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Nomadic Storytellers : Scottish Traveller Self-Representation in Stanley Robertson' s Exodus to Alford

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Nomadic Storytellers: Scottish Traveller Self-Representation in Stanley Robertson's *Exodus to Alford*

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旅する語り部たち—— Stanley Robertson の *Exodus to Alford* における
スコティッシュ・トラベラーの自己表現

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Scottish Travellers are an ethnic minority in Scotland who are known for their nomadic lifestyle. The sedentary society has dealt with them as an exotic and threatening “internal other.” This is largely due to them not being adequately self-represented in public media. They have published nearly forty books about their lives and oral traditions since the 1970s but there has been no substantial research into their writings. The present research is designed to distil an emic (i.e., insiders’) Traveller image from one of the most influential Traveller writings, *Exodus to Alford* (1988) by Stanley Robertson (1940–2009), which will contribute to the construction of a fairer Traveller representation.

The first part focuses on the depiction of travelling life in the *Exodus to Alford* and argues that the Travellers’ nomadism is not described as mere entertainment, but as an essential tradition for them to regain their Traveller identity by fleeing from the city where they are oppressed. The second part turns to their storytelling tradition, as introduced in the book, and examines how Traveller characters communicate their distinct worldview and value system by telling stories. Finally, the third part investigates literary elements in the book, namely the structure and language. These elements are idiosyncratic and present Travellers’ nomadism and storytelling not as separate activities but as one package. The book, thus, portrays Travelling people as nomadic storytellers.

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Key Words : Scottish Travellers, folklore, oral tradition, autobiography, self-representation
キーワード : スコティッシュ・トラベラー, 民俗学, 口頭伝承, 自伝, 自己表象

スコティッシュ・トラベラー（以下トラベラー）とはスコットランドの移動民族である。偏見に基づいた報道などにより、彼らは定住社会から「内なる他者」として扱われている。一方、トラベラーも自伝などを通して自らの生き方や文化を伝えようとしてきたが、それらは研究者の関心を集めてこなかった。そこで本研究は代表的なトラベラー作家 Stanley Robertson (1940–2009) の自伝小説 *Exodus to Alford* (1988) に注目し、トラベラー本人によるトラベラーの自己表象を抽出することを目的とする。

第1章では作中における移動生活の描写に着眼し、街で抑圧されるトラベラーにとって移動生活が彼らのアイデンティティを取り戻す貴重な機会として描出されていることを検証する。第2章では作中で紹介されるトラベラーの物語に焦点を当て、トラベラー独自の世界観や価値観を物語が伝達していると論じる。第3章では本書の構成と言語に光を当て、それらの文学的装置を用いることで本書が移動生活と物語る伝統を一体の伝統として提示し、トラベラーを「旅する語り部」として表象していることを解明する。

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1 Introduction

1.1 About Scottish Travellers

Scottish Travellers are a nomadic people in Scotland and officially defined as “a small but distinctive ethnic and cultural minority within the Scottish population” (Scottish Government Social Research 2009: 4), along with Scottish Gypsies¹⁾. According to the latest census, over four thousand people defined themselves as “Gypsy/Traveller” (Scottish Government 2015: 5). However, Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland (2013: 2) estimated that this should be approximately 15,000–20,000, which is still less than 0.5% of the entire population of Scotland. They speak various languages, including Scots, English, and Scottish Gaelic. They also speak Romani, the language of the Romani people, and even have their secret language, the Traveller cant. Travellers are “among the most marginalised communities in Scotland and among those facing the greatest discrimination” (Amnesty

International UK 2012: 2), which Sara Stewart called, “the last accepted face of racism in modern Scotland.” This is largely due to the distinct lack of their self-representation in public media, which often associates Travellers with crime and other social issues.

1.2 History of Traveller Studies and Overlooked Areas

Research into Scottish Travellers began when Hamish Henderson, a Scottish poet and folklorist, “discovered” a legendary Traveller singer, Jeannie Robertson, in Aberdeen in 1953 (Neat 2009: 16); he called this encounter the “breakthrough” into the “semi-hidden world of the travelling people” (Henderson 1992: 236). After vigorous collection of their oral traditions by the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, Scottish Traveller studies were taken over by the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen in the mid-1990s. As Travellers have been regarded as guardians of traditions, scholars have paid attention to their oral traditions, especially songs and stories (e.g., Williamson 1985, Porter and Gower 1995, and McKean 2016 on song; Douglas 1985, McDermitt 1986, and Braid 2002 on story). These were scholarly attempts to understand the Travelling community through their oral traditions.

On the other hand, there is one large field overlooked by folklorists: books written by the Travellers themselves. The very first book written by a Traveller is Betsy Whyte’s (1919–1988) autobiography, *The Yellow on the Broom*, first published in 1979. Since then, Scottish Travellers have produced nearly forty books, most of which are autobiographies and collections of Traveller stories. Research on their writings is of vital importance academically, because Traveller writers have a choice of what to tell about themselves in their books. In this regard, Travellers’ writings differ from their interviews in the previous research, in which they were expected to talk primarily about what researchers had a particular interest in, such as songs or stories. In order to better understand how Travellers recognise their own community, culture, and experiences, the most helpful materials would be their own writings, in which they actively select what to tell the outside world. Not only is research on Travellers’ writings important academically, but it has social significance as well. Scottish Travellers have long been misrepresented as “exotic” and “threatening” without any form of self-representation in public media, as Lanters (2005: 25) points out in her discussion of Irish Travellers, who have faced the identical issues²). Scottish Travellers’ writings are practically the only media which contain their own voices and, hence, the best materials to find their emic (insiders’) perspectives to present images that are fairer to them.

1.3 Aims and Materials

The present study is concerned with Scottish Travellers’ writings and attempts to reveal how they introduce themselves in the books. In this context, the most suit-

able material would be *Exodus to Alford* published in 1988 by Stanley Robertson (1940–2009), a Traveller writer from Aberdeen, a city in the North-East of Scotland, and nephew of the renowned singer, Jeannie Robertson. This book primarily aims at introducing to the reader (1) the Traveller’s traditional way of life on the road and (2) their folklore such as local legends and vernacular beliefs (Robertson 1988: 16). Therefore, it is a fitting text through which we can understand Traveller self-representation. *Exodus to Alford* is an autobiographical novel about the Travellers’ nomadic life in the summer of 1946. It uses the literary form called “frame story,” which means it consists of two levels of narrative; the narrator tells of the summer travelling in 1946 (the primary narrative), and thirty-four stories are told by Traveller characters in it (the secondary narrative). Hamish Henderson, a pioneer in the field of Scottish Traveller studies, acknowledged Robertson as “a most accomplished and sophisticated literary artist” (1992: 237) in his review of *Exodus to Alford*, and this book immediately established Robertson’s status as an author. This study attempts to unravel how he actually represents his folk in this influential work, thereby encouraging both folklorists and literary scholars to pay attention to Travellers’ writings and also contributing to the construction of a fairer image of Travellers based on their own voices.

1.4 Thesis and Structure

Combining textual analysis, fieldwork, and interviews, I argue that *Exodus to Alford* presents Travellers as “nomadic storytellers,” whose basis for identity are their two inseparable traditions: travelling and storytelling. The first part focuses on the primary narrative of *Exodus to Alford*, which tells of Travellers’ nomadism from emic perspectives; Travellers’ nomadism is not mere entertainment for them but an essential tradition to recover the Traveller identity by fleeing from the city of Aberdeen, where they are oppressed by non-Travellers. The second part deals with the secondary narrative, which casts light on the Travellers’ storytelling tradition. In this narrative, the stories communicate the Travellers’ worldview and value system in terms of (1) their vernacular landscape, (2) belief system, and (3) morality and ethics. Finally, the third part turns to literary elements in *Exodus to Alford*, that is the structure and language, and concludes that the Travellers’ nomadism and storytelling are presented as one package, and not as separate activities.

It should be noted that it is essential to differentiate related but distinct concepts which appear in self-referential writings; in my argument, I use “Robertson” to refer to the author (the historical “I”) and distinguish it from the narrator in the book (the narrating “I”), whom I simply call the “narrator.” And I use “Stanley” when I mention the six-year-old Robertson (the narrated “I”) reconstructed by the narrator³.

2 Travelling

In summer, Travellers would traditionally live in “bow tents,” made of hazel or rowan sticks (Figure 1) and actively move from place to place, looking for seasonal work such as berry picking, flax harvest⁴), turnip thinning, and potato harvest. They would simultaneously be involved in non-seasonal labour, including pearl fishing⁵), hawking, ragging⁶), cloth peg making, tin ware mending, and fortune telling, also called “drukking” (Stewart 2008: 137)⁷). This travelling has poetically been called “summer walking.” In winter, they would set up firmer and more solid tents called “gelly” and stay there throughout winter while other Travellers would rent houses in towns just for winter (Whyte 2001: 110); they would send their children to schools only in winter to meet the minimal attendances required by law. The Travellers’ traditional ways have been disappearing since the late nineteenth century, largely due to administrative pressure to settle nomadic peoples through the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865, Children Act 1908, Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, and Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. According to the 2011 census, the number of Scottish Gypsies and Travellers who live on the road is approximately 600 (Scottish Government 2015: 37).

Travellers’ “exotic” lifestyle on the road has long been unknown to non-Travellers because Travelling people are an exclusive group and do not mix with “scaldies” (non-Travellers; often derogatory) in general (Stewart 2008: vii). Therefore, the settled population with little knowledge about Travellers’ lifestyle



Figure 1 Travellers’ bow tent displayed in the Highland Folk Museum at Newtonmore. It was built by Essie Stewart, a Highland Traveller, in 2008 (photo by author, 19 October 2016).

often see them stereotypically as “a crowd of poor people trekking across country to do ill-paid, strenuous work” (Douglas 1990: 243). This is the stereotype which Robertson discredits in the primary narrative of *Exodus to Alford* by describing their summer travelling as an essential opportunity for Travellers to maintain their ethnic and cultural identity.

In *Exodus to Alford*, Stanley is born into a settled Traveller family in Aberdeen; the family is unable to travel, owing to the Second World War, and the book portrays the harsh treatment which Stanley’s family receives in the city. The family lives on the bottom floor at 19 Powis Crescent (Figure 2) and suffers from name-calling and stone-throwing in the neighbourhood. The worst part of Stanley’s city life is Sunnybank School, where he is terribly bullied by teachers and other children (Robertson 1988: 15). The narrator states, “I hated Powis Crescent and hated that school!” (Robertson 1988: 15). These descriptions are true to Robertson’s own experiences at schools in Aberdeen. In his recordings and manuscripts, he recalls that going to school as a Traveller child was “pure hell upon earth” (Robertson 2005a: Track 4 00:00:16–00:00:24), “pure Purgatory” (Robertson 2002–2005a: 2), and “pure drudgery” (Robertson 2002–2005d: 1)⁸.

Other Traveller writers also write about their experiences in cities and towns. Betsy Whyte was the first Traveller who wrote an autobiography, and she remembers that she was bullied by her teachers and classmates continuously at her school in Brechin, a town in the East of Scotland, in the early 1930s. One day, she was



Figure 2 19 Powis Crescent. The Robertson’s lived on the bottom floor of this building (photo by author, 30 May 2017).

taken in by her classmates and was falsely charged with theft. She escaped from the school immediately. The incident forced her entire family to move out of the town in order to flee from potential trouble. Afterwards, when her parents tried to send her back to school, she obstinately refused to return, feeling, “the thought of going back to school, and facing all those girls, was too much. Much too much” (Whyte 2001: 111). Similar experiences and feelings can be observed in writings by other Travellers (e.g., Stewart 2012: 224; Smith 2008: 16–23). Robertson’s son, Tony, said in an interview that, “[t]he town gave them no pleasure; they were like caged birds, waiting the sign when the yellow’s on the broom” (Robertson 2017: 00:12:43–00:12:49). The yellow broom signified the opening of the travelling season and Travellers eagerly waited to see it. The depiction of city life in *Exodus to Alford* echoes these testimonies by other Traveller writers.

In *Exodus to Alford*, the situation suddenly improves when the war is over and Stanley’s father, William, returned to the family; William immediately secures a contract for flax harvest with a local farmer at Alford, a village located twenty-six miles west of Aberdeen. This enables the family to travel once again. In other words, Alford is the Promised Land for the family, and the journey is the Exodus for them. The book captures Stanley’s excitement at the imminent travelling when spring comes around and his family prepares to leave the city:

Can you imagine then the wonderful exhilarance that possessed me when I saw my mother and my father packing to go to the flax! The great excitement in our departure, when my father harnessed his lovely little horse called ‘Jenny’ to the large float [cart], which carried all the things we required to take with us... The door of the house was left unlocked (there was nothing in there that we cared for).... . . . And then, before we left Aberdeen, a large group of other travelling families joined with us... and my father like the prophet Moses, led the way: It was the start of the ‘Exodus to Alford’! (Robertson 1988: 16).

This passage shows six-year-old Stanley eagerly awaiting the summer travelling. The unlocked door of the house symbolises the Travellers’ feelings towards material things, or city life at large⁹. The narrator goes on to say that, “To the country people we passed we may have seemed a strange migration, but to us this was a journey to a better land – where we would be at home again,” and where they felt “a deep sense of privacy and a feeling of pure freedom” (Robertson 1988: 16)¹⁰.

The narrator used the phrase, “a feeling of pure freedom,” referring to life on the road, away from city; this sense of “freedom” is crucial for Travellers, arguably more than anything else, because they are essentially “free-spirited wanderers” (McDermitt 1986: 68). Two major things they cannot stand are (1) being bound to a small piece of land and (2) working for another authority. They take pride in being free from a plot of land or an employer and feel disdain for the “scaldies”, who are bound to these all their lives. Barbara McDermitt, an American folklorist

who studied at School of Scottish Studies, states that, “submitting to such [regular] employment was a sign of failure” (McDermitt 1986: 77–78) amongst Travellers. Whyte’s testimony backs this idea up:

I have often heard them [Travellers] say ‘The country folks are all so silly. They start to work at fourteen or even earlier, and go on working right up till they are old men, never taking any enjoyment to themselves.’ Few fates seemed worse to a traveller than this. Most of them were good workers, and few men could beat them at any kind of piece-work – as long as they felt they were working for themselves.

But to work for a boss? Oh no, that was beneath their dignity (Whyte 2001: 47).

These statements shed a new light on Travellers’ perspectives on city life. They did hate towns and cities because they were harassed in neighbourhoods, workplaces, and schools; but, above all, the idea of living on a small piece of land and working under someone else itself suited neither their aesthetics nor values. Hence, when the narrator of *Exodus to Alford* uses the word, “freedom,” it has much deeper connotations than a non-Traveller reader may imagine; summer walking was neither an aimless drift nor a leisure activity for Travellers; it was an “exodus” from the city where they were oppressed to the countryside to gain security and freedom.

In reality, to be fair, there are Travellers who are ashamed of their ethnic background, rather than being proud of it. Those Travellers blend into the sedentary society by concealing the Traveller background (Stewart 2012: 225; Douglas 2006: 6). Another Perthshire Traveller, Jess Smith, offers a good example in her autobiography; when Jess’s parents decide to move out of the town and live on the road once again, her elder sisters voice an objection because they are accustomed to the convenient city life. They rebel against their father’s insistence that the travelling life is modernised and as convenient as city life: “Modern, huh! We still have to fetch water from the burn, hang kettles and posts from an iron chittie [stand for a kettle] over an outside fire. Washing, now, it will still be hung from tree to tree. And worst of all, God help me, washing my tender face in a cold burn. Modern, what difference is that from your and Mammy’s days?” (Smith 2008: 5–6). Robertson was painfully aware of this “identity crisis” of the Travellers, and he spares an entire section for this phenomenon in his article (Robertson 2005b: 316). He also features a Traveller character with the identity crisis in his *Fish-Hooses 2*, which depicts his experience as a fish-filleter in Aberdeen (Robertson 1991: 159–165). He, however, does not depict a single Traveller personae who does not enjoy the summer walking in *Exodus to Alford*. In this regard, the book may be historically inaccurate, and the Traveller image in this book may be an idealised one.

Although idealising the Traveller image to an extent, the primary narrative of *Exodus to Alford* vividly illustrates the insiders’ perspectives of the Travellers on nomadism. They take the road not to engage in “ill-paid, strenuous work” but to regain the Traveller identity by fleeing from non-Travellers’ harassment and their

sedentary lifestyle. Travellers do have a house but, for Travellers who have lived with minimal equipment in nature, a house is not home but more like a prison (McDermitt 1986: 77; Whyte 2001: 149). Paradoxically, taking the road means going home in their emic perspective.

3 Storytelling

In *Exodus to Alford*, not only do Travellers move around the countryside but they also tell stories while they travel. The book shows that the Travellers have a tradition of telling stories around a campfire every night while summer travelling. *Exodus to Alford* consists of thirty-four cracks and stories told by thirty-four different Traveller characters, the youngest being a tall, fifteen-year-old Traveller, Prechum, and the oldest, Maisie Morloch, an ancient speywife¹¹. *Exodus to Alford* suggests that stories are told not only as mere entertainment, but also as a tool for sharing and transmitting their vernacular worldview and value system, in relation to their (1) vernacular landscape, (2) belief system, and (3) morality and ethics.

3.1 Vernacular Landscape

One of the Traveller worldviews conveyed through story in *Exodus to Alford* is their vernacular way of perceiving the scenery of Aberdeenshire, where they have travelled to for generations. In the book, Traveller characters tell stories related to places they visit, including villages and campsites¹². For instance, when the Traveller party approaches one of their campsites called the Auld Road of Lumphanan, a Traveller boxer, Battling Don, tells a story regarding a legend of the area. The legend has it that, once in every fifty years, all the trees at the Auld Road of Lumphanan uproot themselves at night and dance between the hill and the river, led by Auld Croovie, “the King Aik [Oak] of aa [all] the trees” (Robertson 1988: 164). The hollows they leave at their birthspots have vast treasure in them, but the trees will murder a person who takes too much away. The protagonist of Battling Don’s tale is a Traveller boy named Jack, who serves for a greedy laird as his shepherd. One night, Jack and the laird see the trees moving away from the Auld Road, dancing to mysterious music. Jack only takes some of the gems from one of the smaller trees’ holes, but the greedy laird jumps into Auld Croovie’s profound birthspot. While the laird is absorbed in collecting the treasure, the trees return from the dance, and Auld Croovie tramples the laird in the hole to death. In this story, Auld Croovie is depicted as a Travellers’ guardian which governs the Auld Road and protects Travellers from non-Travellers. And the story suggests that the Auld Road of Lumphanan is a haven for Travellers in the shelter of Auld Croovie.

In August, 2017, Robertson’s youngest daughter and her husband, Nicole and John Rodgers, kindly took me to the Auld Road of Lumphanan, which was Robertson’s favourite campsite and “their [Travellers’] sanctuary, away from the

eyes of non-Travellers” (McDermitt 1986: 74–75)¹³⁾. Lumphanan was a small village, located twenty-five miles west of Aberdeen and ten miles south of Alford. There was a church at the north end of the village and, beside it, a little path stretched away into the woods towards the north. It was a shady, unpaved road with no road signs; this was what Travellers called the Auld Road of Lumphanan (Figure 3). When we entered the road and passed a sign that read, “No Fires No Camping” (Figure 4), there was a large oak tree on our right-hand side, which overhung the long branches to the other side of the path. Nicole told me this was Auld Croovie, the guardian of the Travelling people (Figure 5). According to Robertson, about fifty Travellers were usually camped on this road, and he could meet his friends and relatives there (Robertson 2002–2005b: 1–2). There are a number of tales related to this Auld Road, and Robertson recollects, “[s]uch strange tales made the old road of Lumphanan a very special place to camp” (Robertson 2002–2005c: 2). Campsites such as this one do not appear on maps, and non-Travellers scarcely pay attention to these places. For Travellers, however, these places and routes have special and symbolic meanings. Their stories, which transmit such vernacular ways of perceiving the landscape, are “a living and monumental archive of Traveller life” (Reith 2008: 95). And those stories have served as an oral and vernacular map for them. Stories told in *Exodus to Alford* well represent Travellers’ unique way of understanding landscapes.



Figure 3 The entrance of the Auld Road of Lumphanan, one of Robertson’s favourite camping sites and his mother’s birthplace. He is buried in a graveyard nearby in accordance with his wish (photo by author, 25 Aug. 2017).



Figure 4 “No Fires No Camping” sign beside the Auld Road of Lumphanan (photo by author, 25 Aug. 2017).



Figure 5 Auld Croovie, the king of the oaks. It is a custom for Travellers to “shake hands” with the overhanging branch when they pass through (photo by author, 25 Aug. 2017).

3.2 Belief System

Besides their vernacular landscape, stories told by Traveller characters also transmit their peculiar belief system. Their stories are full of marvellous creatures and phenomena, and it indicates their strong belief in the supernatural. For instance, *Exodus to Alford* introduces preternatural creatures such as the Water Kelpie of the River Ythan, the Banshee of Glen Isla, and the Broonie [Brownie] o Aboyne's Green Ha¹⁴). Besides these fairies, the book presents Traveller folklore regarding supernatural occurrences such as “the keeper of the grave”, “ghost replays”, and the “in-between world.”¹⁵ These tales are full of supernatural and otherworldly elements and, therefore, sound unreal. However, they are told as believable in a form of memorate (i.e. first-hand experience of the teller) and, as a consequence, the verisimilitude is strong. To stress the reality of the tales, the tellers use phrases such as “fit [what] I'm gang tae [going to] tell ye is the pure honest truth!” (Robertson 1988: 24) and “An this is the truth, I tell ye aa – stiff me deed [dead] if I am telling a prechum [lie]!” (Robertson 1988: 25).

Not only do the stories in *Exodus to Alford* convey Travellers' vernacular beliefs but they also exhibit the other half of their belief system: Christian beliefs. For example, the Devil is one of the popular characters in Traveller tales, and he is commonly called “Auld Cloven Hoddie” because he has cloven hooves. He usually appears as an opponent in Traveller folktales¹⁶). It should be noted that these Christian concepts are intermingled with the Traveller beliefs to a large extent in *Exodus to Alford*. The most recognisable example is that the Devil has a henchman unique to the Traveller folklore called the Laird of the Black Airts, also known as Slorrachs¹⁷). He commits various wrongdoings in the stories, following orders of his master, the Devil. In Mither's tale, for example, Slorrachs kidnaps a princess and says to the protagonist, Jack, that he will release her if Jack can solve three riddles he poses. Jack goes to the Devil's house and secretly acquires the answers to the riddles, assisted by the Devil's aunt. Slorrachs eventually lets the princess go and is terrified of being punished by the Devil for losing her. This story displays the Travellers' distinct belief system, which is a fusion of their own vernacular beliefs and Christianity¹⁸). In his article, Robertson wraps up the Traveller belief system thus: “We believed almost in a world of Pantheism, where we could feel God's Goodness in all of living nature” (Robertson 2005b: 324). The tales told in *Exodus to Alford* embody this belief system, in which they worship God but also believe in the supernatural as part of this world.

3.3 Morality and Ethics

Finally, Traveller tales in *Exodus to Alford* transmit the Traveller morality and ethics through a role model of a Traveller, Jack, a fictional character and hero in Travellers' folktales. The narrator of *Exodus to Alford* identifies the Travellers' escape from Aberdeen with the Exodus in the Old Testament, but there is one cru-

cial difference between the two; while the Israelites left Egypt forever, Travellers have to return to Aberdeen, where they are persecuted, at the end of summer every year. This is why the Traveller characters start to tell Jack tales on their way back to the city. In the Traveller culture, Jack tales are folktales about a Traveller boy named Jack and most, if not all, Traveller families have Jack tales in the family traditions. Even though they travel in groups, they have plenty of opportunities to pass stories around while travelling with extended families and meeting relatives and friends at campsites. Robertson says that he enjoys telling Jack tales most “because ye can get something oot o them. An these stayed in yer mind perhaps much better than ony o ither tales did” (Robertson 1979b: 00:02:01–00:02:09). McDermitt (1986: 189) points out that Jack tales were not considered to be mere entertainment but a significant part of the Traveller education.

In *Exodus to Alford*, the narrator articulates the purpose of telling Jack tales thus: “The Jack Tales are tales of encouragement: These are tales to lift all the Travelling Folk, (most especially the children) from the despair that is felt within the city and the prejudices of many of its people” (Robertson 1988: 119). The narrator goes on to say that, “At the end there are always the rewards. The travelling children who had to face so much hardship within the city, were uplifted by Jack’s exploits and the great morals he possessed. The Jack Tales are therefore a means by which parents instil within the hearts of their children a sense of ethics – and security” (Robertson 1988: 119). These statements suggest that the Jack tales played a particular role in the Traveller education, and it is possible to distil a Traveller role model by looking at the personality traits attached to Jack.

The most obvious moral in the Jack tales in *Exodus to Alford* is that one has to be kind-hearted, hardworking, and courageous; these are the three key characters Jack possesses. He survives various ordeals and accomplishes his missions because of his character. The story which illustrates Jack’s personality best is “Jack and the Well of Life’s Water” told by Kittlie Katie, a Traveller woman in her fifties. Jack is a poor gardener and lives with his mother. One day, the king contracts a serious illness, and the only way to save his life is to get water from the Well o Life, the location of which is unknown. Jack volunteers to search for the well for the king, and he says, “I will find the Well o Life’s water or dee [die] in the attempt” (Robertson 1988: 137). His words display his bravery because he is well aware of the risk of losing his life in the course of his adventure. On the way, he offers his bannock (traditional quick bread in Scotland) to a “bonnie wi speuk [lovely little swallow]” (Robertson 1988: 138), and the bird informs him where the well is. He narrowly escapes a monstrous cat that is guarding the gate of the well and manages to put some of the water of life in his pouch. On the way back to the castle, Jack is attacked by a big black rook, but the swallow protects the water for him. Jack returns to the castle and gives the king a few drops of water, which immediately restores his health. In this tale, Jack finds his helper, the swallow, because he gen-

erously shares his meal¹⁹⁾. He also acquires the water by risking his life. Jack's success is due to his kindness, diligence, and bravery.

It is not only in the Travelling community where kindness, industry, and courage are regarded as essential, but the Jack tales in *Exodus to Alford* underline one distinct teaching unique to Travellers; the most important moral is to have wisdom. The narrator uses the word, "wisdom" as knowledge put into practice, and this definition is apparent in a Jack tale told by Stanley's father, which is known as "Jack at Lochnagar." A young Traveller man, Jack, has lived with his teacher, "an auld man o wisdom," in the mountain since he was a child. One day, the Devil's servant, Slorrachs, comes to the king and demands either the princess, Janety, or the king's fortune. The king loses most of his money and has to greatly increase taxes to his people as a consequence. Jack draws a plan and asks the king to stop giving money to Slorrachs. Slorrachs comes to the castle immediately and threatens to come back to get the princess when "the last snaw [snow] upon the high peaks o ben melts" (Robertson 1988: 54). Slorrachs uses his black art to make the sun shine exceedingly, and the snow starts to melt in no time. Meanwhile, Jack goes to the summit and covers the peaks with bags of salt unbeknownst to anyone, even the king. Slorrachs keeps the sun shining as the mountaintop still looks white but, of course, salt never melts away. Slorrachs becomes exhausted by using his black arts for a long period of time, and he eventually collapses. The king takes advantage of the opportunity and recovers all of the money he gave to the black knight. And he no longer has to heavily tax his people.

At the end, Jack and the king have a conversation, and this exchange implies that the key to Jack's success was his wisdom. Because Jack did everything secretly, the king believes that Jack has supernatural power and used it to protect the snow on the mountains. But Jack says he does not have such power but "I had sae much wisdom that I could ootsmairt him" (Robertson 1988: 57). And finally, he adds that "the only advice I wid gee [give] tae ony body seeking wisdom, is first – tae gain knowledge frae [from] the greatest o teachers and maisters, an then – gang oot an dae it [go out and do it]. For, it's only whin ye apply the knowledge tae the test, an it can benefit ithers – does it become wisdom; an only by haein [having] wisdom, dae ye really know the secrets o aa things" (Robertson 1988: 57). Jack's words emphasise that he outwits the black knight not with extraordinary power but with his wisdom, which is based on what he learnt from his teacher, the auld man o wisdom. After gaining knowledge, Jack put it into practice and successfully transformed his knowledge into wisdom.

The Jack tales in *Exodus to Alford* imply that Travelling people, who have little formal education, are actually wiser than non-Travellers. This view is expressed in the final tale in the work, "Jack and the Clever Man," narrated by Maisie Morloch, "a very ancient woman" who is "known for her wisdom" (Robertson 1988: 20). There once lived an extraordinarily clever man who "had sae muckle

brains there wis really naething that he couldnae mang [talk] about, for he could converse wi the greatest o scholars an he wis weel [well] revered by a'body" (Robertson 1988: 198). One day, he happens to cross Devil's bridge, and this act summons the Devil; he demands the clever man's soul for crossing his bridge unless he can solve three riddles within a year and a day. The clever man makes every possible effort but is unable to find the answers. When a year passes and he only has a day left, he meets a Traveller man called Jack who has camped by the river. The clever man explains his situation and Jack says he will go to see the Devil tomorrow disguised as the clever man. On the following day, Jack solves all the riddles with his sharp wit in front of the Devil and discloses his identity afterwards. Defeated and deceived, the Devil vanishes, saying, "I hae bin won by a peer traiveller cheil [poor Traveller lad]! No!" (Robertson 1988: 202). Maisie Morloch concludes the story (and the entire book) thus: "Really and truly, some folks get an awfy great schooling and great learning and then think they ken [know] everything, (and so forget the Deil [Devil]) but there'll come a day again, whin aa their great learning disnae help them – an they may hae tae get help frae a peer [poor] ignorant tinker" (Robertson 1988: 202). Travellers have been underestimated as illiterate, uneducated, and ignorant whereas non-Travellers go to school and have a good deal of knowledge. However, the story suggests that such knowledge itself is of little value, and it is Travellers that have practical and beneficial knowledge, namely wisdom, handed down from their ancestors. And with wisdom, a "peer ignorant tinker" can resolve a problem which the most brilliant person in the sedentary society cannot solve.

Sheila Stewart verbalises Travellers' wisdom in her collection of Traveller tales, *Pilgrims of the Mist*. In the book, she refutes the prejudice against Travellers being ignorant: "People think the travelling people have no education. But there is more to education than being able to read and write. Travellers need to learn about survival" (Stewart 2008: 137). She continues to say:

So there was a lot of learning going on. It was the travellers' trade to learn these things [e.g. how to build a bow tent, make baskets and horn spoons, and pearl-fish]. So who is to say that the traveller wasn't educated? You had to learn ways of surviving when you weren't accepted by non-travellers. They often think that because we had no formal education and didn't learn to read and write we must be stupid. But we do have knowledge, and common sense, and no one can take that away from us (Stewart 2008: 141).

Sheila Stewart distinguishes between the knowledge taught at school and the one handed down in the Travelling community, like Robertson in *Exodus to Alford*. Both Robertson and Stewart suggest that the reader should recognise the value of the unique knowledge of Travellers, thereby overturning the prejudice against Travellers, who have a different kind of knowledge and intelligence. Taking into account that the Jack tales are stories "to lift all the Travelling Folk . . . from the

despair that is felt within the city and the prejudices of many of its people” (Robertson 1988: 119), “Jack and the Clever Man” can be interpreted as a story which helps Travellers, who are often looked down upon, to build self-esteem by highlighting their unique strength, wisdom, before returning to the city.

4 Structure and Language

In this final chapter, I turn to the literary elements in *Exodus to Alford*, particularly the structure and language, and examine how they affect the construction of the Traveller representation in the work. As mentioned earlier, the book is written in the distinct literary style called frame story. The primary narrative (overarching narrative) illustrates Travellers’ summer walking and the secondary narrative (embedded narrative) portrays their storytelling tradition. In addition, the greater part of *Exodus to Alford* is written in the Travellers’ colloquial language. It is based on North-East Scots often called Doric and is also comprised of words from other languages that Travellers use such as Scottish Gaelic, Romani, and the Traveller cant. Such structure and language are rarely found among other Traveller writers’ works; most of them are written as a straightforward autobiography or a collection of Traveller stories in English with a limited use of the cant in direct speech. This final chapter tries to find a possible reason why Robertson chose these peculiar styles in *Exodus to Alford*.

It can be interpreted that the structure of frame story possibly reflects Robertson’s (the historical “I”’s) firm conviction that the Travellers’ nomadic life and their storytelling tradition are inseparable. Most Traveller autobiographies tell of events that happened on the road and the people they met at campsites. Such straightforward autobiographies focus solely on what the narrator goes through and, thus, do not normally cast light on individual tales told by Travellers on the road. A collection of Traveller tales is another popular genre in Traveller writings, but it takes stories out of context. Compared to these two literary genres, frame story, which Robertson adopts in *Exodus to Alford*, enables him to present the two Traveller traditions, i.e. travelling and storytelling, without separating one from the other. Hence, this structure of the frame story may embody Robertson’s belief that stories are an essential part of the travelling life and, in turn, Traveller stories work fully only in the context of the nomadism. In fact, McDermitt testifies that Robertson always places a heavy emphasis on the environment when telling stories:

I recorded Stanley in front of his fireplace in his Aberdeen council house, a reminder of his wintertime storytelling experiences as a boy. But because Stanley felt I was missing out on the summer camping atmosphere, he insisted on taking me . . . to the different family campsites between the Dee and the Don Rivers. At each stop he would tell me a

tale that he associated with that place. Association of place and story is very important to Stanley (McDermitt 1986: 30).

Robertson has done something similar to his own family as well. His youngest daughter, Nicole Rodgers, testified in an interview in 2017 that, “if he was in the car, you had to turn off the radio because he had to tell you stories about everywhere” (Rodgers 2017: 00:57:41–00:57:47). These two testimonies suggest Robertson’s unshakable conviction that Travellers’ stories had to be told, not in a house, but in the natural context to which they belong, namely around the campfire at the Traveller campsites, in order to convey their “real meanings.”²⁰ His belief in the inseparability of travelling and storytelling is symbolised in a statement at the end of *Exodus to Alford*: “The story can be unveiled only by following the road” (Robertson 1988: 213).

Robertson’s insistence upon contextualising stories explains why he wrote *Exodus to Alford* in the Travellers’ colloquial language. The language in the book reflects how Aberdeenshire Travellers speak. His literary language has drawn attention from critics and scholars as “highly idiosyncratic” (Henderson 1992: 241; McClure 2002: 75). Fiona-Jane Brown, his friend and a local historian in Aberdeen, pointed out Robertson’s literary language enhanced the orality of his text.

[T]he way the books are written. They’re obviously just transcribed from how he speaks because you hear Stanley’s voice in the way it’s written. It’s the way he speaks with the cant words dropping in. And it’s certain phrases and things he always used . . . They’re in the books so *the books are unique in that they are oral. They are about as oral as text can get* . . . (Brown 2017: 00:12:22–00:12:49; emphasis added).

When orality of the text is reinforced, the reader can feel as though they were actually listening to the stories told in the book, while reading. This effect could never be achieved if the book were written in English, simply because it is not how Travellers actually speak. Along with the structure of the frame story, Robertson’s literary language, which is faithful to Travellers’ speech, contributes to the reconstruction of their traditional storytelling context, to which Robertson attached great importance. Grace Banks, a local singer and storyteller in Aberdeen and Robertson’s close friend, describes her reading experience of *Exodus to Alford* in an interview, proving how successful Robertson’s strategy is: “especially in *Exodus to Alford* . . . I love the atmosphere and the feeling that you are there. You’re part of being around the campfire” (Banks 2017: 00:19:06–00:19:29). Written in the Travellers’ vernacular language and the structure of frame story, *Exodus to Alford* is designed to help the reader to taste the authentic atmosphere of the traditional storytelling activity on the road.

A number of researchers have pointed out the close connection between

Traveller stories and their context. Douglas (2006: 4) stated that Scottish Travellers' songs and stories can only be fully understood "in the context of lives of poverty and hardship," although "poverty and hardship" is an etic (outsiders') perception, and it is not certain whether the Travellers themselves consider their circumstances negatively. Similarly, Niles (1999: 165) argues in a discussion of Scottish Travellers' oral narrative that, "these two things [oral tradition and its context] go together. No body of lore can exist apart from its social environment. It can be recorded and fixed on the page, but when textualized in this way it has only a museum existence that is a pale shadow of its true self." Niles underlines that Travellers oral traditions are firmly rooted in their context, and he points out the perils of separating such traditions from the context by textualising them.

Robertson did textualise the Traveller stories and he did fix them on page, but he presented their context simultaneously by adopting the frame story and Travellers' vernacular tongue. As a consequence, his stories are presented as natural and authentic as they can be in the appropriate context, without becoming museum pieces. And if the nomadic life and story are indivisible, Scottish Travellers, who have those two traditions as the mainstays of their ethnic and cultural identity, are neither mere nomads nor storytellers but *nomadic storytellers*. This is how Robertson portrays his folk in *Exodus to Alford*.

5 Conclusion

The present study set out to examine the self-representation of Scottish Travellers in Stanley Robertson's *Exodus to Alford*. It reveals that they are represented as nomadic storytellers, who have a lifestyle, worldview, and knowledge that are different from those of non-Travellers. According to the book, nomadic life is strongly associated with the Traveller identity because it is the only opportunity for them to regain the security and freedom that they have enjoyed on the road. Their storytelling tradition also communicates the Traveller's distinct worldview and value system. Finally, the structure and language in the book represents the author's conviction that travelling and storytelling are indivisible and must always go together. Hence, Travellers, who have carried these two traditions, are neither mere nomads nor storytellers but nomadic storytellers.

Exodus to Alford is invaluable material to understand the Travelling community in Scotland. As Brown describes it, this book is "the Traveller world personified in text" (Brown 2017: 00:17:40–00:17:43). By depicting their world from the insiders' perspectives, it is successful in overturning the popular stereotype that Travellers are poor and ignorant vagrants, who are a potential threat to public order. Moreover, the emphasis on the close relation between nomadism and the Traveller identity can be interpreted as a criticism against local administration in Scotland, which has attempted to solve various conflicts between Travellers and

non-Travellers by settling the former into the sedentary society. The book is also a warning to academics, who have focused solely on Travellers' oral traditions and tended to overlook the context, which is considered essential by Travellers. Above all, the distinct and vernacular perspectives introduced in this work shall relativise the mainstream, non-Traveller worldview and value system, thereby helping to raise awareness of presenting cultural diversity within Scottish society. Thus, *Exodus to Alford* is the key to understanding not only Scottish Travelling people but also modern Scotland as a whole.

It should be noted, however, that the Traveller image in the book is more or less an idealised one as pointed out in the first part; this book illustrates Travellers as a monolith and, therefore, does not describe the diversity within the Travelling community despite the fact that "there is considerable diversity within the Gypsy Traveller population, and it would not be accurate to present them as a single group" (Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland 2013: 6). In order to examine their self-portrait more accurately, considerably more research must be conducted in the field of Scottish Traveller writings since *Exodus to Alford* is merely one of the nearly forty books written by Travellers.

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Notes

- 1) Their exonyms in Scots and English include "Travellers," "Travelling people," "gang-aboot [going-about] folk," mist folk, and "Summer Walkers (poetic)." In Scottish Gaelic, they are called "luchd siubhail" and it also means "those who travel." Travellers have been given exonyms associated with their occupations such as "tinkers (often derogatory)," "tinks (derogatory)," and "tinkies (derogatory)" in Scots and English and "ceàrdannan," which means tinkers, in Scottish Gaelic.
- 2) See Amnesty International UK (2012) for representations of Scottish Gypsy Travellers in print media. For those in online media, see Article 12 in Scotland (2016).
- 3) For detailed discussion and definitions of the three "I"s, along with the ideological "I," see Smith and Watson (2001: 58–63).
- 4) See Whyte (2001: 109–110) for detailed procedure of flax harvest and processing.
- 5) For detailed methods of pearl fishing and related superstitions, see Neat (2009: 107–151) and Robertson (2005b: 318; 2009: 8–13).
- 6) See Whyte (2001: 145) and Smith (2008: 16) for actual method of ragging.
- 7) Fortune telling was conducted predominantly by women and, generally speaking, it was not encouraged to receive money for doing it unless one was in absolute poverty.
- 8) The last two sources are manuscripts which Robertson wrote while he was working at the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen between 2002–2005. He was selected as the keyworker of a Heritage Lottery funded project entitled "Oral and Cultural Traditions of Scottish Travellers," designed and conducted by Ian Russell, the then director of the Elphinstone Institute. The project was aimed at preserving rapidly disappearing Traveller cultures and sharing them with non-Travellers, thereby promoting Travellers' social status. For the background information of the project and its impact on fieldwork theory, see Russell (2005).
- 9) Whyte testifies that, "[m]aterial things had no attraction for them [Travellers]: only enough for

- their immediate needs” (Whyte 2001: 33) and “Travellers are absolutely horrified to see the way that scaldies will squabble about things” (Whyte 2001: 140) because they regarded desire and greed for material things as evil (Whyte 2001: 33, 138–140). She introduces an episode in which a sterile non-Traveller woman begged her elder sister, Bella, to give her one of Bella’s children, Donald. Bella refused, but Donald died shortly afterwards.
- 10) Robertson still felt this excitement even after growing up: “The only time I come alive as a person is in the summer when I can escape from my city prison and take my family out into the country” (quoted in McDermitt 1986: 77).
 - 11) “Crack” is an emic narrative category among Travellers and comprises non-folktales such as news, personal experiences, and contemporary legends. For a detailed discussion of crack and story (see Braid 2002: 51–53).
 - 12) Robertson wrote in his article that each Traveller campsite had its own name, for example King’s Cup and Saucer, Cosy Bush, Crying Wids [Woods], Burkers Den, and the Hungry Midden (Robertson 2005b: 317–318), many of which appear in *Exodus to Alford*.
 - 13) It became illegal to camp on the Auld Road of Lumphanan in 1954, and Robertson’s family ceased travelling that year (McDermitt 1986: 161).
 - 14) A water kelpie, or simply “kelpie,” is a water spirit which is supposed to dwell in rivers and lochs in Scotland. A banshee is a fairy creature known for its uncanny shriek. A brownie is another type of fairy creature which lives closer to the humans and is often associated with one’s dwelling.
 - 15) The “keeper of the grave” is a vernacular belief among Scottish Travellers that the last person buried watches and protects the graveyard until the next person dies in the area. This theme is also dealt with in “Keeper of the Snow” and “Robbie Haa” in Robertson’s sixth work, *Ghosties and Ghoulies*. “Ghost replays” is another Traveller belief that the dead temporarily return to the world of the living and reproduce an aspect of their lives (McDermitt 1986: 319), and it is depicted in “the Ghost of Maberley Street,” “Room o Monks,” and “the Passagewye Under the Loch” in *Ghosties and Ghoulies*. The “in-between world” is supposedly one of the pre-Christian beliefs in Scotland; it is neither heaven nor hell but another world inhabited by nonhuman existence.
 - 16) This reflects the fact that Travelling people are as religious as the other Scottish people. The 2011 census shows that the Christian proportions are not dramatically different among all people in Scotland (fifty-four percent) and the Travelling community (forty-nine percent); in the latter, nineteen percent are members of the Church of Scotland and sixteen percent, Roman Catholic (Scottish Government 2015: 15). However, Travellers seem to not have a blind belief in the Bible. In Betsy Whyte’s autobiography, her religious mother has her own idea about God; when missionaries visit their camp, she makes an argument against some parts of the Bible. After the missionaries leave, she says to Betsy, “Whoever wrote these things [in the Bible] just put down whatever they thought themselves, I think” (Whyte 2001: 114). And Betsy herself struggles to accept what is written in the Bible: “I also read and re-read the Bible, trying to understand it, but many parts of it were as unacceptable to me as they were to Mother” (Whyte 2001: 149).
 - 17) This is presumably a variation of “slorach” in Scots, which means a “wet and disgusting mess of anything” (Scottish Language Dictionaries).
 - 18) Robertson also believed that the fairy and ghostly creatures, such as kelpies, banshees, and brownies were “from the hosts of heaven that were cast out with Satan before the world was” (Robertson, quoted in McDermitt 1986: 322). This is another example of integration between the two belief systems.
 - 19) Generosity is considered particularly important among Travellers, and it is reflected in one of their sayings: “share aa and share smaa [share all and share small]” (Robertson 1990: 155).
 - 20) McDermitt was the first scholar who conducted substantial research on Robertson, but it is inferred from her testimony above that Robertson felt he could not show her the context of Traveller story and storytelling well. This may be why he took up his pen and wrote *Exodus to Alford* to introduce the Traveller story *in context*. In fact, he published this book only two years after McDermitt had submitted her doctoral thesis.

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