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## The "Myth of Tusitala" in Samoa: R. L. Stevenson's Presence in Albert Wendt's Fiction

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Robert Louis Stevenson a sans doute laissé un héritage très significatif dans le Pacifique, un héritage qui est encore très tangible et qui représente une richesse inestimable et une source d'inspiration pour beaucoup d'auteurs postcoloniaux de cette zone géographique. Le but de l'article est d'examiner l'important ascendant que la vie de Stevenson dans le Pacifique a eu sur l'imagination de l'auteur samoan Albert Wendt. A travers l'analyse de la production littéraire de Wendt et en particulier des références à Stevenson qu'on peut retracer dans ses œuvres *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree/Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1979) et *The Mango's Kiss* (2003), je relirai la relation entre les deux romanciers. Je proposerai donc de considérer l'image de Stevenson dans les romans de Wendt comme une sorte de « totem » au sens freudien du terme, c'est-à-dire un symbole profondément sacré et lié à la figure du pro-géniteur, aussi bien qu'objet d'amour et de haine pour la communauté de Samoa où l'auteur britannique a passé ses dernières années de 1888 à 1894.

The legacy left by Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific is undeniable and still really strong, and it represents a priceless heritage and source of inspiration for many postcolonial writers of the area. The aim of the paper is to investigate the strong influence of Stevenson's life in the Pacific on the imagery of the Samoan novelist Albert Wendt, trying to reread the relationship between the two authors through the analysis of Wendt's literary production. Analyzing Albert Wendt's Stevensonian references in *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree/Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1979) and *The Mango's Kiss* (2003), I will argue that Stevenson's image in Wendt's texts could be seen as a sort of "totem" in the Freudian sense of the term, a symbol deeply related to the sacred and the figure of the forefather, but also the center of love and hatred for the Samoan community wherein the Scottish writer spent his last years from 1888 to 1894.

Stevenson (R. L.), Wendt (Albert), littérature postcoloniale, Freud (Sigmund), totem

Stevenson (R. L.), Wendt (Albert), postcolonial literature, Freud (Sigmund), totem's theory

XIX<sup>e</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Samoa, Pacifique, Pacific area

As Kate Darian-Smith points out, « Whether it's fate or mere coincidence, the life stories of the two most celebrated writers of the Pacific — Robert Louis Stevenson and Albert Wendt — dovetail together on the small tropical island of Upolu in Western Samoa<sup>1</sup> ». The Pacific stay of Stevenson was a time of reciprocal improvement for the indigenous community and the Scottish writer who described the Samoan islands and their inhabitants in enthusiastic terms from his first visit onward. In 1889, when he concluded his third Pacific cruise, he told his Western readers that « Few men who come to the islands leave them ; they grow grey where they alighted ; the palm shades and trade-wind fans them till they die<sup>2</sup> », whilst the subsequent local narrative told of an ill Scottish writer who arrived and won the friendship of Samoan people. The presence of the white British writer has had a significant symbolic impact on the life on the island and on the psychological imagery of Samoans. Their peculiar relation based on confidence and acceptance of diversity is very different from the typical colonized/colonizer traumatic encounter, so much so that R. L. Stevenson's life in the Pacific led to the ambiguous “myth of Tusitala” built by his British contemporaries, who separated his art from his life in Samoa creating a mythology full of magic which « functioned as an ideological construction, removing all that was difficult, contradictory and unsettling about the author Stevenson actually became in the Pacific<sup>3</sup> ».

Actually, Stevenson's role of teacher and father figure in Samoa can be highlighted since the origin of his myth, also through an etymological perspective, since one of the meanings of the word “myth” is “tale” or “true narrative”, and it refers not only to its being rooted in truth, but also to the Greek word “*myo*”, meaning “to teach” or “to initiate into the mysteries”. My purpose is to go in depth into the contradictions which characterized Stevenson's stay in Samoa, trying to explain them through the Freudian arguments theorized in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). By examining it, I will try to contextualize the formation of the “myth of Tusitala” and to link it to Albert Wendt's literary production and life, as well as to his ambivalent relation with RLS as a personal guide.

## Stevenson in the Pacific: the creation of the “myth of Tusitala”

Stevenson's relationship with indigenous people has been depicted in a very positive light by many scholars who have often highlighted the peculiar characteristics of the Scottish author's Samoan life<sup>4</sup>. His preference for the « healthy

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Darian-Smith, « Looking at Both Sides », *Australian Book Review*, 2004, Flinders University, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Robinson (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, St. Lucia, UQP, 2004, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Roslyn Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific. Travel, Empire and the Author's Profession*, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> As Michelle Keown points out, the positive relationship between Stevenson and the Samoan community has been highlighted especially in relation to « the Presbyterian faith of Scottish emigrants [which] led them to adopt 'more egalitarian views on social and gender relations' than was

and happy people<sup>5</sup> » of Samoa is also displayed in a huge number of letters in which Stevenson criticizes the European colonial administration as a « dance of folly and injustice and unconscious rapacity<sup>6</sup> ».

Also his works played a significant role in his critiques of colonialism, especially his Pacific fiction. In particular, « his understanding of the dirty ground-level workings of colonialism at its most far-flung would make *The Ebb Tide* and *The Beach of Falesa* so insightful as critiques of the imperial enterprise<sup>7</sup> », and many other Pacific tales, such as “The Bottle Imp” (1891) or “The Isle of Voices” (1893), can be considered examples of his sympathy towards indigenous people, since for the first time they featured Polynesian central characters. “The Bottle Imp” was also translated into Samoan, a fact that urged native people to dub Stevenson “Tusitala”, or “writer of tales”<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, in *A Footnote to History* (1892) Stevenson denounces the behavior of English settlers in the Pacific<sup>9</sup>; thus, the Samoan writer Albert Wendt claims that : « For me, that has remained Stevenson’s most relevant work. It showed his astute and perceptive and enthusiastic support for our struggle against the foreign powers and colonialism<sup>10</sup> ». Actually, the influence of this charismatic literary figure on Wendt’s life has been very relevant since his childhood, when his grandmother used to tell him stories about the great Tusitala<sup>11</sup>.

Albert Wendt was born in Apia, the capital of Samoa, in 1939, forty-five years after Stevenson’s burial on the top of Mount Vaea, which the young Albert could see from his home. In particular, according to Wendt’s grandmother and her generation, the « legend of Tusitala » depicted the Scotsman as « the most famous writer of his day, [...] who [...] chose our small and insignificant country to write and to die in. And when he died, our chiefs and warriors, because of our enormous love for him, carried him on their shoulders over the steep Road of Loving Hearts to the top of Mount Vaea which he’d chosen as his burial place<sup>12</sup> ». This description of

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putatively evident in other British migrant communities », in Michelle Keown, « Isles of Voices: Scotland in the Indigenous Pacific Literary Imaginary », *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 9, Autumn / Winter 2013, 63. Moreover, also Jolly claims that Stevenson’s letters from Samoa are examples of the genuine friendship between the writer and Samoans, in Roslyn Jolly, « Stevenson’s Pacific Transnarratives », *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 9, Autumn / Winter 2013, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, Roslyn Jolly (ed.), *South Sea Tales*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, Roslyn Jolly (ed.), *South Sea Tales*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. xiii.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Robinson (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, St. Lucia, UQP, 2004, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Michelle Keown, *Pacific Islands Writing. The Postcolonial Literature of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> In particular, Keown explains that « While not an outright condemnation of European colonialism per se, the text criticizes the wrangling for power amongst British, German, and US settlers and colonial forces in Samoa », in « Isles of Voices: Scotland in the Indigenous Pacific Literary Imaginary », *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 9, Autumn / Winter 2013, p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Wendt, « Tusitala: The Legend, the Writer & the Literature of the Pacific », in Roger Robinson (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2004, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Michelle Keown, « Isles of Voices: Scotland in the Indigenous Pacific Literary Imaginary », *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 9, Autumn / Winter 2013, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Albert Wendt, « Tusitala: The Legend, the Writer & the Literature of the Pacific », in Roger Robinson (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, St. Lucia, University of

Stevenson's funeral could be seen as evidence of Samoans' *faaloalo*, the typical Samoan custom of giving « respect to people because everything is made by mutual support<sup>13</sup> », and it can exemplify the sort of paternal relationship which linked Samoan people to the Scottish author, a relation based on great regard and reciprocal love. Indeed, Stevenson had established a close relationship with Samoans ; however, when some years after his death his reputation of Tusitala reached his British motherland, European readers started to reconsider the figure of the attractive storyteller, who

[...] was himself part of a barbaric world of orality and magic. He was not a historian, because he existed outside history in a timeless primitive realm. He did not use his legal mind to work through the problems of modern colonial government ; he simply assumed, by right of race and talent, a place at the top of the traditional island hierarchy, a kind of natural chief<sup>14</sup>.

Therefore, the same colonial context in which Stevenson grew up and lived for most of his life inescapably influenced the creation of his myth in the Pacific as well as his experience abroad, especially because Stevenson's figure in Samoa could sometimes take not only the shape of a benevolent father but also of a venerable chief, because of his exploration and study of the indigenous habits from a European perspective. Stevenson's position towards Samoan community is quite ambiguous also because, as Michael Fry points out, numerous biographers « have observed how he lived on Samoa like a Highland chief, gathering relations and dependants (sic) round him in a kind of clan, even dressing his servants in lava-lavas of Royal Stewart tartan<sup>15</sup> ». So, if the peculiar relation between RLS and Samoan people could certainly be read as a demonstration of mutual affection in a sort of father/son relationship, the colonial context in which Stevenson's Pacific life and stories were received would justify an ambivalent reading of his relations with the natives.

Indeed, despite all the positive aspects of his stay in Samoa and the fact that his desire was not to usurp Samoan people's voice<sup>16</sup>, the Scottish writer remained a white settler who, as Paul Sharrad states, was the « propagator of white misinformation about, and textual domination of, the South Seas<sup>17</sup> », maybe because of the influence of social anthropology and social Darwinism, while Roslyn Jolly adds that Stevenson foreshadows Conrad because he is « partly complicit with, partly critical of, and not fully conscious of his own place within, imperialism<sup>18</sup> ». So, while on the one hand he is conscious of the atrocities realized by colonizers and missionaries and their “fatal impact”<sup>19</sup> on indigenous societies and he deprecates the negative effects of their actions, on the other hand his writings, like those of other

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Queensland Press, 2004, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Jeannette Marie Mageo, *Theorizing Self in Samoa: Emotions, Genders and Sexualities*, University of Michigan Press, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Roslyn Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific. Travel, Empire and the Author's Profession*, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009.p. 173.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire*, Phantassie, Tuckwell, 2001, p. 232.

<sup>16</sup> Sylvie Largeaud Ortéga, « A Scotsman's Pacific: Shifting Identities in R. L. Stevenson's Postcolonial Fiction », *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 9, Autumn/Winter 2013, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Sharrad, *Albert Wendt and Pacific Literature: Circling The Void*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2003, p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, Roslyn Jolly (ed.), *South Sea Tales*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. xv.

colonial authors, are in part « complicit with it in their desire to memorialize aspects of the Pacific not previously documented by their predecessors<sup>20</sup> ». Starting from these assumptions, Stevenson's life in the Pacific could be read as quite ambivalent, since it is characterized by RLS's double condition of father figure and chief.

Moreover, considering all these aspects of Stevenson's life, what is interesting in Albert Wendt's position is the contradiction between his warm feelings towards the European writer and his general negative judgment of the imperial European system in which RLS took part. Actually, in his foundational essay *Towards a new Oceania* (1976) Wendt criticizes the formal educational system established by the colonizers, denouncing the atrocities of colonization and the attitude of "mimicry" of the colonized :

*Colonial education helped reduce many of us into a state of passivity, undermined our confidence and self-respect, and made many of us ashamed of our cultures, transformed many of us into Uncle Toms and reconants and what V.S. Naipaul has called mimic men, inducing in us the feeling that only the foreign is right or proper or worthwhile. [...] What frightens me is the easy/unquestioning acceptance by our countries of all this without considering their adverse effects on our psyche [my emphasis]. In my brief lifetime, I have observed many of our countries imitating what we consider to be papalagi culture (even though most of us will swear vehemently that we are not !). It is just one of the tragic effects of colonialism - the aping of colonial ways/life-styles/attitudes/values<sup>21</sup>.*

Considering his vehement position against colonialism and the Papalagi/European educational system, it is quite striking that in his forward of RLS's best Pacific writings he proudly affirms that, when he was a child, he was a passionate reader of the same English colonial romances that he criticizes, especially of Stevenson's tales, and that « over time in my own writing, he has also become a presence<sup>22</sup> », depicting Stevenson as a sort of perfect spiritual guide and literary father. The ambivalent relation between Wendt and Stevenson is evident and quite stimulating also according to the influence that the "myth of Tusitala" had on Wendt's personal and artistic formation, and it is well depicted in the Samoan author's texts, where Stevenson's figure is always introduced through the complex father/son relationship.

These same tensions are the seeds also of that conflict which forms the basis for Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. The Freudian argument has obviously to be

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<sup>19</sup> The term was popularized in a book by historian Alan Moorehead *Fatal Impact: An Account of the Invasion of the South Pacific 1766-1840*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966. Moreover, Rod Edmond explains that « Such impact could be represented as beneficent or harmful, depending on whether one was defending or criticizing the civilizing mission of colonialism. But on the scale of the impact itself, imperialists and their critics agreed: indigenous cultures were more or less obliterated », in Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Michelle Keown, *Pacific Islands Writing. The Postcolonial Literature of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Albert Wendt, « Towards a New Oceania », *Mana Review*, I, 1, January, 1976, pp. 56-57 [my emphasis].

<sup>22</sup> Albert Wendt, « Tusitala: The Legend, the Writer & the Literature of the Pacific », in Roger Robinson (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2004, p. 10.

contextualized in the time of its first appearance in 1913, and relativized considering not only the historical period in which it was written (the end of colonialism), but also the influence of Sir J. G. Frazer's studies on the totemic phenomena in the Aboriginal Australian communities. However, it includes some passages which can suggest a new consideration of Stevenson's impact on Samoan imaginary, explaining his presence in Albert Wendt's literary production through the totem/father's metaphor.

## The totemic relationship between father and son in Freud's work

Freud's *Totem and Taboo* is one of the most important studies about myth from a psychological standpoint and it is based on the Oedipus complex's wish to supplant the father, a desire which is transposed to the envy for the king's powers. In this theory Freud includes also anthropological and social psychological speculation, as well as Sir Frazer's explorations of the Australian Aborigines, demonstrating how his psychoanalytic postulations could be adapted to a colonial context.

Indeed, Freud's work has sometimes been related to the racist ideology of his time ; however, I agree with Maggie Nolan's assertion that

Freud's adherence to a racist economy based around the notion of the savage does not necessarily mean that psychoanalysis cannot provide us with any insights into such formulations. To remove the unconscious or psychic motivation from analysis because some theorizations of the unconscious have emerged within a racist epistemology would require the renewed assumption that the rational precepts of consciousness can and will explain everything<sup>23</sup>.

Starting from this perspective, psychoanalysis can be separated from the racist context of Freud's age, whilst it becomes a useful conceptual tool to think about colonialism.

First of all, one of the most interesting characteristics of totemism is the possibility to convert a ruler into a friend<sup>24</sup> ; therefore, Stevenson can be seen as the white Papalagi who was transmuted into a friend, as well as the object of a strange kind of « tenderness », besides which

*there exists a contrary but unconscious stream of hostility, that is to say, wherever the typical case of an ambivalent affective attitude is realized. The hostility is then cried down by an excessive increase of tenderness [...] Applied to the treatment of privileged persons this theory of an ambivalent feeling would reveal that their veneration, their very deification, is opposed in the unconscious by an intense hostile tendency, so that, as we had expected, the situation of an ambivalent feeling is here realized. (49) [my emphasis]*

This « ambivalent feeling » is depicted in Wendt's works in the conflict between father and son, colonial power and subjection of the colonized. Stevenson embodies both these conflicts, since he is the beloved father and object of envy as well as the white Papalagi chief.

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<sup>23</sup> Maggie Nolan, « Displacing Indigenous Australians: Freud's Totem and Taboo », in Joy Damousi, Robert Reynolds (eds.), *History on the Couch: Essays in History and Psychoanalysis*, Melbourne, Melbourne University press, 2003, p. 60.

<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 43.

Furthermore, in his essay Freud interprets the mixture of fear and reverence for the killed father/totemic subject (68) : therefore, according to him and by extension, myth is the distorted wish of supremacy of entire peoples which culminated in parricide, a metaphorical desire which can be also interpreted as the indigenous people's aspiration to kill the king in order to take control over their own country and gain powers from which they were previously excluded by colonizers. Actually, as Freud points out, « One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father, and so made an end to the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually » (141).

This rite, however, reflects an ambivalent attitude : the sons feel remorse for their act, thus they start to desire a reconciliation and communion with the father (67). Moreover, the most interesting point in Freud's theory is that the totem/father figure has to be treated with respect and, according to Freud, this mixture of violence and regard demonstrates the emotional ambivalence of the members of the tribe, perfectly explainable when the totem is taken as a substitute of the father, on which the sons place their feelings of love and competitive hatred. In fact « [...] in the act of devouring him [the father] they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength » (142). So, in Freud's explanation of totemism we can trace a sort of ambiguous desire of the sons who wish to replace the killed father : from this perspective, Wendt's reverence for RLS might be compared to the aspiration of the writer/son to be like the literary father.

Hence, totemism came about as the resolution of ambivalent feelings towards a group's father-figure : an early rebellion prompted guilt which created what Freud terms « deferred obedience » (145) to the patriarchal role of the father. From this perspective, and taking into consideration all the possible constraints, we could explain Stevenson's figure in Wendt's works as a projection of the beloved and hated father/chief who died on Samoan land, a guardian spirit which can be killed just to indicate that it is considered a member of the tribe (140). Following a metaphorical interpretation, we can say that the reception and assimilation of Stevenson's literary production by Albert Wendt symbolizes his personal gratitude for him, as well as his ambition to literary "kill" and "substitute" the chief's father figure.

So, in Freud's words « Psychoanalysis has revealed that the totem animal is in reality a substitute for the father » (141), and this peculiar situation is skillfully exemplified in Wendt's production, especially in the fate of the character Leonard Roland Stenson in *The Mango's Kiss* (2003), as well as in the role assigned to Stevenson in 1974 novella *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree*, later incorporated into the mid-section of the novel *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1979).

## Stevenson as a totemic father figure in Albert Wendt's works: from *Flying-fox in a Freedom Tree* (1974) to *The Mango's Kiss* (2003)

As Wendt points out « Robert Louis Stevenson has been a presence in my life since I was born<sup>25</sup> », a presence that we can trace also in his literary production, and in particular in those novels which treat the problematic situation of Samoa's hybrid colonial society.

*Flying-fox in a Freedom Tree* is one of the first novellas written by Wendt, and it gives its title to the homonymous collection published in 1974. It narrates the story of Pepe, a young Samoan boy who may represent a literary alter ego of Wendt, as well as of the Samoan community with its attempt to construct its own narrative and history contesting the white Papalagi culture. This is even more evident especially if we read the short-story in relation to its successive incorporation in Wendt's novel *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1979), where the Samoan writer tells the whole story of Pepe's family, transforming the previous novella into a saga which narrates the vicissitudes of three generations of people.

The main character of the first section is Pepe's father Tauilopepe, a westernized Samoan man who manages to get a large amount of community land to settle a plantation, following the example of the Papalagi men and their habit of exploiting indigenous people through their businesses. His activity becomes an all-consuming passion which leads Tauilopepe to ignore his family, particularly his wife and his son Pepe, who starts feeling abandoned by his father. Hence, in the first part of the novel, we can see the seeds of that father/son conflict which would explicate the formation of a totemic society, according to Freud's theory. Moreover, the weakness of Tauilopepe, who cannot affirm his own Samoan personality because of his deep westernization, is justified by Wendt's negative opinion about white presence in Samoa, which is also showed in Pepe's criticism towards his father's behavior : « Life was slow until the papalagi came and changed many things, including, later, people like my father...<sup>26</sup> ».

In the mid-section of the novel, the rebel Pepe becomes the protagonist of the narration. Tauilo's son does not accept the rules imposed by his father and he starts acting as a criminal, robbing from Tauilo's store and then forcing his father to lie for him in an attempt to challenge his authority,

I look at Tauilo and suddenly want him to lie for me. 'Ask my father,'  
I tell Galo. There is silence.  
'Yes, he was sleeping here,' Tauilo says.  
'Did you see him, sir?' Galo asks.  
'Of course I saw him. You do not take my word for it?'  
And immediately the police are lost. Tauilo tries not to look at me. I burst  
out laughing and the police are puzzled.  
'I did it,' I tell them. [...] 'He tells you a lie !' Tauilo shouts to the police.

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<sup>25</sup> Albert Wendt, « Tusitala: The Legend, the Writer & the Literature of the Pacific », in Roger Robinson (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2004, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Wendt, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, Auckland, Longman Paul Limited, 1979, p. 160.

I stop and face him. 'My father is the liar,' I say to them and walk out.  
[...] (194)

Furthermore, in *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* the totemic society is exemplified also by the myriad of symbols which denote the village of Sapepe and Tuilo pepe's family: for instance, during the trial against Pepe, the protagonist changes his identity and repudiates his father, introducing himself as « Pepesa, son of Sapepe and the gods of Sapepe [...] After the Sapepe hero who challenged all the gods and won » (199). The importance of the religious system which, according to Freud, derives from the totemic system, is here exemplified by Pepe's repudiation of the Papalagi Christian faith followed by his father and the judges (200). Pepe's ironical reference to his ancestral gods and to the totemic animal compared to the eyes of the judge which remind of « the eyes of the owl that was the Tuilo pepe family god in the ancient times » (199) is another example of Wendt's ambivalent position, as he is torn between past and present. These passages symbolize the conflictual relation between Pepe and the colonial system, which has been put into question like the power of Pepe's father, and this conflict is exemplified also by the direct references to R. L. Stevenson.

The importance of genealogy is undeniable in Wendt's works as well as in Samoan society<sup>27</sup>, and in fact in *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* the narrator Pepe (and Wendt too) aspires to follow Stevenson's literary model : « I decided to become the second Robert Louis Stevenson, a tusitala » (158), thus he compares himself to RLS and the illness he is dying from to Stevenson's TB (190). However, the admiration for the Scottish author (« if my novel is as good as Stevenson's *Treasure Island* I will be satisfied » [157]) is in contrast, as mentioned above, with Wendt's negative opinion of the colonial educational system. In fact, the deep influence and the imposition of British culture in order to substitute the indigenous traditions and totemic system are firmly criticized by Wendt also in *Towards a New Oceania*,

The formal education systems [...] that were established by the colonisers in our islands all had one main feature in common: they were based on the arrogantly mistaken racist assumption that the cultures of the colonisers were superior (and preferable) to ours. Education was therefore devoted to civilising us, to cutting us away from the roots of our cultures, from what the colonisers viewed as darkness, superstition, barbarism, and savagery. The production of bourgeois papalagi seemed the main objective ; the process was one of castration<sup>28</sup>.

So, if on the one hand Wendt strongly opposes the colonial experience, on the other hand he recognizes the authority and the influence of Stevenson. This quite ambiguous position can be explained thanks to Freud's theory : the Scottish author veritably assumes the role of the forefather who is both loved and hated, also considering Wendt's position against all kinds of prevarications and especially against any forms of cultural colonization. From a totemic perspective, despite the positive and affectionate feature of the bond which links RLS to many amongst Pacific peoples, a sense of hatred and envy for the position of superiority of the father/king still resists, especially because the sons « were inspired by a wish to become like him [the father] and had given expression to it by incorporating parts of

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Sharrad, *Albert Wendt and Pacific Literature: Circling The Void*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2003, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Albert Wendt, « Towards a New Oceania », *Mana Review*, I, 1, January, 1976, p. 56.

their father's surrogate<sup>29</sup> ». Pepe's (and Wendt's) aspiration to become the second R. L. Stevenson is therefore the son's natural desire to resemble the father, although « No one could or might ever again attain the father's supreme power, even though that was what all of them had striven for<sup>30</sup> ».

The same situation is also introduced in *The Mango's Kiss* (2003). In this later work, Wendt's homage to Stevenson is even more evident through the character of Leonard Roland Stenson, an anagrammed fictionalized version of the Scottish author who has written many novels, such as *The Island of Treasures*, *The Earl of Bellingtroy*, *The Tide at Falelima* and *Weir at Lammington*, which are, of course, disguised versions of Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, *The Master of Ballantrae*, *The Beach of Falesá* and *Weir of Hermiston*. Also Wendt's description of Stenson in his forward to *Robert Louis Stevenson : His Best Pacific Writings* is quite interesting, since he claims that « In the yet-unfinished novel, which I have been working on for about 16 years, Stevenson takes on the form of another Papalagi writer who comes to Samoa to die, and becomes a major character and presence in the novel<sup>31</sup> ». In this context, it is significant that Wendt consider Stevenson a « major character » since Stenson's presence in the narration is quite limited and he appears in person only in 28 of the 463 pages of the novel : his cultural and symbolic weight is therefore definitely important for the Samoan author and it is symptomatic also of Stevenson's totemic function.

This British writer is described as a « brilliant man » who « loves to live here [...] He says he's found his home<sup>32</sup> », and he is loved by everyone on the island (115). Nevertheless, from the beginning Stenson is quite a ghostly presence in the novel, as if he foresaw his imminent death ; he is « more spirit than flesh » (112), even though the carnality of his body is confirmed by death.

In Wendt's words, Stenson is his personal « tribute » to Stevenson, as well as « my taking the outsider literary myth of the writer/artist adventuring in Paradise and reclaiming her/him for Samoa and myself<sup>33</sup> ». Thus, through his character Stenson, Wendt adds an even more noteworthy chapter to the « mythology<sup>34</sup> » of RLS and at the same time he regains possession of his literary father. This is quite evident in the relationship between Stenson and the young Samoan girl Peleiupu who meets him in order to improve her English : from the beginning, Stenson leaves a strong impression on the girl, becoming a sort of father for her and establishing another example of totemic relationship : « Barker then described how Stenson had died. For the rest of her life Peleiupu would cherish every detail of it as a vital history in the mythology of her life » (115). In this case, the use of the word

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<sup>29</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 148.

<sup>30</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 148.

<sup>31</sup> Albert Wendt, « Tusitala: The Legend, the Writer & the Literature of the Pacific », in Roger Robinson (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2004, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Albert Wendt, *The Mango's Kiss*, Auckland, Random House New Zealand, 2003, p. 90.

<sup>33</sup> Albert Wendt, « Tusitala: The Legend, the Writer & the Literature of the Pacific », in Roger Robinson (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2004, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Albert Wendt, « Tusitala: The Legend, the Writer & the Literature of the Pacific », in Roger Robinson(ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2004, p. 10.

“mythology” is not casual : it represents Wendt’s consideration of Stenson’s (and Stevenson’s) life and death in Samoa as an aggregation of mystery and magic and a sort of teaching with a strong influence on Pele’s life. This is only the first “heritage” which symbolizes the genealogical relation between the two characters ; indeed, Stenson had a daughter, Marianne, who was about the same age as Pele when she died, suggesting a connection between Pele and Stenson’s lost child<sup>35</sup>. In addition to this, he leaves Pele his entire library, considering her a sort of spiritual heir ; thus, we can say that the topic of progeny is a leit-motif in all Wendt’s literary production and it may be linked to his wish to become Stevenson’s Pacific successor.

However, the most significant example of Wendt’s use of Stevenson’s image as a totemic father figure in *The Mango’s Kiss* is given by Stenson’s death in Samoa, which is not only a clear reference to Stevenson’s death, but also an explanation of how Samoans “killed” their ancestral father. Indeed, Pele suspects that the illness which causes the writer’s death is the « disease of Satoa » (144), the illness of the island where the novelist lived and died. This possibility was already sustained by the young girl, who had previously affirmed « this country is bad for him » (101). Therefore, the totemic presence of Stevenson in Wendt’s novel is summarized by the fate of his alter ego Leonard Roland Stenson who is killed by the island despite his love for it. Nevertheless, his memory will always be safeguarded and respected by Samoans ; in fact, from this moment and all over the text, Stenson is remembered as a still impressive presence in the lives of indigenous people, especially by Pele who dreams of him (149) and considers him her spiritual guide for the immense legacy that he left her through his books : « the library that Stenson had bequeathed her hadn’t been dusted and checked for a long time [...] So after school she took some students and they dusted the books and shelves, putting the books back in alphabetical order » (226). After his death, Stenson’s (and Stevenson’s) role of white Papalagi has been reversed into a positive and healthy issue by those who loved him, in the same way, and after the death, each tribe deeply respects its totemic guide.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to explain R. L. Stevenson’s presence in Albert Wendt’s fiction through Sigmund Freud’s totem theory: the aim of this article is not to deny the mutual affection and respect which has always linked Stevenson to Samoans, but to try to give an explanation to the ambivalent presence of RLS as a sort of guiding light and father figure in Wendt’s life and career. Through the totem metaphor, I have tried to reread the position of Stevenson in the Pacific as it might have been perceived by his contemporaries who created the “myth of Tusitala”, and as it was later received by the younger generation of Pacific authors, like Albert Wendt.

Indeed, while the emotional and historical impact of Stevenson’s figure on Pacific literature has already been noted and highlighted as a healthy and fecund meeting point between European and Pacific culture, it is also important to underline that the British colonial system is still perceived as a harmful presence in Wendt’s opinion, and that also Stevenson’s benevolent magical figure might show some

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<sup>35</sup> Susan Y. Najita, « In the Shade of the Banyan Tree », *The Contemporary Pacific*, Volume 22, Number 2, 2010, University of Hawai‘i Press, p. 358.

negative aspects. It is for this reason that RLS has been treated as a totemic father figure in Wendt's literary production, in order to find a compromise between his immense love and respect for him and the sort of "rivalry" that he feels for the artistic greatness of the Scottish author. This ambiguous situation is finally solved in a positive way thanks to Stevenson's totemic transformation, that is Wendt's final homage to the great Tusiata as well as a way to preserve his memory. Thus, Freud concludes that

after a long lapse of time their [of the children] bitterness against their father, which had driven them to their deed, grew less, and their longing for him increased; and it became possible for an ideal to emerge which embodied the unlimited power of the primal father against whom they had once fought as well as their readiness to submit to him<sup>36</sup>. [...]

The creation of a totemic myth is therefore a real demonstration of respect and veneration for those individuals who distinguish themselves from the rest, as Stevenson did, especially because this process finally leads to reverence for the dead father. Indeed, Stevenson has been elevated to the status of a venerable myth, torn between an ancient and primeval past and the bright present of Pacific literature and Wendt's works.

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