chapter. And can anyone really be so dismissive of the worth of the playgoers’s reactions? Shakespeare (pace Hamlet’s remark about the groundlings) certainly was fully aware of his audience’s sensibilities and realized, as any successful dramatist must, that a play succeeds completely only when performed before a receptive audience. The printed text of a play is the merest blueprint for performance, and while it might succeed as a printed text it has not succeeded as a play until it is performed. Ironically, Jenkins has felt it necessary to provide a theatrical history context for his discussion, although there is nothing revelatory in that theatre history.

Clearly, then, I dislike Jenkins’s prescriptive approach. However, what he writes about individual plays is frequently interesting, though not controversial. His readings stay very close to the text: indeed, they may be too close to mere plot telling, with interpolated, critical points of view. A more focused sense of his critical direction during these readings would be welcome. Symptomatic of this weakness is the lack of a summarizing, concluding paragraph to the discussion of each dramatist. Jenkins has made good use of such sources as biographies and collections of letters, but his extensive notes seldom refer to historical, sociological or similar sources. There is no bibliography, which seems to be an unfortunate trend in academic publishing.

Those readers who do not object to Jenkins’s prescriptions will doubtless find this book interesting, instructive and worthy of attention. Those who prefer to see dramatic literature in its complete theatrical context will leave Jenkins’s book rather unsatisfied and may find J. R. Stephens’s forthcoming book on the profession of the Victorian playwright more stimulating fare.

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R. L. Stevenson


This collection of all Stevenson stories less than 10,000 words long is a strangely betwixt-and-between venture. Its dust-jacket announces Peter Stoneley’s possession of an Oxford Ph.D., as if to give a truer ring to the promised coin of “full introduction and informative notes.” But a “Note on the Texts” acknowledges that “A full scholarly edition of all Stevenson’s writings is . . . well beyond the scope of the current volume,”
and immediately indicates just how far beyond in the revelation that “texts have been reprinted from the Tusitala Edition,” with the silent correction of certain anomalies and typographical errors, and insertion of occasional square-bracketed “editions” [sic] of a word or letter “to aid the sense of a sentence.” With such a modest and cursorily proofed editorial agenda, it does not altogether come as a surprise to discover that the announcement that a cover painting is courtesy of the Bridge-man Art Library omits to mention which artist it is also courtesy of, or whether the painting itself enjoys a name.

In the event, the “full” introduction turns out to be a scant, but nonetheless rambling, eight pages. Much of one is devoted to “The Ebb-Tide,” whose length and joint authorship (which Stoneley credits to Stevenson's unnamed “son-in-law” by mistake for stepson) necessitate its exclusion from the collection itself. The “informative notes” are in fact brief and partial composition and publication details, three or four sentences at most, placed before each story. Even these modest aims are fulfilled only erratically: for example, no mention is made of the inclusion of “The Treasure of Franchard” in The Merry Men collection (1887). There is no textual annotation at all of the stories themselves, and this despite the inevitable obscurity for a modern readership of many of their historical, theological, or topographical references. A note or two on such matters as the military situation in France in September 1429 (“The Sire de Malétroit’s Door”), the theological significance of Disruption Principles (“The Misadventures of John Nicholson”), or South Seas culture and topography (“The Beach of Falesá,” “The Isle of Voices”) would hardly be deemed too gross a selling-out to the needs of the non-specialist reader, at whom the book is in any case primarily directed. Without such glossing, the stories merely hang in approximate chronological sequence in a contextual void.

Overall one is less well served by this volume than by its dated source, the Tusitala edition, whose anecdotal but informative prefaces by Stevenson’s widow and the stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, are sacrificed to Stoneley’s brief comments. Since this compilation has no status as a scholarly edition and a limited market as a popular one, it is difficult to see what purpose it serves. For the enthusiastic general reader who would like the somewhat cumbersome convenience of a single-volume collection of Stevenson’s shorter fiction, it might be worth the price. But it has to be said that the old faded blue Tusitalas are more elegant and
comforting to the grip, and still to be picked up for a couple of dollars a volume in second-hand bookshops the world over.

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Pre-Raphaelite Art & Literature


This book is an exercise in “Symptomatic Reading,” a Marxist-feminist technique Pearce traces to Louis Althusser’s concept of “interpellation,” Raymond Williams’s corrective notion of competing ideologies, and Pierre Macherey’s idea of the recentered text. She sets out to answer a cluster of related questions:

What can the twentieth-century feminist reader/viewer actually do with male-produced nineteenth-century images of women? Is it ethically legitimate to deconstruct/reconstruct a text in which the dominant ideology is blatantly sexist/misogynistic and make it “work for feminism”? And, if so, is it possible to appropriate all texts in this way, or are there aesthetic/ideological factors intrinsic to each which enable or frustrate such activity?

Pearce’s interrogative approach is the strength of her study. She is willing to test her methodology and not afraid of negative answers. But the closing words of her introduction suggest an assumption at odds with this open-mindedness: “To read as a woman is always to read,” she insists, “‘against the grain’” (28). Feminist criticism must, in her view, be a criticism in opposition. And this unrelenting sexual warfare results in a series of readings that mingle insight with perversity. I am sympathetic to Pearce’s focus on the “gaps” and “absences” of texts, but disturbed by her tendency to treat male artists as univocal constructs susceptible (on occasion) to feminist recuperation. Despite the sophistication of her critical apparatus, she seems content with remarkably unsophisticated generalizations about Victorian men and the art they created.

Pearce takes it for granted, for example, that “men prefer to view their object of desire without interference of competition” (111)—a view that ignores the compelling argument of Eve Sedgewick’s Between Men and the larger question of mediated desire. One of the successes of feminist scholarship has been showing us how much unrecognized power women actually had in nineteenth-century England, but the binary rhetoric of