] Go back with your new religion, we never have understood
Your robbing an Indian’s body, and mocking his soul with food!
Go back with your new religion, and find—if find you can—
The honest man you have ever made from out a starving man!
You say your cattle are not ours, your meat is not our meat;
When you pay for the land you live in, we’ll pay for the meat we eat!
Give back our land and our country, give back our herds of game;
Give back the furs and the forests that were ours before you came;
Give back the peace and the plenty! Then come with your new belief,
And blame, if you dare, the hunger that drove him to be a thief!” (14-15)

The poem closes with these words; the speaker offers no resolution, or depiction of any response on the part of the killers to this speech. The daughter’s twenty-five lines of speech—about forty percent of the total number of lines in the poem—thus form a dramatic monologue within the overarching ballad: a unidirectional speech, directed at silent auditors, and spoken in a first-person voice other than that of the poet. The poem that began as a conventional reiver ballad thus ends as a dramatic monologue. Johnson is twice distanced from some of the angriest words in the collection: distanced once by the speaker’s initial affinity with the English settlers—while conventionally ballad speakers are objective, “The Cattle Thief” opens in the style of free indirect discourse—and distanced twice by quoting the Eagle Chief’s daughter’s monologue, putting these harsh words in the mouth of an understandably anguished character.

While the Eagle Chief’s daughter speaks directly to her father’s murderers, her speech is overheard by a silent listnership of Cree women—“the women alone” who met the English riders upon their first arrival in the community (12). The daughter’s speech may include direct calls for decolonization, but her monologue also performs a speech act, in keeping with Pearsall’s conception of the genre: in delivering her speech, the daughter both says she will—and successfully does—claim her father’s body. Her speech demands that settler-colonists restore Native rights to land and food by emphasizing the effects of colonialism on Indigenous bodies—a called-for “social and political transformation” (Pearsall 10)—while her monologue enacts the repossession of her father’s body—a personal act, brought about through the daughter’s words. As her speech shifts from first-person singular to first-person plural, she draws in both her silent female auditors and a Native reader, who too is in possession of “an Indian’s body” (15). In laying claim to Indigenous bodies in “The Cattle Thief,” Johnson aligns political
discourse, the text, and the embodied experience of colonialism. As the following section will show, this alignment mirrors the logic of the Haudenosaunee wampum belt.

That much of “The Cattle Thief” is a poem in translation has been commented on by critics like Cari Carpenter, who argues that “[t]he fact that the heroine speaks to the settlers in Cree but to the reader in English is an important difference,” as it enables “the audience […] to identify with” the Eagle Chief’s daughter (70). Julie Rak has likewise pointed to the translated closing of “The Cattle Thief” as a cathartic moment for Johnson’s audience: “when the audience wept at her [the daughter’s] lines […] they connected her outrage with the violence of a desirable, but mercifully vanquished lawless Wild West” (165). What Carpenter and Rak’s analyses miss, though, is the striking contemporary resonance—even prescience—of Johnson’s poem.

“The Cattle Thief” is sometimes read as a poetic adaptation of the death of Kisse Manitou Wayo, also known as Almighty Voice (see LaRocque 80; Wright 193). Almighty Voice was a Cree man who was arrested for killing a Government cow. He escaped, killing a Mountie in the process, and a 19-month manhunt followed, culminating in a massive gun-fight, in which the Northwest Mounted Police fired cannons and called in over a hundred reinforcements from Prince Albert and Regina. In two days, six men—three mounties, Almighty Voice, and two of his relatives—were killed. And while there are parallels between the death of Johnson’s “Cattle Thief” and this particular historical cattle thief, Johnson’s poem is prescient rather than historical record: “The Cattle Thief” was published in 1895, but the battle that killed Almighty Voice took place on May 27-28, 1897. The “Wild West” depicted in Johnson’s poem, then, was far from “mercifully vanquished” at the moment of the poem’s publication, as Rak has suggested (165). Rather, the poem so aptly depicts Cree life in the 1890s that some twenty-first century critics have misread the poem as commenting on Almighty Voice’s death.

The layers of translation in the text move beyond the overt switch between “the language of the Cree” that both father and daughter speak in the poem and the language in which the poem is printed (12, 13), however, as the dialogue of the settlers is likewise translated into comprehensible English: while the opening lines of the poem are filtered
through their perception, the focus soon shifts to turn them into the subject of the speaker’s critical gaze, and, although many of their utterances are sublingual “hiss[ing]” (12) and “yell[ing]” (13) or unprintable “curs[ing] like a troop of demons” (12), their speech is rendered in clear, coherent couplets. The poem depicts mutual comprehension despite linguistic differences—how does the Cree-speaking Eagle Chief’s Cree-speaking daughter know that the English settlers “called him a Cattle Thief” (14)? That the Eagle Chief’s daughter knows the name her father had been called; that the English settlers understand, if only “scarcely,” her speech; and that the reader has access to fluent translations of all the scene’s dialogue, as if the speaker of the poem has detoured Babel—these impossibilities combine to reveal that the Eagle Chief’s daughter, and the Cree people more broadly, are not the unknowable ‘savages’ of the Victorian British cultural imagination, always in need of translation (as in Longfellow’s Hiawatha, discussed below). The closing speech of “The Cattle Thief” not only articulates the necessary response to continuing colonialist injustice: it also demonstrates the ultimate comprehensibility of an Indigenous Canadian perspective.

Thus the poem that appears to begin as a typical reiver ballad closes with a call for the restoration of Indigenous rights. Johnson’s balladic monologues are not the only form of strategic subversion that she used in depicting Indigenous Canadians as modern and comprehensible: she also published her collection with one of the best-known publishing houses in 1890s London.

4 Historical Context: Bringing a Wampum Belt to a London Publisher

Like the other poets in this dissertation, Johnson’s collection includes an authoritative intervention in which she attempts to shape how her work will be received and understood. The paratextual frame to The White Wampum includes a directive from Johnson to read the poems as “verse-wampum” (n.p.). In order to unpack what Johnson means by this hybrid term, it is important to understand the cultural significance of wampum in the late nineteenth century. Once she provides her directive in her preface, though, Johnson ceases to intervene in the interpretive process; unlike Kipling or
Stevenson, she doesn’t retranslate her poems in footnotes or endnotes, and does not engage with artifactualizing conventions; unlike Morris, she does not manipulate the material context of her poems to convey visually her politics. Before moving into a consideration of Johnson’s preface, I begin by considering the framing paratextual details—the cover and title page illustrations; the advertisements—that mark *The White Wampum* as a Bodley Head book.

When Johnson first travelled to England in 1894, she did not go to perform publicly, as she had done in Canada for almost a decade; the only performances that she did put on were “private recitals in aristocratic homes” (C. Morgan 331), where she was also often a guest rather than the entertainment. Jace Weaver has suggested that “the whole reason Johnson had come to England was to get a publisher for her poetry manuscript” (*Atlantic* 209); Sheila Johnston corroborates this claim, suggesting that Johnson “was prepared to perform should the occasion arise, but her motivation for making the trans-Atlantic voyage was to find a publisher, secure a contract, and see her book of collected verse available for sale” (102). While Johnson travelled through southern Ontario in 1892 and the eastern United States in 1893 in order to earn a living, the central focus of her trip to England was to turn her manuscript into a book.

Although her poetry began circulating in Canadian periodicals in the 1880s, and although she could have sought a contract with an American or a Canadian publishing house, Johnson chose to go to London to find a publisher for *The White Wampum*.63 The collection ended up coming out with the Bodley Head, which was an avant-garde publishing house, best known for publishing *The Yellow Book*, but also the publisher of a number of aesthetic, decadent, and New Woman writers in the 1890s, including Michael Field, Arthur Symons, Edmund Gosse, William Butler Yeats, and Oscar Wilde. Aubrey Beardsley’s black-and-white illustrations for Bodley Head publications have become a visual metonym for fin-de-siècle aesthetics, as a result of Lane’s self-conscious

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63 *The White Wampum* was published under a joint imprint, with John Lane of the Bodley Head in London, The Copp Clark Co in Toronto, and Lamson, Wolfe & Co in Boston. Giles Bergel suggests that, for John Lane, a joint imprint was “highly advantageous for copyright reasons” (165).
construction of “what constituted ‘elegant’ appearance and sophisticated content” in 1890s books (Stetz and Lasner viii). Publishing with the Bodley Head, Jerome McGann has argued, “defined you as a certain type of person—aesthetic and very modern” (78). In 1897, Johnson was quoted in an article in *The Chicago Tribune* as saying that she brought her poems to England in the hopes that John Lane would publish them; if this quotation is accurate, then Johnson explicitly sought “a certain type” of publisher for her first collection.

If Johnson’s idea in publishing with the Bodley Head was to reinforce the modernity of the Indigenous people represented in her collection, the presentation of the book nonetheless introduced a gap between the British reader and the Indigenous Canadian subject, as it represented Indigenous people as removed from the modern

Figure 14a: Cover page of *The White Wampum* (John Lane, 1895). Courtesy of the Thomas Fisher Rare
world. G. H. New provided the title page’s illustration (Strong-Boag and Gerson, *Paddling* 145)—in red ink, a pair of crossed tomahawks are framed above and below by the book’s title, author, and publication information, with a thick black-and-white border image of a circle of tepees in a forest clearing, a lake and mountains in the distance, and a fire at the centre of the circle, its smoke winding up and away like Salome’s hair in an Aubrey Beardsley illustration (see Figure 14b). The *White Wampum* was reviewed widely in Britain: Johnson received clippings of reviews from the *Glasgow Herald, Daily Chronicle, Yorkshire Herald, Westminster Gazette, The Scotsman, Yorkshire Herald, The National Observer, Pall Mall Gazette, Manchester Guardian, Weekly Sun*, and *Weekly Scotsman.*

*The White Wampum* was published as a limited edition, but, as Heather Marcovitch has argued, many Bodley Head books were published as limited editions—this was the press’s marketing strategy to “capitaliz[e] on the trend of collecting”:

Publishers would market a book as a limited edition, promising not only exclusivity but a greater attention to the printing aesthetics. [...] The trend was so pervasive that one journalist complained that publishers were misleading the public by overselling unknown or mediocre writers through makeshift limited and collectors’ editions. The popularity of limited editions meant that Lane and [his publishing partner Elkin] Mathews, financially strapped and unable to finance extended runs of their books, could upsell their publications by transforming their lack of product into a desirable scarcity. (par. 3)

Joseph Bristow describes Lane’s limited editions as designed to distance Bodley Head books from the vulgar profiteering of mass-market publishing (*Fin-de-siècle* 17); Linda

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64 As Figures 14a and 14b show, the title page of *The White Wampum* names as its author “E. Pauline Johnson / Tekahionwake” while the cover lists only “Tekahionwake”; not visible in Figure 14a is that “E. Pauline Johnson” is listed on the spine of the book, along with its title. “Tekahionwake” was the Mohawk name of Johnson’s paternal great-grandfather, Jacob Johnson. As the Haudenosaunee society is matrilineal, Johnson claimed this name rather than receiving it via baptism or other naming ritual. Strong-Boag and Gerson suggest that Johnson took the name “Tekahionwake” for professional purposes, as she tended to sign her personal letters “E. Pauline Johnson,” or with other familiar nicknames like “Paul” (*Paddling* 117).

65 Gerson notes the impossibility of this scene: “Teepees of Plains Indians are improbably pitched in a dense coniferous forest, against a background of lofty western mountains, behind which extend the rays of the setting sun” (Gerson, “Postcolonialism” 429).
Peterson has linked this approach—publishing a limited number of ‘elite’ volumes—to Bourdieu’s idea of the “sub-field of restricted production” (176). Johnson’s book was thus a collection and a collectable—a desirable, elite and consumable object that was rendered as explicitly Native, as the title page illustration and the front cover (featuring a tomahawk draped in a wampum belt; see Figure 14a) advertised.

As one of the series of Lane’s “Belles Lettres,” Johnson’s *The White Wampum* was advertised at the back of each John Lane publication, described—as each book in the series was—more in terms of its physicality than its content. Sandwiched between Lionel Johnson’s *The Art of Thomas Hardy* and C. E. Johnstone’s *Ballads of Boy and Beak*, each advertisement for Johnson’s collection reads, in full:

> JOHNSON (PAULINE).
> 
> THE WHITE WAMPUM : Poems. With title-page and cover designs by E. H. NEW. Cr. 8vo. 5s. net.

The designation “Cr. 8vo” stands for “crown octavo,” meaning the book measured 7.5” x 5”; the volume’s price, 5 shillings net, is in line with other poetry collections of the same size in the series. The reference to E. H. New’s “title-page and cover designs” emphasize the book’s aesthetic value, which was a common move in these back-page advertisements; similar descriptions can be found in the advertisements for Grant Allen’s *The Lower Slopes*, John Davidson’s *Plays*, and H. T. Wharton’s *Sappho*, amongst others. Even *The Yellow Book* was advertised with explicit reference to the number of pages and illustrations in each volume. Johnson’s book, then, was positioned by its publisher as yet another object for consumption—a beautiful book of poems, on an unfamiliar topic but in a standardized, familiar aesthetic format (see Gerson, “Postcolonialism” 432).

In her dedicatory note, however, Johnson figures *The White Wampum* as a collection that is very different from the other books published in the same “Belles Lettres” series. The dedication reads:

> As wampums to the Redman, so to the Poet are his songs; chiselled alike from that which is the purest of his possessions, woven alike with meaning into belt and book, fraught alike with the corresponding message of peace, the breathing of
tradition, the value of more than coin, and the seal of fellowship with all men.

So do I offer this belt of verse-wampum to those two who have taught me most of its spirit—my Mother, whose encouragement has been my mainstay in its weaving; my Father, whose feet have long since wandered to the Happy Hunting Grounds. (n.p.)

By imaging her book as consisting of hybrid “verse-wampum,” Johnson sets up her work as a collection of a very different sort from other Bodley Head books.

Wampum—the white and purple shell beads strung into intricate, highly symbolic patterns on belts—predate colonial contact; most Northeastern North American Indigenous nations used belts of wampum beads to facilitate intertribal contact from around the twelfth century. Mark Shell has described wampum as comparable to a *lingua franca* or “trade language, like Chinook or Choctaw” (38). In wampum, what are considered discrete concepts in the English language—money, contract, historical record, and art—come together. The Haudenosaunee tradition holds that Hiawatha

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66 Haudenosaunee tradition holds that Hiawatha was the first person to use wampum when he brought together the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca in the League of the Five Nations (on which the modern Haudensaunee Confederacy is founded). Although there is still some debate as to when the League was founded, Barbara Mann and Jerry Fields’ suggested date—August 31, 1142—is broadly accepted, as it draws on the oral tradition of Haudenosaunee wampum keepers, on physical evidence, and on scientific data relating to the appearance of a lunar eclipse. See Mann and Fields.

67 Alone, “money” is a poor translation for the word “wampum,” as the significance of wampum is primarily social rather than economic (see Otto 116); nonetheless, wampum have since colonial contact functioned as a kind of money. As Birgit Brander Rasmussen has noted, wampum’s function as currency “emerged mainly as a consequence of colonial exchange and was never primary for the Haudenosaunee” (61). In an 1894 interview, Johnson is quoted as responding to the reporter’s question, “Please tell me what wampums are,” by saying: “Cleverly-woven bands of beads—this history, literature, seal, and coinage of the Iroquois” (“Tekahionwake” 384).

68 Kathryn Muller describes wampum belts as “mnemonic aids to recall political agreements,” noting that “some wampum belts paralleled European written treaties in their ability to record and preserve agreements” (129). Angela Haas describes wampum as “a sign technology that has been used to record hundreds of years of alliances within tribes, between tribes, and between the tribal governments and colonial government” (78). Richard Cullen Rath argues that wampum made the speech acts that accompanied them “serious, if not yet binding, proposals” (304).

69 “[T]he wampum was also used, by the Haudenosaunee and others, as a means of recording history, making of these historical records the locus of peace, healing, and intercultural well-being” (Lopenzina 23).

70 Rath points out the problematic emphasis on visual analogies for wampum in English: “Adopting analogies such as currency, writing, books, reading, inscription or graphism […] focuses attention almost solely on the visual at the expense of other sensory modalities, particularly hearing. This ocularcentrism is
discovered wampum and, with it, facilitated a kind of transitional justice at the time of the Confederacy, “us[ing] it in bringing their message of peace and in rituals of social healing” (Otto 112). Since the Haudenosaunee did not have access to the quahog shells from which wampum beads were made, coastal villagers between the Hudson River and Narragansett Bay sent their beads upriver (see Brooks 394). William Fenton argues that the prevalence of wampum in Haudenosaunee oral history shows that “historically, wampum was something wonderful, [as] the Iroquois could not make it themselves, lacking the shells” (227); “Iroquois chiefs,” claims Fenton, “never did any serious business without wampum” (231).

In her poem “Dawendine,” Johnson likewise characterizes wampum belts—specifically, an all-white belt—as facilitating peaceful intertribal contact: Dawendine brings her “wampum white”71 to the leader of a rival tribe in order to put an end to a conflict, presenting the belt to the man who is both “her lover” (21) and her “hated foeman” (22), as he has murdered her brother. Choosing to stay with “her victorious lover, monarch he of all the Height” (21), Dawendine and her “wampum pale and peaceful” (21) bring about the “dawn of peace” between enemy tribes (22). Dawendine thus becomes a figure for the poet,72 who likewise presented her own White Wampum to the heart of the empire that she loved, but that—as poems like “The Cattle Thief” and “Wolverine” show—she knew was implicated in the murder of Indigenous people. “Dawendine” opens with a description of a haunted landscape—“There’s a spirit on the

at least partially the result of our own text-based, vision-oriented habits as literate scholars and writers in the modern academy” (297). Rath’s essay explores the sonic features of wampum, and gestures towards the significance of the sense of touch for early American Indian cultures. Haas likewise points to the inadequacy of conventional, visual metaphors for wampum; she has suggested that wampum belts are “hypertextual technologies” (77) and that studying them as such “has the potential to re-vision the intellectual history of technology, hypertext, and multimedia studies” (78).

71 At this moment, the word “wampum” can be understood as synecdochically referring to a belt of wampum beads.

72 Anne Collett notes that Johnson includes a reference to “Dawendine” in her semi-autobiographic short story “My Mother,” published posthumously in The Moccasin Maker (1913) (see Collett 369), which further suggests a connection between this figure and Johnson.
river, there’s a ghost upon the shore” (19)—and this ghost turns out to be the singing Dawendine, whose “soft and tender song” is in harmony with the environment:

And the wailing pine trees murmur with their voice attuned to hers,
Murmur when they ‘rouse from slumber as the night wind through them stirs
And you listen to their legend,
And their voices blend with hers. (20)

Johnson’s own ‘songs,’ her poems, blend not with the trees but with the manufactured products made from those trees, as the white pages on which “Dawendine” is printed suggest that Johnson’s ‘song’ is both an instrument of and a record of peaceful internation contact—as were the beaded belts after which the collection is named.

What is especially interesting about Johnson’s figuration of both Dawendine’s offering and her collection of verses as “white” is that wampum belts are rarely monochromatic. For example, consider one of the most famous wampum belts, the Two Row Wampum (tékeni téyohá:te? [see Michelson]), a seventeenth-century belt that both depicted and ratified a reciprocal pact of noninterference between the Dutch and the Haudenosaunee. The Two Row Wampum belt is so-named because it consists of two thin, parallel lines of purple beads separated and bordered by broader bands of white beads (see Figure 15). In this belt, the significance lies in the contrast between the purple and the white beads, as the “parallel purple lines represent the Haudenosaunee canoe and the European ship, comprising the laws, traditions, and customs of their respective people. Each vessel travels down the river of life, represented by the white wampum background, never interfering with the other” (Muller 131). Jon Parmenter argues that the Two Row Wampum’s two purple lines are symbolic of “a separate-but-equal relationship between two entities based on mutual benefit and mutual respect for each party’s inherent
freedom of movement—neither side may attempt to ‘steer’ the vessel of the other as it travels along its own, self-determined path” (84). For these interpretations of the Two Row Wampum to make sense, though, the belt depends on having two different colours of beads; the shapes made by the purple beads can only be read because they contrast with the white beads. Similarly, the Friendship Belt (tehonatenę’tshawá:ko [see Michelson]), which represents the seventeenth-century Covenant Chain alliance between the Haudenosaunee and the English, features a white background with two human figures in purple, united with a chain of friendship (see Figure 16; see also Muller 129). Again, the meaning of this belt—its figurative alliance—can be understood only because of the contrast in the two colours of beads.

Given the precedent of the Two Row Wampum, the Friendship Belt, and other famous wampum belt records, how can a belt of white-on-white beads be interpreted? Johnson’s “white wampum” is without the contrasts that make meaning in wampum belts; it seems as easy to read as an all-white page. Even the image of the wampum on the cover of Johnson’s book has a few bands of contrasting, dark beads (see Figure 14a). An all-white wampum seems to carry with it, to the Western reader, connotations of surrender, or even of racial ‘white-washing’. But the “white wampum” is not an object of Johnson’s invention, nor should she be accused of using an Indigenous artifact as a vehicle for a Western concept—waving the white flag to give in to an enemy during a conflict. Johnson’s all-white belt is not ‘blank’ in the way that a page without ink may be; as an all-white belt, it echoes the pattern of an earlier, foundational, monochrome wampum belt.

5 The Great White Wampum: White Beads in Haudenosaunee and Non-Native Texts

What Johnson appears to be referencing in the white wampum of “Dawendine” and the collection’s title is another historical belt, one that predates the Two Row Wampum and the Friendship Belt: Deganawidah’s “great white wampum” (Parker 98), used to ratify the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Deganawidah (Tekánawi:ta’), The Peacemaker, was a twelfth-century Onondaga leader; along with Hiawatha, he was the co-founder of the
Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which united the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations, with the Tuscarora joining in 1712 to make up the Six Nations. The first written transcript of the Mohawk version of the events surrounding founding the Haudenosaunee Confederacy—an event known as the Kaianere’kó:wa (“Great Law” or “Great Law of Peace”)—was recorded by Seth Newhouse (Dayodekane), a man of Onondaga and Mohawk heritage. In response to the Indian Act of 1876, the Six Nations council of chiefs decided to translate the Great Law into English “as a way to demonstrate their basis of sovereignty” (Monture 133). Newhouse produced a number of manuscripts related to the Great Law, transcriptions of the oral history recorded in the wampum belts; although Newhouse tried to have the Haudenosaunee council of chiefs affirm the validity of his manuscripts, his version of the history was rejected in favour of the versions written by the Seneca traditionalist John Gibson (see Buerger).

In 1916, the archaeologist and historian Arthur Parker acquired a version of Newhouse’s manuscript, which he published in the New York State Museum Bulletin. Parker’s article was the first instance of an English-language publication of Haudenosaunee oral history related to the Great Law. And while Parker’s version of the Newhouse manuscript wasn’t published until after Johnson’s death, Mohawk manuscripts were kept at Johnson’s home, Chiefswood, in the early 1880s, so it is possible that

73 For an account of earlier non-Mohawk and non-Native written accounts of the founding of the Confederacy, see Fenton 51-65.

74 Twenty-first century descriptions of the Great Law frequently use the Onondaga orthography: Gayanashagowa.

75 Fenton elaborates the complicated history of Newhouse’s manuscript:

Seth Newhouse (1842-1921) was the most prolific and controversial of the native scribes [who translated the oral history of the confederacy that had been preserved in wampum records into writing]. […] He passed his political career in the cause of the Mohawk warrior party. […] He was also useful to the old chiefs like John Buck and [John] Smoke Johnson [Pauline Johnson’s grandfather] because he had learned to write in both English and Mohawk. This facility enabled him to put down their words, to record the rituals for mourning and installing chiefs, and to codify the laws. The writing activities of Seth Newhouse during the closing decades of the nineteenth century produced some fascinating and at times controversial manuscripts relating the beginnings of the confederacy. (80)

76 For a full description of the series of individuals who edited Newhouse’s manuscript, see Parker 12-13.
Johnson learned the Mohawk take on the Great Law either through her grandfather John “Smoke” Johnson (a “famous ritual holder” who copied and held manuscripts that were later published [Fenton 67], and for whom Newhouse served as a translator [Fenton 80]) or from these manuscript texts.

In the section of Newhouse’s version relevant to Johnson’s poetry, The Peacemaker—having just announced the completion of the Confederation of the Five Nations (Parker 97)—marks the occasion with the presentation of wampum:

The lords have unanimously decided to spread before you on the ground this great white wampum belt Ska-no-dah-ken-rah-ko-wah and Ka-yah-ne-renh-ko-wah, which respectively signify purity and great peace, and the lords have also laid before you this great wing, Ska-weh-yeh-seh-ko-wah, and whenever any dust or stain of any description fails upon the great belt of white wampum, then you shall take this great wing and sweep it clean.

[...] Now you, the lords of the several Confederate Nations, shall divide yourselves and sit on opposite sides of the council fire [...]. Thus you will begin to work and carry out the principles of the Great Peace (Ka-yah-ne-renh-ko-wah) and you will be guided in this by the great white wampum belt (Ska-no-dah-ke-rah-ko-wah) which signifies Great Peace. (Parker 98)

Johnson’s “white wampum,” then, is an iteration of this earlier belt of “purity and great peace”; the white wampum thus connotes not surrender but the culmination of lengthy negotiation and peace-making. While the Hiawatha Belt—a purple belt with a white tree at the centre and two white squares on either side of it, connected by a line, representing the Five Nations—is now the belt most often associated with the founding of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, in Newhouse’s version, the white belt is the physical manifestation of the Confederacy: the name “Ka-yah-ne-renh-ko-wah”—elsewhere Kaianere’ko:wa’, “Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy; the Constitution” (Maracle 27)—is the Mohawk word for the founding of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Johnson’s repeated references to a white wampum, and her connection of this specific

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77 The flag of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy consists of a stylized version of the Hiawatha Belt, and the belt appeared, along with five arrows, on the reverse of a 2010 US dollar coin, along with the words “Haudenosaunee” and “Great Law of Peace.”
belt with peacemaking, supports the idea that her book is invested with tribally specific
meaning, and should be interpreted with tribally specific knowledge in mind.\textsuperscript{78}

The belt with the double-name “Ska-no-dah-ken-rah-ko-wah and Ka-yah-ne-renh-
ko-wah”—the Peacemaker’s all-white wampum belt—is the only all-white belt in
Haudenosaunee tradition. Like the words in a legal agreement, each belt’s pattern is
unique to that belt—including a pattern of all-white beads. If one were to argue that
Johnson’s “white wampum” is not a reference to the Peacemaker’s belt, then one would
depend on Johnson’s grandfather not having told her about the founding of the Six
Nations, despite his telling her other Haudenosaunee stories, and despite his telling other
people the story of the origins of Haudenosaunee society, at the moment when the federal
government was introducing laws designed to put an end to their culture. One would also
need to depend on Johnson, a voracious reader with an interest in her culture, having not
read Newhouse’s papers, which were kept in her home. John Smoke Johnson died in
1890, six years after his granddaughter began publishing her poems and short stories in
regional and national newspapers and periodicals; for him to have died without sharing
this foundational story with his storytelling granddaughter seems improbable. If one were
to argue that perhaps John Smoke Johnson did tell his granddaughter the story but
omitted mention of the all-white belt—or that perhaps Johnson herself saw no
significance in the belt—then one would need to account for Johnson’s use of a ‘blank’
belt in her collection, and her suggestion that this belt is used to establish and record
peaceful inter-nation relations.

Johnson’s depictions of Native people don’t only show her English readership
Native characters with whom they could empathize: they also depict for a
Haudenosaunee audience what it means to be a ‘good’ Native man or woman. Johnson
must have had a Haudenosaunee audience, as in the years leading up to \textit{The White

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\textsuperscript{78} I am unable to locate “Ska-no-dah-ken-rah-ko-wah”—\textit{Skano"da ke\’rha\’gon}a in Fenton’s orthography
(Parker 98 n1)—in any Mohawk-English or Onondaga-English Dictionaries, which suggests that perhaps
the name refers to this specific belt only, and was dropped from the lexicon after the council’s dismissal of
Newhouse’s manuscript in favour of Gibson’s. Hanni Woodbury gives \textit{owaehe?sdó'gu?} for “pure white”
(1482).
Wampum, she published in the Brantford Courier and the Brantford Expositor as well as in larger Toronto-based publications like Saturday Night and The Week (Gerson and Strong-Boag, Paddling 219-225), and performed recitations in Brantford (Gerson and Strong-Boag, Paddling 39). Johnson also likely would have performed for Haudenosaunee people in Toronto, Montreal, and Buffalo, as the movement of Indigenous Canadians into urban centres isn’t a solely twentieth- and twenty-first century phenomenon—consider, for instance, the large numbers of Mohawk men employed as steelworkers on bridges and skyscrapers from 1886 onwards (see Valaskakis 51-52). Not all of Johnson’s readers were British or Euro-Canadian, and her political interventions resonated in Ontario as well as England. When Johnson has Dawendine hand to her lover an all-white belt—and when Johnson in turn brings her White Wampum to London—she affirms the significance of this specific belt in Haudenosaunee history, which, at the time, was a contested, politicized move.

Around the time that Pauline Johnson began writing the poems that would be included in The White Wampum, a division had arisen on the Six Nations Reserve. On one side, followers of Longhouse traditions adhered to the “Indian way” and “followed their own traditions, not those of the white man as taught in the schools and churches” (S. Weaver 216-7); on the other side, Christian Haudenosaunee—including prominent Mohawks like Johnson’s Anglican father—sought closer alliance with non-Native government, and gained increasing influence in tribal affairs (see S. Weaver 213). This religious division lead to political differences, with the traditional “Longhouse people” seeking to preserve existing customs and governance structures, in a fashion that the Christians “often considered […] too conservative” (S. Weaver 213). The Christian Haudenosaunee were not in favour of assimilation; rather, they felt that the most practical method to maintain their cultural integrity required working with the federal government.

One area in which these political differences can be found is in the different versions of the Great Law that were recorded between about 1880 and 1910. Newhouse’s version of the Great Law belongs to the Christian side of the debate: Fenton notes that Newhouse was a “Mohawk patriot” (81) who inserted contemporary practices into this historical record, thus back-dating practices consistent with “the descendants of the Six
Nations [who] were turning their minds to elective government” (82). Gibson, who wrote the version of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy that was legitimated by the council, was a Longhouse traditionalist. Johnson thus frames her critiques of ‘incorrect’ Native behavior—as we shall see in “Ojistoh”—in the context of a tense debate that raged at Six Nations, but that would have been lost on her British readership. When Monture argues that, “[f]or all of her arguments regarding the nobility of the Iroquois Confederacy, Johnson rarely addressed the contemporary political environment at Six Nations” (131), he doesn’t account for her implicit participation in this Longhouse v. Christian debate. Johnson’s adoption of a white wampum as the title and governing metaphor for her collection firmly places her in the Christian-reformist camp, meaning that her depiction of what it means to be a ‘good’ Native person is politicized. Like Morris, who creates resilient Danish and Icelandic folk who are capable of rising up against the forces of oppression and suffering, Johnson translates the wampum in order to present an image of ‘correct’ Haudenosaunee ways of being—models of Haudenosaunee culture—whose words can be translated without their ways of understanding their own culture being transformed.

By describing Johnson as belonging to the Christian camp, I don’t mean to suggest that she was in favour of assimilation; indeed, as my close readings of her poems suggest, Johnson villainizes those Native characters who treat wampum belts in the same way as characters in books by Longfellow or by Fenimore Cooper treat wampum. Monture is correct when he claims that Johnson “avoided making overt political statements” (131, emphasis mine); her political statement on the Longhouse v. Christian divide, however, is nonetheless evident in “Dawendine” and, as I shall argue, “Ojistoh.”

Not that Johnson’s British audience necessarily would have understood the particular significance that wampum held in late-nineteenth-century Haudenosaunee society. Her British critics tended to contextualize Johnson’s poems alongside other American writers whose work featured Indigenous subjects—writers like James Fenimore Cooper and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Gerson, “Postcolonialism” 433). Given Johnson’s interest in Longfellow’s Hiawatha—her stage costume was based on an illustration of Hiawatha’s lover Minnehaha—the context seems apt, but I want to argue
that a tribally specific lens helps to illuminate a cross-cultural politics that may have been lost on Johnson’s British and settler Canadian audiences. To assume that Johnson uses Native tropes like wampum in the same way as Fenimore Cooper or Longfellow—as her Victorian readers and viewers seem to have assumed—is to miss the cross-cultural politics of Johnson’s first collection.

Johnson’s use of wampum belts is very different from her American contemporaries. In Cooper’s “Leatherstocking Tales,” for instance, wampum have a largely economic function rather than a social one, as wampum stand in for currency. Natty Bumppo, the protagonist of Cooper’s series of novels—a white man raised by Delaware Indians—repeatedly attempts wagers involving wampum: in The Last of the Mohicans (1826), he says to the young Mohican Uncas, “I will bet my charger three times full of powder, against a foot of wampum, that I take him [Montcalm] atwixt the eyes, and nearer to the right than to the left” (59); in The Pathfinder (1840), he again attempts a bet, exclaiming, “I would wager, with the Serjeant’s daughter here, a horn of powder against a wampum-belt for her girdle, that her father’s rijiment should march by this embankment of ours and never find out the fraud!” (58-9). Given his close relationship with Native people, including his Mohican companion Chingachgook, Natty is depicted as an authority on Native topics; readers of the “Leatherstocking Tales” series would have no reason to disbelieve Natty’s equation of wampum and currency.

In Longfellow’s Hiawatha, wampum are likewise aligned with wealth. For instance, Nokomis tells Hiawatha about “the great pearl-Feather, / Megissogwon, the Magician, / Manito of Wealth and Wampum,” who sends “disease and death” to their people (90). Megissogwon wears a magical “shirt of wampum” (96) that protects him from Hiawatha’s arrows; Hiawatha claims this shirt “[a]s a trophy of the battle” after he shoots an arrow at Megissogwon’s head (99), and takes as well other items of value that had belonged to the magician:

All his wealth of skins and wampum,
Furs of bison and of beaver,
Furs of sable and of ermine,
Wampum belts and strings and pouches,
Quivers wrought with beads of wampum,
Filled with arrows, silver-headed. (99-100)

This opulent wampum beading is a marker of status; the purpose of wampum is superficial and decorative. Later in the poem, at Hiawatha’s wedding, the guests are described as “Clad in all their richest raiment, / Robes of fur and belts of wampum” (115). In *Hiawatha*, while wampum aren’t traded as currency, their primary purpose is as a display of what would now be termed conspicuous consumption. In this poem, the significance of wampum is represented as comparable to gems or precious metals. Readers of *Hiawatha* would have no reason to be aware of the roles that wampum belts held in Indigenous cultures; those readers who ‘bought in’ to Longfellow’s authoritative positioning would have seen wampum as functioning merely to display one’s wealth.

Of course, Johnson’s white wampum belt was quite a different object from Longfellow’s decorative “snow-white wampum” beading (138). Wampum, argues Brander Rasmussen, “affirms the authority of Haudenosaunee society while simultaneously attempting to enroll Europeans into their social order” (65). While the Canadian government sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples into non-Native means of organization and governance through a series of laws following the Indian Act, Johnson’s white wampum attempted the reverse move, and sought to assimilate English peoples into a Haudenosaunee system. Johnson’s later texts represent Indigenous Canadian objects and concepts as carrying power even when separated from their original context, and as being able to shape the actions and experiences even of non-Native people. For instance, in one of her stories from *Legends of Vancouver*, “A Squamish Legend of Napoleon,” Johnson depicts a Pacific Northwest Coast Indigenous object—the vertebra of a “sea-serpent” (125), a Squamish “charm” that “worked disaster” against the enemies of its possessor (128)—as responsible for Napoleon’s loss at Waterloo. Another of the stories from this collection, “A Royal Mohawk Chief,” discussed below, describes the expansion of the Haudenosaunee council to include one of Queen Victoria’s youngest children, Prince Arthur, as an honourary chief. In these stories, as in *The White Wampum*, Indigenous systems unproblematically integrate non-Indigenous people.
Her balladic monologues multiply the distance Johnson’s poems’ words from her own voice and her own body; in so doing, they formally replicate an important aspect of wampum belts—theyir connection to what Brander Rasmussen calls the “tribal body”:

Designated people served as the keepers of specific wampum records, but a much larger number of people might be responsible for remembering the exact wording of a particular, smaller segment of the agreement related to a specific belt. Thus, individual members of the tribal body would be linked to particular parts of a given belt, creating a parallel correspondence between the belt as a whole and the community as a whole. […] The link between wampum and the tribal body is crucial to understanding how wampum functioned as a record and how the Haudenosaunee understood the interrelation of text, memory, society, wampum, and the body. (73)

Johnson’s balladic monologues thus mimic the logic of the wampum. The detached ballad speaker, quoting the translated words of a range of characters, brings together the voices of a multi-national Native community; the monologists enact and record their desired transformations, and renew relationships. Thus “The Cattle Thief,” even though it is a poem about the Cree, follows the logic of the wampum by bringing in the Eagle Chief’s daughter’s speech; by reasserting Indigenous peoples’ rights to their land, their food, and their bodies; and by demanding the restoration of justice and reciprocity in English settlers’ dealings with Indigenous people. When Johnson writes poems that espouse a love of the forest, or of canoeing, or of a scene, she writes lyrics with an “I”-voice that may or may not be close to her own. When Johnson writes poems about life as an Indigenous Canadian, though, she writes narratives that purport to speak not in her voice but in the voices of many members of the “tribal body.” It’s not that Johnson speaks for them—it’s that they speak through her.

In so doing, Johnson took up the traditionally Mohawk role of the interpreter.79 Among the Six Nations, members of different tribes tend to fulfill different roles; Onondaga chiefs usually hold more traditional offices like wampum keeper and firekeeper, and Onondaga men and women can be faith keepers, while Mohawk people

79 Gerson and Strong-Boag note in their introduction to E. Pauline Johnson Tekahionwake: Collected Poems and Selected Prose that EPJ “attempted to continue the role of translator and intermediary favoured by many of her Mohawk ancestors” (xxxvi).
usually fill more administrative roles, such as speaker of the council and interpreter. Of her relatives, Johnson’s father had been an interpreter for the New England Company and for the council of the chiefs, holding the latter role from 1859 until his death in 1884 (see C. Johnston 197); his grandfather, George Martin (Shononhsé:se’) had also been an interpreter, and often mediated between the Six Nations and government officials, notably during the War of 1812 (see McNab). The role of these interpreters was not to translate old stories for English-language consumption, but rather to share the concerns of the community with non-Native officials and institutions. And so, in her ballad translations, Johnson takes up the same role.

Like Morris, Kipling, and Stevenson before her, Johnson creates a people via translation. Her balladic monologues translate the textual aspects of wampum belts, bringing together a community of voices in order both to call for and to bring about political change. Seth Newhouse’s interlingual translation of the white wampum, and of the Great Law of Peace that it represents, is a chronological prose narrative; Johnson intersemiotic translation interprets not the story of the white wampum but its function: the unification of multiple voices in enacting and affirming fair and equitable inter-nation relationships. She interprets for a British readership the lived experiences of Indigenous Canadians, and interprets for Haudenosaunee readers as well models of authentic Indigeneity.

The White Wampum thus interprets for a dual audience. For her British readers, Johnson set up and then subverted conventional, stereotypical depictions of Indigenous peoples; by packaging her book in a familiar, aesthetic format—and then subverting the conventions of the ballad collection by instead presenting a book of “verse-wampum”—Johnson presented The White Wampum in a form that would be acceptable to a British audience familiar with the Bodley Head’s aesthetic format, without simply creating yet another cookie-cutter Indian for easy collection and consumption. But Johnson also wrote

80 As Charles M. Johnston notes, in the nineteenth century “[t]he speaker of council and the interpreter were powerful officers in the daily management of the council’s affairs, and with two exceptions a succession of eminent Mohawk chiefs filled both these positions until the turn of the century” (196).
for Native readers who, like her, would have grown up on Longfellow and Fenimore Cooper; for these readers, Johnson delineated between appropriate and inappropriate types of translation, and modeled the possibility of translating Native concepts into English without fundamentally altering them. Johnson dedicated *The White Wampum* to both her English mother and her Mohawk father; her collection translated for two audiences—white and Native. The poem that best demonstrates Johnson’s delineation of the inappropriate use of Indigenous cultural objects is the first poem in the collection, “Ojistoh.”

6  “Ojistoh”

Only two poems in *The White Wampum* include explicit reference to wampum belts: “Dawendine,” discussed above, and “Ojistoh,” the first poem in the book. “Ojistoh” is a dramatic monologue in largely iambic pentameter, spoken by the wife of a Mohawk chief who wars with the Wendat (Huron) people. Early in the poem, one of the Wendat men approaches Ojistoh with an attempt at peacemaking; just as the daughter in “The Cattle Thief” speaks both English and Cree simultaneously, in this poem Ojistoh likewise translates the words of Wendat characters:

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O! evil, evil face of them they sent
With evil Huron speech: ‘Would I consent
To take of wealth? be queen of all their tribe?
Have wampum ermine?’ Back I flung the bribe
Into their teeth, and said, ‘While I have life
Know this—Ojistoh is the Mohawk’s wife.’ (4)
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This “wampum ermine”—white, the colour of the stoat’s winter coat, and suggestive of both aristocratic heraldry and Megissogwon’s hoard in *Hiawatha*—is offered not in an attempt to improve intertribal relations, but in a form reduced to its economic value. Rather than attempting to make peace with the speaker’s husband by having their leader offer him—and through him, all the Mohawk people—a white wampum, these Wendat men render the wampum as merely “wealth” that can be collected and held by an individual. In their hands, it becomes “bribe” rather than treaty or art or commemoration, and thus compounds the insult to Ojistoh, whom they assume can be bought.
Emma LaRocque has criticized Johnson’s depiction of the Wendat men in “Ojistoh,” arguing that the poem represents Johnson’s “negative internalization” of Native identity (122); by resorting to a depiction of the “evil, evil” Wendat, LaRocque claims that Johnson reveals that she “had internalized White stereotypes of ‘Indians’” (123) and applied these stereotypes to the traditional rivals of the Mohawks. And while Johnson did not attempt to hide that, personally, she was a proud Haudenosaunee woman—she is reported as having told a journalist, “I am an Iroquois, and, of course, I think the Iroquois are the best Indians in civilization and birth, just as you English think you are better than the Turks” (S. Johnston 120)—a significant part of the vilification of the Wendat in “Ojistoh” stems from their irreverence for Indigenous traditions. Part of what makes the Wendat in “Ojistoh” “evil, evil” is their treating a white wampum belt the way that Euro-Canadians did: as “wealth,” or mere currency, that an individual can “take” and “have” to themselves (Johnson 4). Strong-Boag and Gerson argue that, in “Ojistoh,” it is significant that “the Native woman assumes the role of the moral and physical superior” (Paddling 146); to this, I’d add that she also is the only character in the poem who recognizes and rejects the attempt to use an Indigenous object in a non-traditional manner.

After she rejects their bribe, the Wendat capture Ojistoh and take her away to their “distant Huron fires” (4). Ojistoh feigns to admire “the one [she] hated most” (4), and, in a moment of pretended seduction, caresses him with one hand, but “burie[s] in his back his scalping knife” with the other (5). Ojistoh then flees on a horse, concluding her poem by inverting one of the lines of the poem’s first stanza:

Ha! how I rode, rode as a sea wind-chased
Mad with sudden freedom, mad with haste,
Back to my Mohawk and my home. I lashed
That horse to foam, as on and on I dashed.
Plunging thro’ creek and river, bush and trail,
On, on I galloped like a northern gale.
And then my distant Mohawk’s fires aflame
I saw, as nearer, nearer still I came,
My hands all wet, stained with a life’s red dye,
But pure my soul, pure as those stars on high—
“My Mohawk’s pure white star, Ojistoh, still am I.” (5)
With such a closing, it seems difficult to read this poem as doing anything other than displaying LaRocque’s suggested “negative internalization”: the opposing colours of the blood-stained hands and the thrice-“pure,” “white” soul appear to reinforce the idea that Johnson had “internalized White stereotypes of the ‘Indian’” (LaRocque 123), as Johnson here aligns purity with whiteness, while the “red” is a “stain” on Ojistoh’s hands and skin.

And yet the idea that Ojistoh’s colour binary (red=a stain; white=pure) can readily be mapped onto Johnson’s own thinking is complicated by the context in which this passage appears. Ojistoh’s trauma manifests itself in this passage in the dense accumulation of doubled-up words: she “rode, rode,” “Mad with sudden freedom, mad with haste,” “on and on,” “On, on,” “nearer, nearer,” repeatedly insisting that she is “pure,” “pure,” as a “pure white star”\(^8\) (5). Like the other infamous literary lady who is disturbed by the blood on her hands—Lady Macbeth at the end of Act V Scene 1 says, “To bed, to bed— There’s knocking at the gate— Come, come, come, come, give me your hand— What’s done, cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed!” (195; l. 63-66)—Ojistoh too stammers and repeats herself. Both women display the stuttering and mental confusion of an extreme crisis, even though Ojistoh’s motive to murder is much more sympathetic than Lady Macbeth’s. To suggest that Ojistoh’s words, at a moment of heightened emotional intensity, might be read as reflective of Johnson’s own beliefs is to miss out on the broader context of the collection: Ojistoh’s equation of purity and whiteness, an equation that perhaps harkens back to Newhouse—and of red skin and a stain—is about to be undermined by all the subsequent depictions of race in the collection, and is undermined too by her own refusal to treat wampum as if she were “white.”

Thus, with “Ojistoh,” Johnson opens her collection by insisting on the culturally appropriate use of Indigenous objects. The Wendat men’s speech is “evil” not—or not only—because it is in Wendat, but because it mistranslates “wampum” as “wealth”

\(^8\) *Ojistoh* is the Mohawk word for “star” (Strong-Boag and Gerson, *Paddling* 272 n92). David Maracle spells it *otsihsto’k* (75).
(Johnson 4). “Ojistoh” shows that Indigenous people like the poem’s speaker can speak in fluent English without allowing the act of translation to alter the fundamental aspects of what it is they translate. The Wendat character may speak in his Native language, his “evil Huron speech” (Johnson 4), but he has misinterpreted how a white wampum should function in intertribal relations; Johnson’s poem may be in English, but it is also a model of a ‘correct’ interpretation of wampum.

7 “Wolverine”

While “Ojistoh” and “The Cattle Thief” translate Indigenous-language speech into English, “Wolverine” transcribes the strongly marked dialect of a white trapper. As in “The Cattle Thief,” the plot of “Wolverine” centres on the unjust, brutal violence of men who are explicitly named as “English” (28). The bulk of the poem—spoken by a trapper for the Hudson’s Bay Company—recounts a time when he was rescued from an imminent wolf attack by a Native man, “the chief [he]’d nicknamed Wolverine” (26).

“Wolverine” describes a perilous situation in which a white trapper is stalked by wolves until, at the last moment, his Native savior appears. Unlike the “Eagle Chief” whose daughter rejects the name he has been called, this poem’s Native hero takes up the appellation given to him by a white man: giving the trapper his horse, he says, “‘Take Indyan’s horse, I run like deer, wolf can’t catch Wolverine’” (26). Both the trapper and his savior escape the wolves. Later in the same year, though, the trapper meets a group of travelling “Whites” (28), who recount what seemed to them an ambush:

“They said, ‘They’d had an awful scare from Injuns,’ an’ they swore
That savages had come around the very night before
A-brandishing their tomahawks an’ painted up for war.

“But when their plucky Englishmen had put a bit of lead
Right through the heart of one of them, an’ rolled him over, dead,
The other cowards said that they had come on peace instead.

“That they (the Whites) had lost some stores, from off their little pack,
An’ that the Red they peppered dead had followed up their track,
Because he’d found the packages an’ came to give them back.

“‘Oh!’ they said, ‘they were quite sorry, but it wasn’t like as if
They had killed a decent Whiteman by mistake or in a tiff,
It was only some old Injun dog that lay there stark an’ stiff.’

“I said, ‘You are the meanest dogs that ever yet I seen,‘
Then I rolled the body over as it lay out on the green;
I peered into the face—My God! ’twas poor old Wolverine.” (28-9)

As with “The Cattle Thief,” in “Wolverine” Johnson flips the conventional late-nineteenth-century dichotomy: harkening back to Noble Savage tropes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the trapper depicts the “Englishmen” as unrepentant savages—when they describe the dead body as an “Injun dog,” the trapper sends the animalistic insult back to them—and he represents the Native characters as motivated by moral imperatives—as, even, noble.

“Wolverine,” perhaps more than any other poem in The White Wampum, plays in to stereotypical portrayals of Indigenous peoples. Wolverine’s sole line of dialogue is delivered in an ungrammatical “Indyan” version of English; “like deer” (26), he is comfortable and confident in a wilderness setting that nearly kills the trapper; his death comes about during the commission of yet another kind deed paid to seemingly hapless “Whites” (28). The Englishmen who kill Wolverine, in contrast, take up the mantle of ‘the savage,’ as they are unrepentant in their brutality. Their actions may flip the ‘primitive v. civilized’ dichotomy, but it does not unpick it or subvert it. Again, this poem appears at first to support the stance of those who criticize Johnson’s poetry as “acquiesc[ing] to dominant requirements that Indians, if alive, must be noble, stereotypically so” (LaRocque 125). What such a reading doesn’t account for, though, is the twice-distanced voice in which the majority of the poem is spoken. All the action of the poem—all the words spoken, including those by Wolverine—is filtered through the trapper’s perspective.

Were “Wolverine” a dramatic monologue, one might argue that Johnson inhabits the voice of this white trapper in order to “explore the possibility,” to borrow Kate Flint’s language, of inhabiting a stance “from which [she] may do the gazing, and judging” (“Rule” 166). Flint has argued that the dramatic monologue provides the “capacity to inhabit another person’s imaginative space [and so] frequently becomes a form of
exploration on the part of the poet” (“Rule” 161); this imaginative space allowed Victorian women poets to enact “slippage between gender positions, between classes, between races” in order to “explore the possibilities of identification with others” (“Rule” 165). But “Wolverine” is a balladic rather than dramatic monologue, with the trapper’s heavily accented voice always in quotation marks. Johnson thus formally widens the gap between herself and her character, the trapper. The formal distancing in the poem is apt for its content, in which the speaker forcefully argues that one finds in the racial self what one expects to find in the racial other—and thus that the self is more distant, and the other more readily identifiable, than the poem’s “English settlers” seem to have anticipated. The poem layers speaker upon speaker, auditor upon auditor, in order to show not simply “the possibilities of identification with others,” but rather to show the self as other—in this case, the animalistic brutality of white men.

“Wolverine” is the only poem in The White Wampum that is marked by a strong dialect. The trapper’s voice dominates the poem, but is always framed by quotation marks; only in the third line does the voice of the speaker of the poem emerge, to distinguish “Wolverine” as a ballad rather than a dramatic monologue. The poem begins:

‘Yes, sir, it’s quite a story, though you won’t believe it’s true, But such things happened often when I lived beyond the Soo.’ And the trapper tilted back his chair and filled his pipe anew. (24)

The meter of the poem—iambic heptameter tercets rhyming AAA—is almost the same as the meter used by Oscar Wilde three years later in “The Ballad of Reading Gaol,” except Wilde splits the long heptameter line into two lines of tetrameter and trimeter. But while Wilde’s ballad-speaker “feel[s] another’s guilt” (555; l. 266) and empathizes with his condemned fellow-prisoner, the speaker of “Wolverine”—the voice who quotes the trapper, and who appears only in that third line—is detached from the key actions in the narrative: detached in time—the trapper says the events happened “way back” in perhaps “sixty-six or eight” (25); detached in place—the actions unfolded “beyond the Soo” (24); and also emotionally detached—he or she avoids commenting on the action of the story or the trapper’s recounting of it. So while “Wolverine” plays on stereotypes of Indigeneity, these are stereotypes that the trapper holds. The trapper, whose dialect and
occupation suggest their own set of stereotypical assumptions, has a perspective which the speaker merely reports, without comment, perhaps inviting the reader to make her own judgment. Accounting for the poem’s form as a balladic monologue suggests that critics like LaRocque are too quick to equate Johnson’s voice with the voices in her poems.

8 Victorian Iroquois

While Johnson’s poetry is often read and taught as nineteenth-century Native Canadian literature, in this chapter I argue for a Haudenosaunee-specific reading of her first collection. In order to clarify the context into which Johnson placed her white wampum—and thus to speak to the politics of her collection—this section will describe the Haudenosaunee view of their relationship with Britain, and contrast it against the British view of their relationship with the Haudenosaunee. This latter perspective, I will show, builds on the representation of primitive balladry in Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, which was one of the most popular poems in nineteenth-century Britain, and thus was one of the most important sources of information about the Haudenosaunee for British audiences.

When Johnson was a young woman, the Haudenosaunee—and the Mohawk specifically—believed that they had a nation-to-nation relationship with Britain. 82 Theirs was, as Cecilia Morgan has noted, “a particular relationship […] that had been forged historically and, from their perspective, could not be subsumed completely under the categories of ‘colonised’ and ‘coloniser’” (233). In the century leading up to Johnson’s birth, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy repeatedly aligned its forces with the British, most notably in the French and Indian War (1754-1763), in the American Revolution (1765-1783)—which lost them their territory in New York—and in the War of 1812. The

82 “Although no word approximating ‘nation’ existed (or exists) within the Iroquoian vocabulary, the understanding of Iroquois group autonomy was pronounced enough for the English to refer to the Iroquois as the Five Nations in colonial times, since they viewed them as powerful political and military allies in the struggle for North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (Monture 121, emphasis in original).
Mohawk military and political leader Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea) persuaded his people to relocate north of the border, in what became the Six Nations Reserve; Brantford, the largest city near Johnson’s home in Ohsweken, is named after Brant’s initial crossing of the Grand River.

Evidence of this special relationship can be found in Johnson’s writing. Her collection of shorter prose pieces, *Legends of Vancouver* (1911), closes with a story that is neither a legend nor of Vancouver: “A Royal Mohawk Chief” describes the day when a young Prince Arthur was given the honorary title of fifty-first chief of the Haudenosaunee. The language used in this piece repeatedly emphasizes the historical loyalty of the Haudenosaunee—“that loyal race of Redskins that has fought for the British crown against all of the enemies thereof, adhering to the British flag through the wars against both the French and the colonists” (157)—and the parity of Native and non-Native representatives of their people—“an English prince and an Indian chief, riding amicably side by side” (160). The story and the book both close with the narrator, a fictionalized version of Johnson herself, describing how she has inherited the material objects associated with this day:

As I write, I glance up to see, in a corner of my room, a draping scarlet blanket, made of British army broadcloth, for the chief who rode the jet-black pony so long ago was the writer’s father. He was not here to wear it when Arthur of Connaught again set foot on Canadian shores.

Many of these facts I have culled from a paper that lies on my desk; it is yellowing with age, and bears the date, “Toronto, October 2, 1869,” and on the margin is written, in a clear, half-boyish hand, “Onwanonsyshon, with kind regards from your brother-chief, Arthur.” (165)

The idea that Prince Arthur—who had been appointed Governor General of Canada nine months before the publication of *Legends of Vancouver*—was a “brother-chief” of Johnson’s father further suggests this idea of parity. Arthur was only one of fifty-one chiefs, each on an equal footing. Just as Johnson sought, with her text, to bring her non-Native readers into the Haudenosaunee social order, so too had her father sought to ally the British royal family with Haudenosaunee customs.
The Victorian British cultural imagination did not, however, accord with the Haudenosaunee view of their relationship. In British writing under Victoria’s reign, the Haudenosaunee—when they are differentiated from generic depictions of “the Indian”—fall into one of the two stereotypes available for Indigenous North Americans: noble savage or violent savage. Rather than as sovereign nations, as they had been described in the eighteenth century, in the Victorian period the Haudenosaunee were depicted as a primitive, brutal people, readily able to resort to ruthless violence despite their being, in the majority, Christians. In his 1854 *Household Words* two-part series “The Lost Arctic Voyagers”—two short articles about the missing Franklin expedition, written after the explorer John Rae recovered relics of the *HMS Terror* and the *HMS Erebus*—Charles Dickens claimed that it was “pretty certain” that “Michel, an Iroquois hunter” murdered and ate other men in his party in Franklin’s 1819 to 1822 overland exploration of the Arctic (364), but that the men of the lost Franklin exhibition could not have resorted to cannibalism, as “the nature of the men” was not inclined to consider, even in extreme circumstances, resorting to this taboo as a “last resource” (392). So while the Haudenosaunee were known to be Christianized, and to be allied with the English, there remained this suspicion that they were capable of levels of depravity that were unthinkable to Englishmen, as Dickens’ example shows.

Such suspicion was reinforced via the major text through which Victorian Britons would have known about Native North Americans generally, and the “Iroquois” specifically—namely, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855); this poem accords neatly with the noble savage tradition. As noted above, Hiawatha was a historical figure—a twelfth-century political leader. Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* was one of the best-selling poems in Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and even those who did not read the book could have taken in any number of its adaptations, as a veritable Hiawatha industry sprang up in the wake of the poem’s popularity—Flint has

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83 “In England he [Longfellow] eventually outsold Tennyson and Browning. Tennyson once bragged to a friend that he made two thousand pounds a year from poetry, then grumbled, ‘But Longfellow, alas, received three thousand.’ Three years after his death Longfellow’s bust was unveiled in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey, the first and only time an American poet has received this honor” (Gioia 65).
detailed the numerous “musical spin-offs” inspired by Longfellow’s work (*Transatlantic* 133). In titling his poem *Hiawatha*, Longfellow mistakenly conflated two figures: the historical Onondaga-Mohawk political figure, and the Anishinaabe trickster, Nanabush, also known as Manabozho.

*Hiawatha* describes itself as a poem written for people who like ballads—who like and expect a certain kind of primitivism with their balladry. The poem opens with an evocation to the listener, in the tradition of the *siste viator* (“stop, traveller”) convention (Jackson, “Longfellow’s Tradition” 475). In the poem’s introduction, the reader is invited to “pause and listen”:

Ye who love a nation’s legends,
Love the ballads of a people,
That like voices from afar off
Call to us to pause and listen,
Speak in tones so plain and childlike,
Scarce can the ear distinguish
Whether they are sung or spoken;—
Listen to this Indian Legend,
To this Song of Hiawatha! (8)

Ballads are rendered as a communal utterance that is displaced from the present either by distance or by time; that these “voices … [s]peak in tones so plain and childlike” links ballad-speakers to developmental theories of evolution of the type associated with the German biologist Ernst Haeckel, which aligned stages of human maturation—through childhood and adolescence into adulthood—with stages along a linear trajectory of racial progress. These theories “la[id] out a specific and more predictable trajectory of change over time,” in contrast to natural selection, the “trajectory [of which] cannot be predicted” (Castañeda 20). *Hiawatha* isn’t a ballad—its trochaic tetrameter lines mimic the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, a link that Longfellow’s note makes explicit when he describes the poem as an “Indian Edda” (239)—but *Hiawatha* is written for ballad-lovers, who all, the poem suggests, share a common understanding that ballads come “from afar off” (Longfellow 8).

The poem’s cultural distance is marked by its frequent use of Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe) terms, which the poem “obsessively translates,” making the lengthy glossary—
140 words in the Routledge second edition—at the back of the text largely unnecessary, “a pleasurable reiteration of what ‘any reader’ of the poem already knows” (Jackson, “Longfellow’s Tradition” 477). The frequent use of these transliterations in Hiawatha invite the kind of in-text and paratextual retranslation that we’ve seen in earlier chapters of this dissertation—the kind of artifactualizing scholarly apparatus that reinforces the foreignness of the text, and suggests that what has already been translated still needs further re-translation. Longfellow also included fourteen pages of notes at the end of the poem, directing his readers to authoritative sources on Native North American customs, legends, and language. The effect is that the historical Indigenous figures in the poem, and the contemporary Indigenous people described in the footnotes, are positioned as always in need of interpretation and explanation—and that the poet is the authoritative source who can be trusted to provide the correct interpretation.

An especially important aspect of Longfellow’s Hiawatha is its concluding section, “Hiawatha’s Departure,” in which the hero sails off into a “fiery sunset” of “purple vapours” (236). Before leaving his people, though, Hiawatha welcomes for them a new leader, who arrives by boat:

From the farthest realms of morning
Came the Black-Robe chief, the Prophet,
He the Priest of Prayer, the Pale-face,
With his guides and his companions. (229)

Hiawatha’s response to the arrival of European settlers is “exultation” (229): he says that the sun has never shined as brightly, the earth never bloomed as gaily, nor the tobacco ever tasted as sweetly as it did the day these colonizers arrived (see 230). Longfellow

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84 Longfellow was a professor at Harvard for eighteen years; he retired from teaching in 1854, the year before the first edition of Hiawatha was published.

85 Longfellow’s footnotes reference ethnographic, linguistic and folkloric studies of the Iroquois, Ojibwe, Mohicans and Delaware, and more general reference studies of ‘Indians,’ such as Schoolcraft’s Algic Researches (1839) and History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States (1850), Catlin’s Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians (1841), Heckewelder’s Indian Nations (1818), Foster and Whitney’s Report on the Geology of the Lake Superior Land District (1850), and so on (see Longfellow 239, 240, 241, 243).
thus sets up colonialism as a harmonious continuation of Hiawatha’s legacy, and a
welcome improvement to the lives of Haudenosaunee people. The arrival of “the Pale-
face” is a smooth transition that signaled the end of an era of Haudenosaunee leadership
and the beginning of Christianity. The elders in the poem repeatedly tell the priest and his
men, “It is well for us, brothers, / That you come so far to see us!” (233). For Longfellow,
Hiawatha’s legacy is continued in colonialist rule, rather than in the council of fifty
chiefs.

Although she read Longfellow, and although she is supposed to have modeled her
stage costume on illustrations of Minnehaha that were a part of the Hiawatha industry,
Johnson’s collection of verse-wampum does not do what the speaker of Hiawatha implies
Native North American ballads could or should do. Johnson’s ballads are not “a nation’s
legends,” nor are their stories conveyed in “tones so plain and childlike” (Longfellow 8).
Rather, they are hybridized with a modern form, and depict modern Indigenous lives.
Hiawatha is filled with non-English words, but Johnson’s Native words are already
interpreted, and don’t need annotations to be understood. Her translations position Native
people as comprehensible to an English-speaking audience—as differing in customs or
culture but nonetheless understandable people. The ballad thus provides Johnson with a
way to both conform to her audience’s expectations—of course stories of Native North
Americans would be told in ballad form!—and subvert them, by refusing to fulfill the
expectations set up in Hiawatha.

The absence of footnotes in Johnson’s collection—especially notable when
contrasted against the collections by Stevenson and Kipling discussed elsewhere in this
dissertation, or against Longfellow’s Hiawatha—can be understood as related to this idea
of the text as “verse-wampum” rather than conventional, artifactualizing ballad
collection. Recall that, in her dedication to the collection, Johnson described her

86 There is a single footnote in The White Wampum: on page two, a note on the poem “Ojistoh” translates
the word “Niyoh!” as “God, in the Mohawk language.” Aside from this single annotation, there are no other
footnotes, endnotes, or other extra-poetical commentary in The White Wampum.
composition process as “weaving” (n.p.)⁸⁷; the words, like beads, are a part of a work that is not then framed or contained. Fenton paraphrases an 1876 manuscript in which he describes what happens when an Indigenous group didn’t know how to read a particular wampum: “A Huron chief named Forty Suns explained that an Iroquois belt had been received so long ago that the old men had forgotten what it said, and he would have to take it to the Senecas to find out its meaning, because the Hurons regarded it a serious matter not to respond to a belt” (233-4). There are no secondary, framing belts that might help Forty Suns to understand the primary belt. Johnson’s “verse-wampum” was there to be understood, if her audience wished to understand it; if they didn’t or couldn’t, the onus was on them to find out what it meant. Among the Romeike & Curtice clippings of British reviews of her book is one dated April 5, 1895, from an unknown reviewer in an unknown periodical; this highly critical review ends, “By the way, Miss Johnson does explain the meaning of a ‘wampum,’ though she refers to it quaintly and prettily in a little prose preface.”⁸⁸ Unfortunately for Johnson, it seems that this reviewer’s willingness to remain unaware of wampum is representative of a larger “sanctioned ignorance” of the type described by Gayatri Spivak in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (1999): a willful ignorance perpetuated by the dominant culture’s refusal to acknowledge an Indigenous culture’s intellectual traditions and knowledge systems, compounded by the dominant culture’s active dismissal—even erasure—of these same traditions and systems (2).

9 Pauline Johnson, Haudenosaunee Poet

To read The White Wampum from a tribally-specific perspective—to read Johnson as fulfilling a traditionally Mohawk role—is to read this book differently from how Johnson’s work is usually interpreted: as pan-Indian. Flint describes Johnson as “couch[ing] herself as a member of an imaginary, pan-Indian nation,” in large part

⁸⁷ As Brander Rasmussen notes, “[i]t is worth remembering here the etymology of ‘text’ and ‘textuality’: they are rooted in the Latin word ‘textere,’ which literally means ‘that which is woven”’ (70).

⁸⁸ As with the other Romeike & Curtice press clippings, the name of the periodical, author and page number for this article have been lost. See the Pauline Johnson Fonds in the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University.
because the costume that she designed for her stage appearances brought together “various symbols of native culture” from different tribal groups and from fiction: “fur pelts, Iroquois silver medallions, wampum belts, her father’s hunting knife, and, in time, a necklace of bear claws—an ensemble apparently influenced in part by the dress worn by Minnehaha in illustrations to popular editions of Hiawatha” (2009: 279). Jace Weaver says that Johnson’s “buckskin, clothing, and fur dress [were] a pan-Indian fantasy of her own design that became increasingly elaborate as time passed, with additions such as an ermine-tail necklace” (Atlantic 208). Strong-Boag and Gerson describe Johnson as making “no effort to replicate the actual clothing of any specific Native group,” and suggest that “Johnson’s collage approach to creating a recognizably Indian costume highlights the self-conscious and constructed nature of her stage identity” (Paddling 110). Anne Collett calls Johnson’s stage outfit “a fascinating bricolage, ‘smoke of many camp fires’” (165). When critics place Johnson’s writings in the context of her stage performances, her strategic “pan-Indian” self-fashioning comes to the fore.

Johnson’s dress, costume and appearance, however, were not a part of The White Wampum. Bodley Head books, as Peterson has noted, did not include “a common feature of late nineteenth-century celebrity publishing: the photographic frontispiece” (176). Unlike the posters for her performances, unlike the frontispiece of her later collection Canadian Born (Toronto: George N. Morgan, 1903), and unlike most twenty-first-century studies of Johnson’s work, The White Wampum did not include a picture of Johnson in her “pan-Indian” costume in the text. Johnson’s refusal to perpetuate the pan-Indian image in her first poetic collection is consistent with the stance that she took in an article that she published two years before going to England to look for a publisher. In “A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction” (1892), Johnson argued against contemporary portrayals of Native women that were insufficiently tribally-specific:

The term “Indian” signifies about as much as the term “European,” but I cannot recall ever having read a story where the heroine was described as “a European.” The Indian girl we meet in cold type, however, is rarely distressed by having to belong to any tribe, or to reflect any tribal characteristics. She is merely a wholesome sort of mixture of any band existing between the Mic Macs of Gaspe and the Kwaw-Kewlths of British Columbia. (178)
So while, on-stage, Johnson was willing to depict the kind of “regulation Indian maiden” (178) that her audiences expected—a strategy that she then subverted in the contents of her poetic recitations—in print Johnson refused to reproduce yet another iteration of the same “one Indian girl” that appeared in other late Victorian texts (178). Johnson began her career as a touring poet-reciter only two years before she sailed to London with her manuscript (Strong-Boag and Gerson, *Paddling* 16); a chronological study of her seventeen years of stage performances could perhaps account for a shift away from the cultural specificity seen in her early-career publications, and toward the “pan-Indian” role described by Colley, Flint, Jace Weaver, and Strong-Boag and Gerson. Johnson’s characters in *The White Wampum* belong to individual nations, and are aware of—even though they do not always conform to—the expectations of their specific cultures. And while the characters in Johnson’s poetry are not only Mohawks—her poems include Huron and Cree people, as well as characters whose tribal affiliation is not specified at all, as in Yakonwita of “The Pilot of the Plains” or the unnamed speaker of “Cry from an Indian Wife”89—there is no attempt in her collection, as there was in her costume, to create a singular cultural identity for all Indigenous Canadians. The purpose of Johnson’s collection was to re-shape, rather than reflect, English and English-Canadian expectations of Indigenous peoples.

10 Johnson’s Place in Twenty-First-Century Indigenous Criticism

In *Red on Red* (1999), one of the foundational books of the theoretical movement known as Indigenous Literary Nationalism or American Indian Literary Nationalism, Craig Womack argues that Indigenous criticism should “emphasize unique Native worldviews and political realities, search for differences as often as similarities, and attempt to find Native literature’s place in Indian country, rather than Native literature’s place in the canon” (11). Taking up Womack’s call, recent critics of Indigenous North American

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89 Given that “Cry from an Indian Wife” was written and first published shortly after 1885 Northwest Rebellion, the eponymous Indian Wife is presumably Métis or Cree, as men from these groups made up the majority of the Native combatants.
literature have turned to Native intellectual traditions as a way of understanding Native texts, “assert[ing] a critical scholarship that draws from specific cultural contexts” (Justice 213). Kelsey summarizes the approach:

What I would like to suggest is that Native American epistemologies and worldviews might be used for the purposes of reading Native texts in culturally appropriate ways and that a sophisticated reading of this sort that explores the contours and minutiae of key cultural concepts constitutes a legitimate theoretical practice that has hitherto remained unrecognized. [...] By culturally appropriate I designate a set of interpretive strategies that ground tribal texts in their specific backgrounds, histories, and cultures. (8-9, emphasis in original)

In this chapter, I follow the model of a tribal-centered approach by considering the significance of the white wampum for a Haudenosaunee text that was written in the aftermath of Six Nations responses to the Indian Act, and that was published in London. Rather than turning to postmodern or postcolonial theoretical frameworks for understanding Johnson’s collection, I have turned instead to what Thomas King calls “our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization” (12)—specifically, the late-nineteenth-century Mohawk version of the Great Law of Peace. My approach, in keeping with Indigenous Literary Nationalism, has been to read Johnson’s text with her specific cultural background and historical moment at the fore; this tribally specific approach is in keeping with one of Johnson’s most famous essays on Native writing, “A Strong Race Opinion,” mentioned above, in which she criticizes non-Native authors who don’t account for differences between “any tribal characteristics” that might distinguish “the MicMacs of Gaspe” from “the Kwaw-Kewlths of British Columbia” (178). As this essay shows—and as my reading of The White Wampum likewise shows—tribal specificity was important in Johnson’s writing, and taking a tribal-centered approach can best illuminate some of the under-discussed features of her first collection.

Where my approach deviates from the project of Indigenous Literary Nationalism is in its politics. For Jace Weaver, reading Native texts from a tribal-centered perspective is necessarily political: “the goals of American Indian Literary Nationalism are consonant with those of Native American Studies more broadly, the studying and teaching about
Native peoples from an Indigenous perspective and supporting Native Americans in their struggles” (43). Included in this latter goal is advocating for Indigenous sovereignty (see Weaver, “Splitting” 43-44). Approaching American Indian Literary Nationalism from a literary studies rather than a Native studies perspective, I follow Sam McKegney’s caution against turning literature into something that “is valued foremost for its utility”: “we risk doing violence to the literature when we require it to be a tool for political action. The danger involves approaching literature with predetermined goals and agendas, the urgency of which encourages us to be less responsible to the literature’s creative insights, thereby disregarding Indigenous artistic agency” (29, emphasis in original). As any reader familiar with Johnson’s second poetic collection *Canadian Born* (1903) will know, Johnson was not an advocate for Indigenous separatism or sovereignty, and it seems a significant misreading to align a tribal-centered approach in Johnson’s case with twenty-first-century political goals. Nonetheless, this chapter asserts that “illuminating the intellectual histories, experiences, and knowledge structures” (Sinclair 20) of the Haudenosaunee enables us to understand Johnson’s first collection in startlingly new and intriguing terms: as balladic monologue “verse-wampum” that target both Haudenosaunee and British readers.

11 Conclusion: Indigenizing Victorian Studies

In describing Pauline Johnson as both a Victorian and a Haudenosaunee poet, this chapter participates in an ongoing debate about the nature and continued relevance of the term “Victorian.” In his consideration of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s ballads, Bristow has asked whether “the questionable epithet [“Victorian”] bears any intellectually valuable relation to the larger part of the poetry written during the period that it seeks to delineate” (“Whether” 105). Amanda Anderson has likewise criticized the term for enabling “an assumable social totality or unified culture” and for being “anachronistically wedded to the person of the queen” (195). These critiques suggest that the period and its texts require a conceptual reframing.

The counter to such critiques is that the term “Victorian” does not label a set of nationally rooted literatures—as in, for instance, Levine’s discussion of networked
Victorian texts, described above—but rather that the term names a “set of practices and affects” (LeCourt par. 8). In describing The White Wampum as a Victorian text, I point to the typically Victorian practice of ballad collecting and framing, which does not necessarily turn a poem into an object of study; to the specifically Victorian aestheticizing of the ‘Other,’ a practice that Johnson first invites and then subverts; to the particularly Victorian fluent rendering of non-English words in a manner that does not fit neatly into Venuti’s foreignizing/domesticating, progressive/conservative metric. As “A Royal Mohawk Chief” makes clear, Johnson did not find it contradictory to bring together terms like “Royal” and “Mohawk”; in parallel, to describe her first collection as both Victorian and Haudenosaunee is not to envelope one term within the other or to qualify by hyphenation. In calling The White Wampum a Victorian book, my objective is to expose the heterogeneity of British ballad collections in the 1890s, and to counter the claim that “Victorian poetry” is a homogenous whole from which outliers ought to be excluded. Priya Joshi has argued that to “confine the term [‘Victorian’] to geography or history is to asphyxiate Victorian studies at its most generative” (39); I would suggest further that to subdivide the books that came out of a single publishing house into “Victorian literature,” “transatlantic literature,” “empire literature,” “world literature,” and so on, would be to replicate the systems of collection and categorization that this dissertation exposes as a limiting our conception of the true capaciousness of Victorian balladry. As Joshi notes, in the past twenty years “postcolonial-themed scholarship” has “vitalized” Victorian studies (20); the methods of Indigenous Literary Nationalism—methods that are both historicist and formalist—can likewise enrich our understanding of the ways in which Native North American people adopted, adapted, reformed, and presented Victorian cultural and artistic practices.

Unlike Kipling, who in “The Flowers” described the productions of non-English places as “English poesies” (111), Johnson does not suggest that her own poems are English. In “My English Letter,” her speaker strongly demarcates the line between English and Canadian land, and English and Canadian writing, and yet shows English and Canadian letters as both participating in an international literary network. She describes the Atlantic as a point of contact between the two continents: “the very grey-green sea that dashes / ‘Round these Canadian coasts, rolls out once more / To Eastward,
and the same Atlantic splashes / Her wild white spray on England’s distant shore” (88). One might, based on this stanza, be inclined to name Johnson as a transatlantic poet, and whether or not she is, The White Wampum remains a Victorian text, brought to England, and published in England. This is the system into which Johnson placed her text and her ventriloquized Indigenous Canadian voices; she brought them to and circulated them in the centre of the British publishing industry and the Victorian poetic marketplace.
Coda

When Theodor Adorno described the museum as a necessarily funereal institution, he used terms that resonate with the current critical discourse on late-nineteenth-century ballad collections: “Museums are like the family sepulchers of works of art. They testify to the neutralization of culture. [...] Once tradition is no longer animated by a comprehensive, substantial force but has to be conjured up by means of citations [...] then whatever happens to be left of it is dissolved into a means to an end” (175). Adorno, and the cultural and literary critics who have followed after him, described the systematic collecting and ordering of material culture as a violent, even murderous, process. According to the dominant critical narrative, ballad collectors of the 1890s performed a kind of literary lepidopterology, capturing, killing, framing, and classifying ballad specimens in an exhaustive and finite collection.

The twin effects of artifactualization were, on the one hand, to frame ballads as the cultural productions of a primitive or foreign culture, separate from modernity, and, on the other hand, to present the genre as foundational to the civilized present, at the origins of the nation. Ballads thus both were excluded from, and helped to shape, an acceptable image of the modern British subject. Ballads were aestheticized and rendered as easily consumable because they were figured as having the ability to speak to and for a people. Those who study ballad artifactualization are interested in what ballads were and were not able to say to, for, and about modern Britain (and, sometimes, America—as in Michael Cohen’s work) at the end of the nineteenth century.

Like those who study the artifactualization of the ballad, I look at how the ballad was assembled in collections; unlike those who focus on ballad reading, my study centers on those who interpret the ballad by translating it—that is, reading and rewriting it. The poet-translators in this dissertation were interested in the communities that ballads represent, and the effects that ballads could have in reshaping those communities, sometimes in relationship with a British reading public—but they were not necessarily interested in preserving an acceptable image of the modern British nation, nor did they see the ballad as inextricably linked to British identity. Morris’s Danish and Icelandic
ballads collapse distinctions between past and present, and between living and dead, as they repeatedly call for mobilization against oppressive social structures; Kipling shows the ease with which Tommy’s rebellious words—including non-English words—enter the mouths of the British middle class; Stevenson’s Indigenous Tahitian characters are historicized but speak in a Victorian British vernacular; Johnson’s verse-wampum attempt to reestablish a Haudenosaunee-British relationship in accordance with Indigenous Canadian customs, and to establish the Mohawk as the arbiters of those customs. Rather than seeing the ballad as a segregated artifact, neither touched by nor touching the modern present, these interpretations of the genre show not only its continued adaptability and portability, but also its ability to slip between the book and the reader’s body, escaping the museological frame.

The works discussed in this dissertation reshape our understanding of late-Victorian conceptions of balladry because translations are shaped by their contexts. As an interpretive act, translation depends on selecting the most contextually appropriate words in order to be coherent. If I say “the train stops,” do I refer to a train ceasing to move forward (“le train s’arrête”), or the places where a train lets passengers on and off (“les arrêts de train”)? Or am I talking about not carriage-engines but long lines of men and camels of the sort described by Kipling in “Oonts” and “Gunga Din”—and thus about “le cortège” rather than “le train”? The most appropriate translation is determined by the phrase’s context in the passage and in time and place. More complicated still are poetic translations, which must also account for the transformative aspects of translation practice—the shaping and structuring of artistic expressions into forms that carry specific cultural connotations and that organize experience in particular ways. This dissertation demonstrates that the ballad is not a form, in the singular, with only one stable and unchanging way of structuring its content, nor is the collection a form, in the singular, with a single way of controlling and containing its contents. A formalist approach need not depend on a conception of the ballad or the ballad collection as homogenous, stable forms. Paying attention to the interpretative acts of translations—performing analyses that are necessarily historicist and formalist—complicates our picture of the ballad in the 1890s.
My work in this dissertation thus not only presents us with a more nuanced understanding of fin-de-siècle balladry, but also participates in on-going debates in Victorian studies about methodology. Just as there is now a critical consensus that transculturation transformed the emerging novel, with a bidirectional flow of influence between the metropole and the colonized space, so too does this study suggest that the complex interactions between centre and periphery reshape our understandings of balladry—not only the centre and periphery of metropole and colony, but also the centre and periphery of the page. Medievalists since Michael Camille in the early 1990s increasingly have turned their attention to the marginalia at the borders of illustrated manuscripts, and book historians like Heather Jackson and Beth Lau study Romantic readership by investigating handwritten marginal annotations; in this study I show that we ought to look to the paratexts of translated works in order to enrich our analyses of a poet-translator’s interpretive project, and complicate the conventional critical understanding of the function of ballad commentary. A frame is not necessarily restrictive; the “citations” that Adorno describes do not necessarily mean that the text they describe is “no longer animated.” We instead might see literary translations as interpretations that, rather than purporting to be less complex than their source, initiate a series of reinterpretations—a chain that can be traced in the material contexts of publication and republication (Morris), in footnotes and in musical adaptations (Kipling), in endnotes and in related stories (Stevenson), and in the white space that demands a reader perform their own interpretive work (Johnson). These paratexts open up, rather than close down, further interpretation.

My approach in this dissertation is as attentive to historical context as it is to literary form. Historicist research enriches our understanding of the past, but has been denigrated for not bearing sufficient critical heft. Rita Felski summarizes the critique of historicism as an approach that “treats works of art only as cultural symptoms of their own moment, as moribund matter buried in the past” (575). In attempting to move beyond the repeated representation of the ballad as mere “matter,” material, or artifact—some objectified thing that is metaphorically dead, effectively killed off by scholarly practice—this dissertation points to the genre’s persistence through time, its continued and continuing ability to act as a participant “in chains of events,” and to attempt to
“shape outcomes and influence actions” (Felski 583). My approach in this dissertation is decidedly historicist: the individual chapters in this dissertation are heavily invested in the practice of historical research, drawing on archival records, biographical details, and first editions; I also retain the use of the temporally bound designation “Victorian.” And yet, this dissertation suggests, such historical details can be yoked to a consideration of form in order to demonstrate this genre’s continued political vitality—an aspect of the ballad that persisted across time, despite the interventions of editors dating back to Thomas Percy.

My dissertation thus digs deeply into a specific cultural moment in order to suggest that the ballad, even at this moment of intensive and systematic collection, was as capacious and hybridizing as it was for John Gay in 1728, W. H. Auden in 1937, and John Koethe in 2009. By the end of the nineteenth century, ballads had circulated in print for hundreds of years; their printing did not put an end to their movement and adaptability any more than artifactualization did. The formalist approach in this dissertation considers meter, stanza structure, repetition, punctuation, font choice, ink colour, illustrations, dedications, and notes—features that shape and structure poems and collections—in order to demonstrate that these forms, even these borders, do not entomb the ballad. The increasingly systematic and exhaustive collecting and cataloguing impulses of the nineteenth century did not constitute a permanent or fundamental change of the genre.

This project looks at poets who wrote ‘new originals’ of and for specific cultural groups, and labeled their translations as ballads. Translations are a particularly intriguing subset for a formalist and historicist study of the late nineteenth century ballad because they reveal assumptions about the genre that aren’t apparent in the ballad collections that have been the subject of critical attention in recent works by Michael Cohen, Yuri Cowan, Meredith Martin, Jason Rudy, and others. The study of poetic translation not only enables an appreciation of these individual poets’ conceptions of the ballad, but also provides alternative viewpoints on the ballad in the 1890s. Those who follow the trajectory of ballad artifactualization argue that the increasing objectification of the ballad distanced the ballad-consuming public from the world represented in the text, and point to the ways in which the ballad was framed and classified; in contrast, this dissertation
reveals that the ballad continued to intervene as a shaping and organizing force in its own right, to a range of political ends. That some of these ballads were not critically or popularly successful does not suggest that the texts did not shape or organize the experiences, peoples, and cultures they represented.

If our scholarship is motivated solely by a historicist impulse, we risk turning the study of art into solely an exercise in archive building. A skeptical reading of this dissertation might accuse my own project of continuing the artifactualizing process—of separating 1890s ballads from a broader cultural history; of characterizing the *fin-de-siècle* as a finite historical period without repercussions in the present; of adding vivisection to lepidopterology. And while a central objective of this dissertation has been to nuance our conception of late-Victorian ballads—a historicist goal—my attention to collecting, translating, and framing demonstrates that these practices can refract as well as restrict—a formalist argument. The collection, as a containing and unifying whole, is not necessarily totalizing; translation, as a practice, is not necessarily violent, or even final.
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