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## Editorial

**Subscription breakthrough:** we are happy to report that subscriptions to the *Journal of Stevenson Studies* will now be much easier. A system has been set up for payment through the University of Stirling Online Shop and this will at last allow direct payment by credit or debit card. The Online Shop (<http://shop.stir.ac.uk>) will require you to open a password-protected account to place your order and make a purchase: check 'Product Catalogue / Schools and Divisions / School of Arts and Humanities'. This method will guarantee swift payment and delivery, and we hope it will lead to more subscriptions from both individuals and institutions. Back numbers are also available by this method, at a reduced rate of £10.00 per volume including postage. Volumes are deemed to be back numbers twelve months after first publication in October of the previous year. As always, the need for renewed and increased subscriptions remains pressing if we are to continue with hardcopy publication.

Four of the essays in this issue of *JSS* were first presented at the seventh biennial Stevenson conference held in July 2013 at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. Our thanks go to the organisers Chris Danta and Roslyn Jolly for supporting the journal in this way, and of course for yet another successful international Stevenson event. The topic was *Stevenson, Time and History*, and we are pleased to publish contributions on this theme from Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Natalie Jaëck, Alan Sandison and Hilary J. Beattie.

If 'time' and 'history' were key topics for the Sydney conference (and we believe that a further collection of essays on the theme is to be published from the University of New South Wales) three of the essays selected for *JSS 11* seem to be fascinatingly engaged with questions of space and perception. Natalie Jaëck uses the map provided for *Kidnapped* to offer a theoretical disquisition on





the necessarily incomplete nature of all fiction, or indeed writing itself, while reflecting too on the hidden agendas behind all acts of mapping and historical record. By such means she finds aesthetic and political ‘acts of resistance’ in Stevenson’s understanding of his art and indeed in the text and paratext of *Kidnapped* itself. The challenge to perception of previously unmapped space is the subject of Caroline McCracken-Flesher’s essay as she traces Stevenson’s travels in America, where he encountered a degree of difficulty in writing the new, and even in recognising his ‘old’ self, in territories hitherto so significantly untrodden in both cartographic and imaginative terms. Alan Sandison’s challenging essay uses Stevenson’s own conception of the nature of art and the (apparently) utterly different aesthetic of Australian aboriginal art to explore the nature of aesthetic meaning in itself, and how we seek to tie it to, or to release it from, expression and the natural world around us – even as the deepest knowledge cannot be put into words. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, for permission to reproduce Emily Kam Ngwarray’s 1995 work *Anwerlarr anganenty* (*Big Yam Dreaming*) as part of this discussion.

A different engagement with space appears in Ashleigh Prosser’s account of the bourgeois bachelor’s domestic lodgings in *Jekyll and Hyde*. Conceptual and cultural differences and debates on genre and literary formation return once again to ‘haunt’ Letitia Henville’s essay on Stevenson’s translation / version of ‘The Song of Rahéro’, while the New Zealand poet David Howard has been haunted by strangeness, beauty and Stevenson’s death in his poem ‘The Speak House’. Hilary J. Beattie outlines a different encounter with strange forces in Fanny Stevenson’s short story ‘The Nixie’, as she explores the contested nature of the story’s origins to assess Fanny’s relationship with Stevenson, her skill as an author, and her role as muse, or indeed as a ‘nixie’ in her own right.

Roderick Watson Linda Dryden





## The future is another country: restlessness and Robert Louis Stevenson

*Caroline McCracken-Flesher*

In 1879, Robert Louis Stevenson set out for America in search of a transformative experience. Arriving in New York he declared himself ‘your sincere [...] American’.<sup>1</sup> Then rattling through Ohio on the emigrant train he imagined the end of one life and the beginning of another: ‘I dream no more / The dreams of other-where, / The cherished thoughts of yore; / I have been changed from what I was before’.<sup>2</sup> He challenged: ‘No man is any use until he has dared everything’.<sup>3</sup> Unfamiliar and new, America was the place of testing and transformation.

This article explores the phenomenological discomfort of an author who, in Edinburgh, ‘aspire[d] angrily after that Somewhere-else of the imagination’, but in America encountered what he expected to be new and transformative as already old.<sup>4</sup> As Stevenson headed west, America accumulated as a sign rather than a source of change – and pointed the aspiring author back toward the uncharted territory of that inner space, the mind. Jean Baudrillard theorises that representations gradually have distanced us from the real. By our century only simulacra remain.<sup>5</sup> As an author, and thereby doubly caught within the signs of his century’s burgeoning cultural economy, Stevenson struggled to access newness. But the more he tried to express America, the more it manifested as a place already of the past, unoriginal and inauthentic.

Yet things looked promising at the start. Stevenson posed his trip as a journey into the unknown. It was a precipitate escape from the ‘impersonation of life’ he currently lived in an old world mediated by oppressive parents.<sup>6</sup> Edinburgh, in Baudrillard’s terms, was all map and no territory. In *Picturesque Notes*, published only the year before, the city is a whole ‘cabinet’ of curiosi-





ties, but all of them known: Edinburgh is ‘Beautiful [... but] not so much beautiful as interesting. She is pre-eminently Gothic, and all the more so since she has set herself off with some Greek airs.’<sup>7</sup> Every inch has layered meanings – so much so that those who live there seem disconnected from any possibility of ‘reality’. They are ‘[c]hartered tourists’ in a territory impenetrable because so laden with meaning through its mapping.<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, America was a ‘promised land’ – because an unknown one.<sup>9</sup> Just off the boat, Stevenson mused:

[W]hat has been and what is we imperfectly and obscurely know; what is to be yet lies beyond the flight of our imaginations. Greece, Rome, and Judea are gone by for ever; [...] England has already declined, since she has lost the States; and to these States, therefore, yet undeveloped, full of dark possibilities [...] the minds of young men in England turn naturally at a certain hopeful period of their age’. (p. 89)

Stevenson was blithely planning to ‘see some wild life in the west and visit both Florida and Labrador ere I return’.<sup>10</sup> He would escape off the map (already rather expansively conceived) into raw experience – ‘wild life’.

And the new in place should produce the new in writing: *Travels with a Donkey* (1879) was selling well – it had even met parental approval, for father Thomas, while abjuring Stevenson’s ‘irreverent uses of the name of God’, admired his son’s now established and ‘unique’ style.<sup>11</sup> Stevenson’s literary cohort, trusting that the author ‘wouldn’t go any farther than New York’, comforted themselves that his travels would ‘end in a book’, and presumably of the usual type.<sup>12</sup> But the Stevenson who immediately hopped the train to Monterey had different aspirations. Far from reach, he celebrated the ‘Amateur Emigrant. [...] I believe it will be more popular than any of my others; the canvas is so





much more popular and larger too'.<sup>13</sup> Throwing over his 'unique' style, he aimed for no 'monument of eloquence'.<sup>14</sup> This book would be 'prosaic in view of the nature of the subject' and 'not [...] very like a book of mine'.<sup>15</sup>

The Stevenson who set out from Scotland himself would be all new. On board the *Devonia*, that 'one small iron country on the deep', for Stevenson's fellow passengers the future is already mapped by what has been (*Amateur Emigrant*, p. 10). Emigration as an 'abstract idea' at home seems 'hopeful and adventurous' – 'this great epic of self-help'. (p. 10). At sea, by contrast, 'We were a company of the rejected, the drunken, the incompetent, the weak, the prodigal', some with 'eyes [...] sealed by a cheap, school-book materialism' (pp. 12 and 36). Hopeful young men are scarce: 'many were married and encumbered with families; not a few were already up in years. [...Those] around me were for the most part quiet, orderly, obedient citizens, family men broken by adversity, elderly youths who had failed to place themselves in life, and people who had seen better days' (p. 10). An alcoholic 'was at the same time fleeing from his destiny and carrying it along with him' (p. 34). Weighted down by the past, these emigrants are steaming toward more of the same.

The author, however, was different. He had cut the ties that bind, refusing to tell his parents of his departure. At Greenock, he had 'never been so much detached from life; I feel as if I cared for nobody [...] all I carry on from my past life is the blue pill'.<sup>16</sup> Already sick, he wryly told one friend 'it's but little of my native land I'll carry off with me'.<sup>17</sup> He was projecting himself into a new life, reading 'Aimard's novels to teach me independence and philosophy and learn something of the ways of New York'.<sup>18</sup> And once in New York, Stevenson found he had no imprint on that society. He bought a copy of his own work 'and the man said "By Stevenson" – "Indeed," says I – "Yes, sir," says he – Scene closes'.<sup>19</sup> The name is an observation not a recognition, and fails to connect even Stevenson in person to a past. So it is not surpris-





ing that crossing Ohio Stevenson observed 'I had no idea how easy it was to commit suicide. There seems nothing left of me; I died a while ago; I do not know who it is that is travelling'.<sup>20</sup>

New York completed the process of stripping away the past – the sluicing rain forced Stevenson to abandon a pair of shoes, socks and trousers 'and leave them behind for the benefit of New York city' (*Amateur Emigrant*, p. 99). The man who would ride the train, eventually perched on top in trousers and unbuttoned shirt, would be another person.<sup>21</sup> Soon, however, he discovered how much of the past travelled with him. Although he had slipped the constraints of parents, and of the friends who fervidly hoped he would not go beyond New York, he brought considerable mental baggage.

John Wesley Powell, exploring the Green River in 1869, confronted a land uninvestigated by Europeans. Powell began scientifically, as a government surveyor would: 'The mouth of the Colorado is in latitude 31° 53' and longitude 115°. The source of the Grand River is in latitude 40° 17' and longitude 105° 43' approximately. The source of the Green River is in latitude 43° 15' and longitude 109° 54' approximately'.<sup>22</sup> But as new, the river challenged this vocabulary. Powell tries to hold to descriptive terms: on May 30, 'Kingfishers are playing about the streams, and so we adopt as names Kingfisher Creek, Kingfisher Park, and Kingfisher Canyon'.<sup>23</sup> A rock has 'the appearance of a colossal beehive [...] and so we name it Beehive Point'.<sup>24</sup> But before long experience comes too fast and furious, and the rapid that tips the boat flings Powell into the language of Romanticism: we are now at 'Disaster Falls' past 'the Gate of Lodore'.<sup>25</sup> Taken from a Southey poem about the Lake District (1820), the name signifies the failure of naming under a torrent of newness. The poet, unable easily to describe to a child how the water comes down at the Cataract of Lodore, gives way to a fugue of sound:





Retreating and beating and meeting and sheeting,  
Delaying and straying and playing and spraying,  
[...]  
And thumping and plumping and bumping and jumping,  
And dashing and flashing and splashing and clashing;  
And so never ending, but always descending,  
Sounds and motions for ever and ever are blending,  
All at once and all o'er, with a mighty uproar;  
And this way the water comes down at Lodore.

More, presumably, was better, but signified still that expression could not be exact, and could never be enough. Deploying Southey, Powell demonstrated that newness, even when rendered as mere sound and movement, precipitated him into a known discourse. Stevenson found himself similarly constrained.

As an author, Stevenson was aware of the problem. About to disembark in New York, he was 'amused, and then somewhat staggered, by the cautions and the grisly tales that went the round' (*Amateur Emigrant*, p. 86).

You would have thought we were to land upon a cannibal island. You must speak to no one in the streets, as they would not leave you till you were rooked and beaten. You must enter a hotel with military precautions; for the least you had to apprehend was to awake next morning without money or baggage, or necessary raiment, a lone forked radish in a bed; and if the worst befell, you would instantly and mysteriously disappear from the ranks of mankind. (p. 86)

New York lodgings are pre-mediated by tales that were hoary when Stevenson heard them of the Cevennes. Travelling with his donkey only the previous year, he had learned that the widely circulating story of an inn guest murdered in his bed, and the





cautionary tale therefrom, 'was but the far-away rumour and reduplication of a single terrifying story already half a century old, and half forgotten in the theatre of the events'.<sup>26</sup> Experienced traveller and dealer in tales, he presents himself as too sophisticated to be swayed by folk narratives as they migrate to a new world – though as a savvy commercial author, in fine urban folklore style he immediately retells the version New Yorkers tell of Boston.

Still, meeting a black waiter in Pittsburg, his 'every word, look and gesture marched me farther into the country of surprise. He was indeed strikingly unlike the negroes of Mrs. Beecher Stowe, or the Christy Minstrels of my youth'. (*Amateur Emigrant*, p. 107).<sup>27</sup> Stevenson records the ways in which the waiter contravenes expectation:

Imagine a gentleman, certainly somewhat dark, but of a pleasant warm hue, speaking English with a slight and rather odd foreign accent, every inch a man of the world, and armed with manners so patronisingly superior that I am at a loss to name their parallel in England. A butler perhaps rides as high over the unbutlered [...] But the coloured gentleman will pass you a wink at a time; [...] he unbends to you like Prince Hal with Pains and Falstaff.  
(p. 107)

And supposing himself beyond the childhood influence of *Cassell's Family Paper*, with its tale of 'Custaloga, an Indian brave, who, in the last chapter, very obligingly washed the paint off his face and became Sir Reginald Somebody-or-other', he finds Ohio nonetheless 'not at all as I had pictured it' (p. 108).<sup>28</sup> The author's sophistication does not necessarily mean he has escaped the story.

Moreover one story debunked quickly mutates into another: the waiter advises against tipping while 'deftly pocket[ing] a





quarter' – the exchange is recast through Wordsworth's leech gatherer and Lewis Carroll's parody. Wordsworth's traveller on the moor meets and quizzes a perplexing old man, philosophizing upon yet consistently failing to grasp their mutual relationship; Carroll mercilessly parodies the cash nexus invisible from a privileged class position when the White Knight, in similar circumstances, quizzes and in his perplexity assaults a seemingly mystic old man who is simply begging loose change.<sup>29</sup> And notably, if author Stevenson humorously observes his own limitations, he also reproduces them unawares. Watching a drunk thrown off a train, he interprets through dime store westerns: '[his hand] stole behind him to the region of the kidneys. It was the first indication that I had come among revolvers' (p. 112). The possibility that the man has taken a knock as he was ejected, or that he needs to scratch, do not arise for Stevenson, the chronic invalid who himself has just been suffering from 'the itch' (pp. 98-9).<sup>30</sup> A potentially familiar scene is borne down by story.

'The youth of America is their oldest tradition. It has been going on now for three hundred years', Oscar Wilde would quip through a character in *A Woman of No Importance* after his own 1882 lecture tour.<sup>31</sup> Stevenson was crossing a territory already mapped as 'new' by imagination. And much as he understood it, he could not escape it. There was no route to the real that did not lie through language. Everything 'new' was old again.

Yet if America was turning out to be a pretold tale, some experiences oddly could not be expressed. The railroad had only reached completion in 1869. Racing from east and west, it bestrode an empty middle, with settlement creeping inward from the coasts. Now, as Stevenson moved from shores and woods to these vast spaces, he ran out of language. Summiting the continent, skirting peaks that rise from the plains and crossing the Red Desert, Wyoming Territory showed only:





tumbled boulders, [...] not one shapely or commanding mountain form; sage-brush, eternal sage-brush; over all, the same weariful and gloomy colouring, greys warming into brown, greys darkening towards black; and for sole sign of life, here and there a few fleeing antelopes; here and there, but at incredible intervals, a creek running in a canon. [...] here there is nothing but a contorted smallness. (p. 127)

Perhaps he had slept past the strange rock formations now known as Vedauwoo, the blue triangles of Jelm and Elk Mountain, the palisades at Green River which provided stunning illustration for Powell's 1875 account of his voyage down the Colorado. But all the way from Laramie to Ogden, the usually appreciative author has nothing much to say, and none of it good. Indeed at one point Stevenson simply hands over narration to a letter written 'by a boy of eleven, long since dead, [...] dated only twenty years ago', and that tells of Indian attack on the Overland trail (pp. 130-32).

Why, as Stevenson finally turned onto a road less travelled, did language elude him? While he mocked the way in which America had been wrapped in story, as we have seen he was subject to it. Now, even where the landscape was new to him, signs of the past accumulated. All around lay the ruins of civilization: 'impromptu cities, full of gold and lust and death [have sprung] up and then died away again, and are now but wayside stations in the desert' (p. 129). The boy's story, indeed, in its own day, had already been overtaken. He wrote not from the moment, but from school in California; the news he bore was old. And of course Stevenson himself got it from a landlady on the west coast as the story of a brother since dead.<sup>32</sup> Though it stands in lieu of a 'present' in Stevenson's journey across the plains, he got it in and told it from California. In America, it seems, the future too is past. In an index to the problem, as they went, Stevenson's trainload of





migrants to the west met others heading east. They ‘ran upon the platform and cried to us through the windows, in a kind of wailing chorus, to “come back.” On the plains of Nebraska, in the mountains of Wyoming, it was still the same cry, and dismal to my heart, “Come back!”’ (p. 137). Language has not just run ahead, it is returning and recasting these new explorers as the more belated the more they forge their way into the future.

Caught in language, unable to say anything new, maybe it’s better to say nothing at all. But Stevenson doesn’t quite say nothing. In Nebraska, as he sat ‘by the hour’ ‘on top of a fruit-waggon [... spying] in vain for something new’ he describes ‘a world almost without a feature; an empty sky, an empty earth’ (p. 123). Surely this was new in his experience. Yet Nebraska is a ‘huge sameness’ (p. 124). Of course the place was completely new to him. It just didn’t seem so. Why might that be? Nebraska, in fact, is so totally and consistently and repeatedly new as he journeys through it hour after hour that it escapes the codes of western romance. And in face of this extensive newness, Stevenson paradoxically cannot accommodate it as real. A woman at home in a context that to him seems ‘almost ghastly. Less than a dozen wooden houses [...] planted along the railway lines’, points to ‘extreme newness, [...] a strong impression of artificiality. With none of the litter and discoloration of human life; with the paths unworn, and the houses still sweating from the axe, such a settlement as this seems purely scenic. The mind is loth to accept it for a piece of reality’ (p. 125). Wyoming’s rocks are described as dreary imitations ‘of the shape of monuments and fortifications’ (p. 127).

Such difficulty in grasping the insistently new as itself expresses the degree to which ‘newness’ is an activity of mind. On the east coast, Stevenson was enchanted by names: ‘As when Adam with divine fitness named the creatures, so this word Susquehanna was at once accepted by the fancy. That was the name, as no other could be, for that shining river and desirable





valley' (p. 106). Leaving Laramie, however, Stevenson was off the map and with no resources to supply the deficiency. Across Nebraska, the illness that had been lurking began to occupy his mind, and 'the evening we left Laramie I fell sick outright' (p. 128). To this fact he holds 'many sins of omission.' Certainly, all night he roamed restlessly, seeing 'Outside, in a glimmering night [...] the black, amorphous hills shoot by unweariedly into our wake'. Next morning was no better: 'when day came, it was to shine upon the same broken and unsightly quarter of the world' (p. 128). Lacking codes by which to read this landscape, and with the lack compounded by his own illness, Stevenson cannot begin to name the territory. And it is only in the act of naming, in the process of bringing the unknown into the known without the intrusion of code, that we can fleetingly experience the new as the real.

If we can only access the real without a code, but without a code we cannot recognise it as real, how, then, can a traveller encounter the new? As the landscape moves past us, we need ourselves to move – almost, but not quite, to lose the self. 'Out of my country and myself I go', Stevenson muses (p. 72). On the train, 'One small knot [of men] had no better occupation than to worm out of me my name; and the more they tried, the more obstinately fixed I grew to baffle them' (p. 135). Withholding his name, and trembling on the verge of sickness, as he travelled the continent Stevenson held and loosed the ties that bind, the codes that catch. Amid stereotypical fellow emigrants, Stevenson himself is both recognizable and not. In New York, he is not recognised as author; in Elko Nevada he is misrecognised as a musician, as he had been taken for a pedlar during his 1876 canoeing trip through France and Belgium (pp. 144-45).<sup>33</sup> Stevenson's travels, at their most successful, were as much internal as external. A not emigrant, but not at home, he was both himself and out of himself. When not actually out of his mind, dosed by laudanum to sleep off the shakes, he was that 'singular hybrid'





he would admire in formation by the 'hotch-potch of races' in Monterey – an 'original'.<sup>34</sup> Too new to be inscribed, this reality could potentially encounter the new.

Sadly, we know nothing of what Stevenson as 'original' made of America on his return trip. And of course, the land would have been no longer 'new', even to him. However his arrival on the settled west coast proves illuminating. After the deserts of Wyoming, California was coded as 'a new country' yet also 'home': 'I had come home again – home' he gushes, on the train gliding down Blue Canyon, past Alta and Dutch Flat (p. 146). The new has become old, but as both can be recognised as a place of change. Stevenson marvels that the land was once 'pure', but in its man-made shifts is ever new. He wonders, 'what enchantment of the Arabian Nights can have equalled this evocation of a roaring city, in a few years of a man's life, from the marshes and the blowing sand. Such swiftness of increase, as with an overgrown youth, suggests a corresponding swiftness of destruction' (p. 181). Where the land shakes, 'all is new, nature as well as towns. The very hills [...] have an unfinished look' (pp. 180; 181). And notably, in June 1880, ten months after he crossed the country, this discourse maintains. Calistoga, despite and perhaps because of its portmanteau naming for other places and pasts, is fascinatingly 'raw'.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, if perversely, by lapse of time, Edinburgh itself has become new. In *Picturesque Notes*, the ancient city boasted the irony of a New Town now old, and post-Union mimicked a significant past – it was all map and no territory. But '[There] is a spark among the embers; from time to time the old volcano smokes'.<sup>36</sup> As pasts fade even Edinburgh can thrust up new territory and escape the map. And as memory fades in the mobile mind, the old can be encountered as new. Coming helter skelter down to the west coast, Stevenson wrote: 'not I only, but all the passengers on board, threw off their sense of dirt and heat and weariness, and bawled like schoolboys, and thronged with shin-





ing eyes upon the platform, and became new creatures within and without' (*Amateur Emigrant*, p. 146). 'I do not know if I am the same man I was in Europe', he wrote from Monterey.<sup>37</sup> He must not have been, for a few months later he was actively looking forward to seeing his parents.

Newness, then, that momentary access to the subsequent as the authentic, the primary, the raw, the real, erupts in the instant when it is encountered by the mind on the move. On the cusp of change, the mind may escape the codes that construct and constrict all experience. But such an opportunity can never last. Leaving Glasgow, Stevenson lamented his 'impersonation of life'.<sup>38</sup> On his return to Edinburgh, he had married Fanny and attained that life. He had fixed himself within the story of family he had before found so restrictive. What was a seeker of the new to do? Writing from America Stevenson knew he was mentally and artistically 'fumbling for the new vein'.<sup>39</sup> 'I am not frightened', he wrote. 'I know my mind is changing'. It should be no surprise that soon he was charting the pre-linguistic regions of the uncharted territory that was Mr. Hyde. Before all was done, he would chart the Pacific. From Soho to the South Seas, it seems, Stevenson ever sought, and perhaps could fleetingly find, that shock of unfamiliarity that signals the new – in place and in poet.

#### NOTES

- 1 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994-1995) vol. 3, p. 7.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 4 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes* (London: Seeley, Jackson and Halladay, 1879), p. 1.
- 5 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).





- 6 *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 330.
- 7 *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, p. 2.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 3-4.
- 9 Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Amateur Emigrant* in James D. Hart *From Scotland to Silverado* (Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press, Harvard 1966), p. 89. Henceforth cited in text. I use Hart's version, which combines *The Amateur Emigrant* ('From the Clyde to Sand Hook' and 'Across the Plains'), the essays of *The Old and New Pacific Capitals*, and *The Silverado Squatters* because it reconstitutes the first before it was bowdlerised for contemporary publication.
- 10 *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 6.
- 11 *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 323 n. 1.
- 12 W. E. Henley to Charles Baxter, [16 August 1879], *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 4-5.
- 13 *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 15.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 29 and 13.
- 16 *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 2.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 18 The Frenchman Gustave Aimard, who had lived (according to his own account) a sensational life that included adoption by a Comanche tribe, produced about seventy volumes, including *The Frontiersmen* (1854), focused on upstate New York in 1783.
- 19 *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 6.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 21 See *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 10.
- 22 John Wesley Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado River and its Canyons* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), p. 17.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 137.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 137.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp., 158, 165.
- 26 *Ibid.*, Also *Travels with a Donkey*.
- 27 An American blackface group, they performed in Britain from 1857-60, and after their disbandment the name was generalised to similar groups. Stevenson, born in 1850, could conceivably have seen the





- original troupe.
- 28 The novel is Percy B. St. John's *Amy Moss or The Banks of the Ohio*. *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper* advertised itself as 'The Cheapest Illustrated Paper Ever Published' and touted *Amy Moss's* initiation as a serial in number 20 (1854). See endpapers for *The Quarterly Review* vol. 95. See the volume edition (London: Cassell, 1860), p. 281-85.
- 29 William Wordsworth, 'The Leech Gatherer, or, Resolution and Independence', (1807) and Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass, and what Alice found There* (1871), chapter 8.
- 30 Stevenson had possibly picked up scabies mites from bedding on the ship, given that he references a 'red sublimate' as treatment – a precipitated sulfur ointment.
- 31 Lord Illingworth, in Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), Act I.
- 32 James D. Hart, *Robert Louis Stevenson: From Scotland to Silverado* (Cambridge Mass.: Belknap, 1966), p. xxx.
- 33 *An Inland Voyage* (1878), see chapters 'Pont-Sur-Sambre,' with its subtitle 'We are Pedlars,' and 'La Fere of Cursed Memory.'
- 34 *Letters*, vol. 3 p. 10; *Old and New Pacific Capitals*, "Monterey," first appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*, November 1880. See Hart, p. 161.
- 35 *The Silverado Squatters*, in James D. Hart, p. 208.
- 36 *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, p. 2.
- 37 *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 16.
- 38 *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 330.
- 39 *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 59.





## Remembering forward<sup>1</sup>

*Alan Sandison*

The hand becomes an eye that fuses and  
concentrates all five senses and sees things whole.

—Lee Ufan

‘In the beginning was the eye not the word’, wrote the art historian Otto Pächt,<sup>2</sup> and it is an aphorism which I believe would have earned Stevenson’s approbation.<sup>3</sup> One of the finest (and perhaps shrewdest) compliments he ever received came from the distinguished painter Sir John Millais who asked Sidney Colvin to tell Stevenson that in his opinion ‘he is the very first of living artists. I don’t mean writers merely, but painters and all of us. Nobody living can see with such an eye as that fellow, and nobody is such a master of his tools’. Millais, we must remember, was widely regarded as ‘a shrewd and very independent judge of books’,<sup>4</sup> and a very well-informed observer of his artistic milieu. What he is responding to here is, I believe, the artistry and skill in Stevenson’s compositions, the clarity of his vision and the intuitive exercising of what Wordsworth called ‘the intellectual eye’. That Millais should bracket together writers *and* artists is altogether significant.

In his remarkably astute essay on Victor Hugo Stevenson is saying something which could be seen as an amplification of Otto Pächt’s dictum that in the beginning was the eye not the word:

For art precedes philosophy and even science. People must have noticed things and interested themselves in them before they begin to debate upon their causes or influence. And it is in this way that art is the pioneer of knowledge; those predilections of the artist he knows not why, those irrational acceptations and recognitions, reclaim, out of





the world that we have not yet realised, ever another and another corner; and after the facts have been thus vividly brought before us and have had time to settle and arrange themselves in our minds, some day there will be found the man of science to stand up and give the explanation.<sup>5</sup>

What has helped him to this conclusion is his analysis of the work of Walter Scott who, as the most celebrated and influential exponent of Romanticism amongst novelists, seemed to usher in a new way of looking at the world. By contrast, his predecessor Henry Fielding, had believed that 'each of these actions [of his characters] could be decomposed on the spot into a few simple personal elements, as we decompose a force in a question of abstract dynamics. The larger motives' says Stevenson, 'are all unknown to him; he had not understood that the nature of the landscape or the spirit of the times could be for anything in a story'. But Scott's instinct 'taught him otherwise' and so in his work 'we begin to have a sense of the subtle influences that moderate and qualify a man's personality; *that personality is no longer thrown out in unnatural isolation, but is resumed into its place in the constitution of things*'(pp. 5-6, my italics). It is, he believes, this change in the manner of regarding men and their actions that has since 'renewed and vivified history'.

It is when you read remarks like these which ascribe so much to developing Romanticism and then choose to leave that familiar cultural landscape to look at Aboriginal art that you extend your perspective and begin to wonder about the reach and sufficiency of such classifications, whether or not there might be fresher sign-posts and other ways of envisaging 'being modern', which might challenge our habituated 'intellectual eye'. Through the millennia, Aboriginal art has provided a graphic illustration of the 'influences that moderate and qualify a man's personality', influences which ensure that 'personality is no longer thrown out in unnatural isolation, but is resumed into its place in the





constitution of things'. Indeed, the unceasing exploration of the 'constitution of things' is the matter of all serious Aboriginal art. But these influences and that constitution of things owe nothing to a Western cultural tradition and need to be approached with a fresh, unprejudiced vision if we are to derive from it the lessons it has to offer.

We can explore further affinities between Stevenson's perceptions of what constitutes romance – he habitually uses this word instead of romanticism – and the *modus vivendi* of Aboriginal art: for example, when we look at the emphasis he lays on the limits of analytical language. Time and again through the fluid depth of meaning in which his own concepts swirl, he seems to me to describe a power and process which is to be found exemplified at its fullest in a great deal of Aboriginal art:

The artistic result of a romance [he writes], what is left upon the memory by any really powerful and artistic novel, is something so complicated and refined that it is difficult to put a name upon it; and yet something as simple as nature.

He admits that these two propositions 'may seem mutually destructive, but they are so only in appearance'. The fact is, he says, 'that art is working far ahead of language as well as science, realising for us by all manner of suggestions and exaggerations, effects for which as yet we have no direct name; nay, for which we may never perhaps have a direct name' (p. 7).

A certain vagueness about the purpose and effect of a romance, he believes, can result from this even though 'it is clear enough to us in thought'. The trouble is 'we are not used to consider anything clear until we are able to formulate it in words, and analytical language has not been sufficiently shaped to that end' (p. 8). Throughout all his writing Stevenson shows himself profoundly aware of the power and energy of the inarticulable, the 'dark





matter', we might call it, of the Romantic writer's cosmos. (It is tempting to diverge at this point to talk about Eugene Gendlin's notion of 'felt meaning', of giving due status to experience before it is logically ordered which is what Stevenson is demonstrating here, but I shall leave that to someone else.)<sup>6</sup>

As the Romantic novel progresses towards the Conradian end of the spectrum, the tendency towards a greater degree of abstraction becomes evident to Stevenson, so tuned to the future: 'there has been some departure from the traditional canons of romance' as he succinctly puts it. He discusses this, I think brilliantly, in his treatment of Hugo's *Quatre Vingt Treize*, a novel built upon 'a sort of enigma', raising questions 'which remain unanswered to the end'. The portrayal of character, he believes, is only lightly drawn and does not fully engage us. Instead 'what we really care for is something that they only imply and body forth for us' because our interest 'is not in the men, but in the country that they loved or hated, benefited or injured'. The characters themselves fade away rapidly and 'what we regard is what remains behind; [...] it is the principle that put these men where they were, that filled them for a while with heroic inspiration, and has the power, now that they are fallen, to inspire others with the same courage'. And Hugo has achieved this by dealing only 'with the objective materials of art, and dealing with them so masterfully that the palest abstractions of thought come before us, and move our hopes and fears as if they were the young men and maidens of customary romance' (pp. 18-19).

Towards the end of his essay on Hugo, Stevenson hits on a phrase which was to become a staple in the evaluation of the work of Conrad and, more generally, in the language of twentieth century literary criticism. In Hugo's work, Stevenson maintains, 'every situation is informed with moral significance and grandeur' (p. 20). In other writers, we find the moral clumsily thrown over the story 'like a carpet over a railing. Now the moral significance, with Hugo, is of the essence of the romance; it is





the organising principle'. In his work we find 'elemental forces playing [...] nearly as important a role, as the man Gilliat [in *Les Travailleurs*] who opposes and overcomes them.' The result is that 'those individual interests that were supreme in Fielding, and even in Scott, [and] stood out over everything else [...] figure here as only one set of interests among many sets [...] one thing to be treated out of a whole world of things equally vivid and important'. His conclusion is powerful:

for Hugo, man is no longer an isolated spirit without antecedent or relation here below, but a being involved in the action and reaction of natural forces, himself a centre of such action and reaction; or an unit in a great multitude, chased hither and thither by epidemic terrors and aspirations and, in all seriousness, blown about by every wind of doctrine. (pp. 21-2)

## II

It is extraordinary how much of this can be discovered, profoundly expressed, at the very heart of Aboriginal creativity: the universals Stevenson perceives in his analysis of Hugo's writing and for which he provides an aesthetic theory are the same universals that we find, dazzlingly illuminated, when we turn our attention to the practice and content of much Aboriginal art. (I should stress here that I am going to deal with abstract rather than figurative art.) In her impressive essay "The raw and the cooked": what makes Aboriginal art so "deadly" (in *Remembering Forward*), Judith Ryan, Senior Curator of Indigenous Art at NGV and curator of a great many exhibitions of Indigenous art, ends with these words:

Makers of Aboriginal works of art communicate in ways that bypass the written; theirs is the multi-layered language of metaphor, richer than words and impossible to





articulate completely, as French writer Mikel Dufrenne explains: ‘The truth of art, what makes art true, is its power to reveal what knowledge has no access to, some sort of ungoverned face of the world [...] a place where imagination and reality can meet and celebrate’.<sup>7</sup>

Ryan points out that physical properties also have a metaphorical dimension and she quotes the words of the Aboriginal painter Gawarrin’ Gumana explaining that his ‘sacred place’ is ‘mud, rock, sand, earth, clay’. Even the ochres which contribute their colour to bark paintings are deeply sacred. Theirs are, as Ryan finely puts it –

the tonal colours of earth. Its sound is quiet – from rock, mud and earth – and serious, serious of heart. It tells us something: it is ngarra (sacred). The aesthetic of inwardness is a product of the materials – mud, earth, rock, bark and what they mean to the Yolngu – as suggested by [the aboriginal leader and educationist] Raymattja Marika: ‘The symbolism behind the designs can be seen, by someone who knows, to be in all the little details and shapes and colours of the work of art. The deepest knowledge is abstract [...] it cannot be put into words’.<sup>8</sup>

At the most seminal levels of this age-old art, then, there lies an aesthetic with which Stevenson’s could claim sympathetic kinship, and be enlarged by it. A profoundly complex reality communicable principally through a highly abstract aesthetic – and even then never fully – lies at its core ensuring that those 19th century aesthetic theories exemplified by Walter Scott, Victor Hugo or even Robert Louis Stevenson, can be accorded their true if perhaps modest place in a miraculous cultural continuum stretching back over thousands of years.

Stevensonians will immediately recognise another affinity in





the testimony which Judith Ryan provides:

For me great examples of Aboriginal art resonate with an aura of power, truth, blood, beauty, spirit and law that is transmitted by the passionate conviction of the maker – his or her truth to materials and honouring of culture [...] the personal is aesthetic as well as political.<sup>9</sup>

Truth to materials, the honouring of his culture and the passionate conviction of the maker are all at the foundation of Stevenson's approach to *his* art. Few successful British writers have returned so insistently – I had almost said obsessively – to such a searching examination of the nature of his own art as well as the art of others (both what it is and what it might be). We might recall his praise for Hugo's masterful dealings with 'the objective materials of art'; but the constant and imperative need to continue refining one's technique until it has been completely mastered is something to which he returns many times. 'Marble, paint, and language, the pen, the needle, and the brush, all have their grossnesses, their ineffable impotences [...] It is the work and it is a great part of the delight of any artist to contend with these unruly tools, and now by brute energy, now by witty expedient, to drive and coax them to effect his will'.<sup>10</sup> Urging his admirer Trevor Haddon 'to be devoted to his art', he tells him that, above all, he must strive for mastery over his own technique:

In your own art, bow your head over technique. Think of technique when you rise and when you go to bed. Forget purposes in the meanwhile: get to love technical processes; to glory in technical processes; get to see the world entirely through technical spectacles, to see it entirely in terms of what you can do.<sup>11</sup>

In his well-known exchange with Henry James, Stevenson





differentiates their practice in terms highly relevant to this discussion. James, he says, ‘spoke of the finished picture and the work when done; I, of the brushes, the palette, and the north light. He uttered his views in the tone and for the ear of good society; I, with the emphasis and the technicalities of the obtrusive student’.<sup>12</sup>

It is notable that Stevenson seems instinctively to express himself in terms of the visual artist; and what so often strikes the viewer of Aboriginal art is that here, too, the artist demonstrates the same utter commitment – devotion if you like – to the justness of the composition, and in particular to its process because process is very much part of its meaning. (‘While Paddy’s complete absorption in the printing process is palpable’, writes Michiel Dork in his essay on Paddy Nyunkuni Bedford, ‘he may also appear casually indifferent to the results, as if the performance of painting is an end in itself.’<sup>13</sup>) Characteristically, for these artists too, technique was of the first importance and is exceptionally painstaking and innovative. ‘For much Aboriginal art’, writes Howard Morphy –

the act of production was as important as the finished object. Art represented the appearance of ancestral forces in ritual contexts: imminent, transitory, effective in achieving a particular purpose and then discarded, hidden or destroyed. A true clash of cultures occurred: an opposition between the aboriginal perception and the Western conception of art, with its emphasis on the finished object, the collectable form and the independence of that form from the context of its production.<sup>14</sup>

Stevenson was also somewhat cavalier about ‘the finished object’. One might recall his attack on the realists for their ‘insane pursuit of completion’ in ‘A Note on Realism’; and Barry Menikoff illuminatingly enlarges this when he writes:





One of the reasons the endings to Stevenson's fictions are so problematic is precisely because they are not envisioned in any way as conclusions. The stories are texts whose deeper narratives are still unfolding [...] following the fortuitous details that 'complete' the action proper.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its frequent disregard for the primacy of the finished object, the best of aboriginal art is notably brimful of confidence, deriving, perhaps, from inherent certainties about its embodiment of sacred creation myths, which provide it with something very close to a religious dynamic – as the visual transcription of the Dreamtime. But this assurance also stems from the artists' mastery of their tools and materials. Congruity of concept, design, pigmentation, paints, dyes, and purpose coalesce in an unassailable integrity. Some of these elements – the paints, the 'canvas', the colours, even the design – are quite capable of changing. Their discovery of acrylic paint, for example, opened up new possibilities that were quickly seized on; and batik-work was adopted and adapted to great effect quite early in the 20th century efflorescence of aboriginal artistry.

### III

Richly narrative as these paintings are, central to that narrative's meaning is its continuousness; that is, its continued unfolding into the present as unfinished business (not dissimilar to Stevenson's texts 'whose deeper narratives are still unfolding'). It is a great misunderstanding to label such representations, as has been done, simply as a door opening to the past – which would render it static. In 1987 another anthropologist, James Clifford, characterised it differently when he told a New York audience that tribal artists 'can no longer be marginalised. They speak not only for endangered "traditions" but also for crucial human futures'.

After quoting Clifford in his essay 'The Authenticity of





Australian Painting in the Age of Globalization’, Professor Ian McLean goes on: ‘The intensification of globalization has moved thinking further in this direction. In dissolving the structural dichotomies that orientated European thought – such as East/West, modern/primitive, us/them – globalization is changing the way we think about the hierarchy of cultures’.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, Maclean rightly insists that ‘Aboriginal art being made today in remote communities of Australia remains distinctively Aboriginal’; and though it may not be in one sense traditional, it can certainly be described as ‘neo-traditionalist as it relies to a large extent on traditional thinking to engage with the modern world’. And he adds the important rider, ‘If it is accepted into the discourse of contemporary art, then the European model of postmodernism is not the only way to be contemporary in this age of globalization’.<sup>17</sup>

#### IV

Nothing could be clearer from even a cursory examination of Aboriginal art than that it is dynamic not static, which was how its authors essentially did and do see it, and perhaps more correctly, how they live it. Stevenson aligns himself with the same methodology when he draws a distinction between himself and Balzac – who had allowed himself ‘to be led into the static’ – whereas his own preference was for what he saw as a much superior method – the kinetic. Centrally, we find in Aboriginal art a dynamic linking past and present through country or land: whatever the medium, the land is the real canvas and, of course, in early expressions of this art it was literally done on sand as well as on rock and bark. Paddy Bedford’s *Motor Car Yard – Blanket Lizard Dreaming* is an excellent example of the way in which the Dreamtime obtrudes into the quotidian present of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and transforms it into a beautiful, powerful and contemporary cultural statement.

Of Bedford’s *Emu Dreaming and Bedford Downs Massacre*





which represents an appalling massacre perpetrated by cattlemen less than a century ago as they moved into the Kimberly – an event which this artist painted several times – McLean has this to say: ‘Such paintings are living myths that insist on the continuity of the past in the present, as if the Dreaming heroes are not locked in the past but continue to walk and shape the land’. Then he adds a useful reminder: ‘But they are also simply pictures’.<sup>18</sup>

I have referred several times to the all-important creative matrix of the Dreamtime and a word about the concept is necessary. It is important to remember that this was a word coined by anthropologists in the 1890s as an approximate translation of a word in one of many Aboriginal languages, some of which use a term which cannot be translated literally as Dreamtime. The Yolngu people, for example, feel that their word ‘wangarr’ does not connote dream but reality. Searching for a definition, one might seize on one casually proffered by the eminent authority on Western Desert Aboriginal culture Professor Fred Myers who refers to *tjukurrpa* or Dreaming simply as ‘the mythological, ancestral foundation of the everyday world’.<sup>19</sup>

This Dreamtime is peopled by ancestral beings who emerged from the earth ‘and began to shape the world’; every action of theirs ‘had a consequence on the form of the landscape’ These ancestral beings were complex forms capable of transforming their own bodies into other forms both living (emus, possums, kangaroos, fish) and inanimate (rocks, trees, rivers) ‘or even bushfires or beehives and honey’. Howard Morphy, whom I have been quoting, concludes with an important reminder:

Aboriginal religion is concerned with the continuities that lie behind dynamic processes and produce new lives, with stability in a world of acknowledged change. It is this accommodation of change and process that has enabled Aboriginal religion to maintain its relevance in a rapidly changing world.<sup>20</sup>





## V

With Morphy's words in mind, what about Stevenson's Dreamtime? One of the reasons Italo Calvino gives for his great regard for Stevenson is 'because of the moral nucleus of all his narratives'. Economically put, this observation yet isolates a defining quality that lies at the core of his aesthetic. In his essays as well as his novels he is driven by the question – what do we as highly-evolved post-Darwinian 'moderns' live by? We have an urge to define a moral order in our lives but we have only our own sense of honour, of propriety, of decency to guide us, along with some Mosaic shards – if we are the relics of a Christian culture – and perhaps our art. In art we may discern, if only through a glass darkly, some foundation of moral principle: where devotion, discipline and sacrificial commitment to the pursuit of truth are rewarded by an arduously-achieved mastery of one's chosen instruments, bringing persuasive evidence, it would seem, to show that *laborare est orare*. Perfection of style can lead us to unexpected heights: confronted by a Fra Angelico masterpiece, for example, the infidel might well teeter on the edge of religious conversion: the dazzling organization of all its parts, brilliantly portrayed, achieve an order in complexity which may seem little short of miraculous. And that might prompt us to recall that it was his yoking of Stevenson's 'clean, light, clarity of style' with his narratives' moral nucleus which persuaded Calvino of his greatness as a writer. In fact, these words mirror Stevenson's own in his essay 'Fontainebleau' in which he credits France with imbuing him with his love of style: 'Precision, clarity, the cleanly and crafty employment of material, a grace in the handling, apart from any value in the thought, seem to be acquired by the mere residence'.<sup>21</sup> Hallowed as these elements are by the depth of their author's commitment to their refinement, they seem to undergo a transmutation from the purely aesthetic to the moral.

In his exceptionally penetrating essay introducing his collection of Stevenson's short stories, *Tales from the Prince of Story-*





*tellers*, Barry Menikoff writes that Stevenson was ‘at one and the same time the most deliberately artistic of new writers and the one most preoccupied with moral issues’. He fills this argument out convincingly in the course of his introduction:

Stevenson (like Henry James) found himself with two fundamental inclinations: the one towards technical artistry, which he saw in the French, and the other towards moral analysis, which he found in Hawthorne. The problem was to amalgamate the two, creating a fiction that was both technically brilliant and thematically complex. Instead of highlighting one or the other [...] Stevenson fashioned a short story that was moral in its impulse and artistic in its execution; he created, in effect, the ‘moral art story’ or the art story with a moral.

Menikoff, stresses, as others have done, that what is always ‘at the centre of [his] fiction is the idea. The core of a Stevenson story is intellect’. He can be called ‘a philosopher in fiction with far more justness than virtually any of his contemporaries, including Hardy and James’, but, as he shrewdly adds, Stevenson ‘wanted to leave behind a small, indelible mark on a stick, so that whoever came after, so long as the stick lasted, would recall and in the process revivify his name’.<sup>22</sup>

Just so is Aboriginal art dedicated to recalling and revivifying Dreamtime; but ‘recall’ and ‘revivify’ are not entirely satisfactory terms since they might seem to accord the Dreamtime a specific moment in time, a moment which artists feel called upon to *revive*. Michiel Dolk puts it better:

we might conceive of ancestral events as forever immanent and embodied in landscape, existing simultaneously with the here and now of lived experience and within historical memory. Consequently painting does not sim-





ply re-present or re-enact the dreaming; it also is the dreaming.<sup>23</sup>

By the commitment of these artists to making their own indelible mark describing their origins and the moral imperatives which, deriving from these origins, shape the present and the future, identity would be established and preserved. That mark, in truth, embodies in its abstract pattern-making an enormously complex sign-system, which the artist deploys and interprets. It also gives the artist his or her status as the presenter and interpreter of what might be called sacred texts, and only those authorised to do so through their birthright and initiation can present or decode their representation in this way.

## VI

This is an abstract aesthetic, then, that emphasises technique and process and an unrelenting search for a truth so profound that it tests the limits of the articulable and results in a product which is, to quote Stevenson again, 'so complicated and refined that it is difficult to put a name on it; and yet something as simple as nature'. There is one word which Stevenson, with *his* love of abstract patterning, uses repeatedly when talking about form and style, and again it is one which links literature with the visual arts and simultaneously explores the limits of meaning: it is the word arabesque. In general usage it takes different shades of meaning but one is a free-flowing, spatially-liberated (though often intricate) line, which follows its own organic laws. In 'A Chapter on Dreams' Stevenson describes how his creative 'Brownies' in suggesting stories to him do so 'without ethical narrowness'; instead, conveying hints 'of that sort of sense we seem to perceive in the arabesque of time and space'.<sup>24</sup> In 'Fontainebleau' the arabesque is the necessary preliminary experiment among free, abstract forms which the tyro artist will attempt: 'The arabesque, properly speaking, and even in literature, is the first fancy of the artist; he





first plays with his material as a child plays with a kaleidoscope; and he is already in a second stage when he begins to use his pretty counters for the end of representation'.<sup>25</sup> Stevenson has an artist's – I'm inclined to say almost an oriental artist's – interest in 'the line'. In one of his earliest essays, 'Roads', he makes an admiring reference to another sensuous line – the Hogarthian line of beauty when recalling 'some miles of a fine, wide highway, laid out with conscious aesthetic artifice'. He enlarges on this: 'It is said that the engineer had Hogarth's line of beauty in his mind as he laid them down. And the result is striking. One splendid satisfying sweep passes with easy transition into another, and there is nothing to trouble or dislocate the strong continuousness of the main line of the road'.<sup>26</sup>

Sandra Naddaff in her excellent book on the arabesque writes of the 'carefully patterned, entirely predictable movement of the arabesque',<sup>27</sup> and she quotes a remark of the distinguished Arabist Jacques Berque that '*[l'arabesque] s'offre a ses yeux comme un labyrinthe, un dédale*'. Labyrinths, we might note in passing, get frequent mention in Stevenson's work, but that the arabesque fascinated him should not surprise us for abstract pattern-making is to him a crucial element of his aesthetic: 'it may be said with sufficient justice', he writes in 'Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', 'that the motive and end of any art whatsoever is to make a pattern; a pattern, it may be, of colours, of sounds, of changing attitudes, geometrical figures, or imitative lines; but still a pattern'. (At the beginning of the paragraph he refers to it as a web.) Later he says that 'the true business of the literary artist is to plait or weave his meaning' – and that will involve not just choosing a 'pattern [...] to please the supersensual ear' but also require him to choose 'apt, explicit and communicative words'. But the aesthetics of literary style for Stevenson start with the first mark of his pen on paper: 'From the arrangement of according letters, which is altogether arabesque and sensual, up to the architecture of the elegant and pregnant





sentence, which is a vigorous act of the pure intellect, there is scarce a faculty in man but has been exercised'.<sup>28</sup>

One of the reasons why I dwell a little on the arabesque here, and Stevenson's apparently instinctive involvement with it, is because something very like it constitutes an important figure or motif in a good deal of Aboriginal art – one which lays central emphasis on the line. Writing of Emily Kngwarreye's work, Judith Ryan notes:

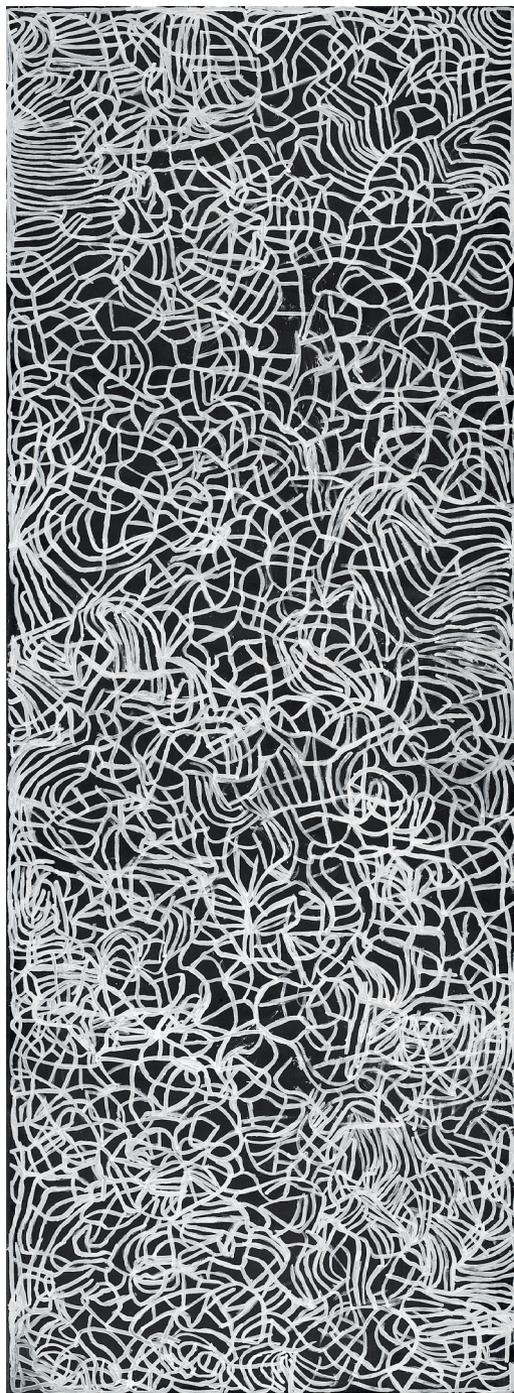
In the evolution of Kngwarreye's *oeuvre*, two primary elements dominate – dots and lines – which in the artist's hands become intuitive gestures and bring to mind [Paul] Klee's expression 'A line is a dot that went for a walk' and 'Drawing is taking a line for a walk' [...] Ultimately Kngwarreye takes the linear gesture that signifies *anwer-larr* (pencil yam) 'for a walk' on huge canvases composed of a continuous labyrinthine line such as in *Big Yam Dreaming, 1995*.<sup>29</sup>

The endlessness of such projections is of a piece with the arabesque: they establish an impressive pattern but, though far from meaningless, lead to no resolving centrepiece or succinct denouement, and so recall another of Stevenson's challenging remarks to those who demand that all roads should lead to the New Jerusalem or even the New Florence: 'How if there was no centre at all, but just one alley after another, and the whole world a labyrinth without end or issue'.<sup>30</sup> Then the arabesque becomes an end in itself containing, as in Kngwarreye's work, its own meaning.





**Emily Kam Kngwarrray (Anmatyerr c.1910–1996)**  
***Anwerlarr anganenty (Big Yam Dreaming) 1995***



Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 291.1 x 801.8 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Janet and Donald Holt and family,  
Governors, 1995.



Michiel Dolk draws attention to an alternative, if similar metaphor which being even more organic, is perhaps more just in this context: Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome which is composed 'not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end but always a middle (*milieu*) from where it grows and overflows [...]. The rhizome pertains to a map [...] that is always detachable, connectable, revisable, modifiable'.<sup>31</sup> Dolk specifically relates this metaphor to Emily Kngwarreye's work which reflects her own life digging for yams and tubers, thus bringing her art and her life-experience together

I have said that though Aboriginal art draws on ancestral teaching and iconography inspired by the Dreamtime, this does not mean it is static or predictable. To the contrary it is lively and adventurous, constantly reinterpreting its inheritance. Ryan observes acutely: 'Art also derives from art, from what has gone before, but each finished work upon a bare surface is a new beginning for the artist and the viewer. It is unpredictable and involves risk'.<sup>32</sup> These words might almost have been written by Stevenson – the cadences are akin to his and the sentiments are entirely so. For him art has to be constantly renewed and refreshed: in 'A Note on Realism' he writes with great conviction: 'Every fresh work on which they [the artists] embark is the signal for a fresh engagement of the whole forces of their mind'.<sup>33</sup> He even returns to the subject in the course of his morose reflections in 'Lay Morals', where we are told that 'every glimpse of something new is a letter in God's alphabet'.<sup>34</sup>

If the basic repertoire of Dreamings is a 'given', it is open to the artist to *find* appropriate motifs that enable the artist to acknowledge the broader context of rapidly changing ideas and practices. Sometimes this 'finding' has produced new dreamings or dreaming sites, which have, for example, ranged from the Ark of the Covenant to Ned Kelly. Thus while due homage is paid to the law and to kinship with place as *given* in the Dreamings, the





artist is still free to exercise his or her own imaginative interpretation according to experience and knowledge and to find new motifs for doing so.

The remarkable economy of many aboriginal paintings, the fine (and immensely skilful) attenuation of the tale they tell, condensed to a line or a line of dots, affirms a profoundly knowledgeable attachment to the abstract, symbolic representation of their culture's rituals and truths. And, it has to be repeatedly emphasised, it results in paintings of the most striking beauty. Stevenson would, I riskily suggest, have been greatly attracted to aboriginal practice. It offers, it seems to me, a visual correlative to his own drive to greater abstraction. Herbert Spencer appealed to him he tells us because 'there dwells in his pages a spirit of abstract joy, plucked naked like an algebraic symbol, but still joyful'.<sup>35</sup> Before Scott, whom he holds partly responsible for the contemporary taste for details and 'facts', in the hands of a Voltaire for example, the story was 'as abstract as a parable'. Now in his own time he begins to see writers 'aspire after a more naked, narrative articulation'.<sup>36</sup> In a letter to his cousin Bob discussing his art, art in general, and what he calls representative art in particular, Stevenson draws some awkward distinctions, but he makes a telling point when he talks about what he calls 'decorative art'. When we deal with 'a pure convention, like drawing,' he writes, 'three strokes suffice, and satisfy plenarily the most captious'. Then he adds an important rider: 'But I do not think we yet understand the living vigour of a frank convention, boldly enforced. Decorative art has thus liberties denied to the representative'.<sup>37</sup> The arabesque or a line of dots gone for a run are, in many ways, just such conventions. The value he attached to bareness and economy of expression is made abundantly clear in his well-known remarks to Bob a few weeks earlier: 'Jesus, there is but one art: to omit! O if I knew how to omit, I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knew how to omit would make an Iliad out of a daily paper'.<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to reflect that the





most conspicuous quality of all good aboriginal art is its rigorous selection resulting in a stringent economy that speaks volumes.

## VII

A little while ago I wrote that the methodology of aboriginal art involves a dynamic linking past, present and future through country or land. I should like to return now to look at Stevenson's treatment of the past and of country in the light of this process. In her excellent essay 'Secrets and Lies: Stevenson's Telling of the Past', Jenni Calder writes that Stevenson 'takes his history personally [that is, his national history] and absorbs it as a physical history in the same way'. Though I am not claiming that Stevenson's view of the past is at all comparable to the role the past plays in Aboriginal painting, nevertheless as Calder says 'Stevenson believed that Scots had a particular and distinctive relationship with the past which marked their character and culture'. And she quotes the narrator in *Weir Of Hermiston* who tells us that a Scot, 'stands in an attitude towards the past unthinkable to Englishmen, and remembers and cherishes the memory of his forbears, good or bad; and there burns alive in him a sense of identity with the dead even to the twentieth generation'.<sup>39</sup>

Francesco Marroni writes eloquently of Stevenson's treatment of the past in *Weir*:

In his imagination, the loneliness of the moorland is contrasted with the crowds of phantoms which have haunted its deserted spaces through the centuries and which, whether incited by revenge, or filled with overwhelming pity, have always displayed the same intention of honouring their fathers and ensuring that their identities and the moral values of their actions are never forgotten.<sup>40</sup>

It is in the moorland that the past finds its roots; it is the moorland and the events that took place there which infuses *meaning*





into the past. In another valuable essay, 'Figures in a Landscape: Scott, Stevenson and Routes to the Past', Dr Calder, after describing how the sense of human life as organic to the landscape is amplified in Scott's *Waverley*, contrasts this with Stevenson's response: 'He turns to the past to find paradigms for the present, and often these are of a very personal nature. It is not historical narrative that interests him, so much as a cognitive unfolding of personality located in the past'. There is much truth in this, but it may not be the whole truth. Her examination of Scott's treatment of the past seems to me to be shrewd: 'Scott's protagonists journey through landscapes that live in the past and where the past lives. Scott peoples this territory with characters who are genuinely indigenous, whose language, culture, and customs are organic to the environment'. However, I have reservations when she claims that Stevenson's protagonists 'don't so much open up Scotland as remind us just how readily time and change estrange us from both the landscape and the past'.<sup>41</sup> Applied narrowly to *Kidnapped* such a reading might appear persuasive, and it is true that Stevenson's fictional characters do not have an organic connection to the landscape – to 'country' – as they do in Scott, or in the work of Aboriginal artists. Nevertheless, I would argue that Stevenson himself has an exceptionally strong consciousness of the past, of his country's history, of being an inalienable part of it and its culture, repeatedly acknowledging the traditions it embodies as giving him an identity distinct from that of any other nationality. 'Scotland is indefinable; it has no unity except upon the map. Two languages, many dialects, innumerable forms of piety and countless local patriotisms and prejudices part us among ourselves [...] yet somewhere, deep down in the heart of each one of us, something yearns for the old land [...] Of all mysteries of the human heart, this is perhaps the most inscrutable'.<sup>42</sup> Throughout his work he returns again and again to the past until in *Weir of Hermiston* the narrative gives it physical embodiment for the last time, before it dissolves into





that spectral realm Professor Marroni describes.

In an earlier essay Stevenson writes: ‘the past is myself, my own history, the seed of my present thoughts [...] and in the past is my real life’; and later – ‘the more distant past is all that we possess in life, the corn already harvested and stored in the grange of memory’.<sup>43</sup> While it is true that ‘our old days, and deeds, our old selves, too,’ may be irretrievably lost, yet something of crucial importance will always remain: ‘conceive that little thread of memory that we trail behind us broken at the pocket’s edge; and in what naked nullity should we be left! For we only guide ourselves, and only know ourselves, by those air-painted pictures of the past’.<sup>44</sup>

That Stevenson turns to the past to find paradigms for the present which are often very personal in nature is very persuasive and it can be seen to be all the more apt when we look at his use of landscape. For the aboriginal artists their country’s geomorphology has huge significance imbued as they conceive every part of it to be with the power of the ancestral beings. Nevertheless, landscape for Stevenson is still important (and we must remember that he criticised Fielding for not understanding ‘that the nature of the landscape [...] could be for anything in a story’), but it illustrates Simon Schama’s observation that landscapes are ‘constructs of the imagination’ and ‘the carriers of memory’.<sup>45</sup> In ‘A Retrospect’ Stevenson writes ‘when we are looking at a landscape we think ourselves pleased, but it is only when it comes back upon us by the fire o’ nights that we can disentangle the main charm from the thick of particulars’.<sup>46</sup> For Stevenson it is important that memory be allowed its editorial as well as its hallowing role. As he constructs the landscape he constructs or reinforces his own sense of identity: at the same time he reveals the importance to him of the human imprint. In his essay ‘Roads’, for example, he makes it clear that what appeals to him most about roads is an organic quality which carries the mark, or evokes the memory, of human usage – even of a wilful individual eccentric-





ity: 'A footpath across a meadow – in all its human waywardness and unaccountability, in all the *grata protervitas* of its varying direction will always be more to us than a railroad'.<sup>47</sup> But even as he follows the road's 'capricious sinuosities', his imagination is busy *creating* the landscape that lies ahead.

So there is a definitive difference between Stevenson and the aboriginal artists I have been dealing with, every element of whose geomorphology is instinct with vigorous life and meaning. 'As the ground of being', writes Michiel Dolk, 'the earth is the embodiment of all other relations. Hence geomorphic shapes predominate [...] the dynamic life of shape in painting conveys the metamorphosis of being in landforms which are the memory bank of symbolic and social relations. Comparable to Jackson Pollock's reference to painting as "memories arrested in space", PB's works suggest memories of place arrested in a process of displacement'.<sup>48</sup> While this is an impressive summary of the Aboriginal 'ground of being' from which all else flows, and with which no other system can truly compare, it could still be argued that ultimately even their particular landscape, too, is a construction: however sanctified it has come to be, hallowed as the well-spring of their identity, folk-memory is at the root of their system of beliefs, too, as it is for the Borders community of Hermiston. The difference is that the principal elements of their and their country's story have, by faithful observance, cultivation and representation over many centuries, acquired the status of revealed religion. 'Strained [...] through the hour-glass of time', to use Stevenson's phrase,<sup>49</sup> over tens of thousands of years, these concepts and values were elevated to the sacred, refined to become all-embracing and their legacy codified in the bible of their artistry – rather as the wonderful stained glass windows of Chartres were a legible bible for illiterate Christians.

## VIII

Stevenson credits Walter Scott with revealing 'that personality is





no longer thrown out in unnatural isolation, but is resumed into its place in the constitution of things' and it is this change in the manner of regarding men and their actions which has 'renewed and vivified history'.<sup>50</sup> Widening our field of vision to embrace centuries of Aboriginal culture and creative expression, what we find is a unified and coherent cosmos, and what is strikingly manifested in its pictorial representations – however abstract they may be – is a universe where everything, without exception, has a place; where every form and shape embodies the creative spirit engendered by the ancestral beings; where art and life are one. In Dolk's excellent summary:

All life and law is understood to issue from the ancestral agencies embodied in places, which are interconnected with the Dreamings of other people and places. From this basic locative principle, which defines the site-specific relation of language and cultural practice to the symbolic repertoire of painting, everything else follows'.<sup>51</sup>

## IX

What I have been trying to do is to offer yet another lens through which to look at Stevenson's work – and, appropriating again Wordsworth's notion of the 'intellectual eye', to *think* about it in a certain way: a way which includes, but goes far beyond, the Conradian objective 'to make [us] see'.

I have noted the capacity of Aboriginal artists to adapt their processes and their iconography to changing times and circumstances while embodying, representing and paying homage to the 'given' of the Dreamtime: 'Remembering Forward' in other words. But Stevenson, too, is a remarkable case of a writer – an artist – who in, his essays at least, defines himself against the past, and in all his work gives constant attention to the fathers of the tradition out of which he grew, while at the same time expressing





his determination to revise and revivify that inheritance in new and ground-breaking ways: 'my theory is that literature must always be most at home in treating movement and change; hence I look for them'.<sup>52</sup> – 'Remembering Forward' one might say.

I have sought to justify a widening of our critical field of vision to embrace a centuries-old culture and the extraordinary creative inventiveness which it nurtured and – most importantly – *continues to nurture*. I have even hinted that we should, perhaps, not always think in linear mode when it comes to defining our own culture and its development, but more spatially, learning to see our world rather in the way that that inspired genius, Emily Kngwarreye presents hers as she worked on her great 3m by 8m painting, *Big Yam Dreaming*, where a mass of arabesques or rhizome-like lines constitute a complex web or pattern in which we will find both argument and meaning: just as Stevenson suggested when he expressed his seminal conviction in 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature' that 'pattern and argument live in each other; and it is by the brevity, clearness, charm, or emphasis of the second, that we judge the strength and fitness of the first'.<sup>53</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 'Remembering Forward' was the title chosen by the curators for the exhibition of Australian aboriginal painting since 1960 in the Museum Ludwig, Cologne in 2010.
- 2 Otto Pächt quoted in Roger Kimball, 'The Rape of the Masters', in *The New Criterion*, (December 2003).
- 3 It is true that Stevenson once declared that his twin aims were war to the adjective and death to the optic nerve, but as George Dekker points out in his essay 'The Mixed Current of Realism and Romance', in *Robert Louis Stevenson*, edited by Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005), p.167, what he has in mind here is 'the massing of visual details in the tradition of Balzac' – a tradition which had long been a bogey for Stevenson.
- 4 Sydney Colvin, 'Introduction', *The Letters of Robert Louis*





- Stevenson*, vol. 1 (London: William Heinemann, 1924), Tusitala 31, p. xv.
- 5 'Victor Hugo', in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, vol. 27, p. 6, henceforth cited in text.
  - 6 See Eugene T. Gendlin, *Experience and the Creation of Meaning: a Philosophical and Psychological Approach to the Subjective* (1962), (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997).
  - 7 Judith Ryan, in *Remembering Forward: Australian Aboriginal Painting since 1960*, ed. by Kaspar König, Emily Joyce Evans, Falk Wolf (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2010), p. 135.
  - 8 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
  - 9 *Ibid.*, p. 135.
  - 10 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Note on Realism', in *Essays Literary and Critical* (London: William Heinemann, 1924), Tusitala 28, p. 72.
  - 11 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), vol.4, p. 141, (5 July 1883).
  - 12 'A Humble Remonstrance', in *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: a Record of Friendship and Criticism* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), ed. by Janet Adam Smith, p. 99.
  - 13 Michiel Dolk, 'Are We Strangers in this Place?', in the Paddy Bedford Exhibition Catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney 2006, p. 17.
  - 14 Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), pp. 23-24.
  - 15 Barry Menikoff, 'Introduction: Fable, Fiction and Modernism', in *Robert Louis Stevenson: Tales from the Prince of Story-Tellers*, ed. and introduced by Barry Menikoff (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 33.
  - 16 Ian Maclean, in *Remembering Forward*, p.163.
  - 17 *Ibid.*, p. 166.
  - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
  - 19 Fred Myers, 'What Did Paintings Want? – Pintupi Painting at Yayayi in the 1970s', in *Remembering Forward*, p. 137.
  - 20 Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, pp. 69, 71-72.
  - 21 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Fontainebleau', in *Further Memories*,





- Tusitala 30, p. 103. Calvino's comment is quoted by Richard Dury, in 'Robert Louis Stevenson: A Critical Perspective' in the on-line Robert Louis Stevenson Archive.
- 22 Menikoff, pp. 8, 9, 18.
- 23 Michiel Dolk, p. 22.
- 24 'A Chapter on Dreams', in *Further Memories*, p. 53.
- 25 'Fontainebleau', *ibid.*, p. 102.
- 26 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Roads', in *Virginibus Puerisque*, Tusitala 25, p. 186.
- 27 Sandra Naddaff, *Arabesque: Narrative Structure and the Aesthetics of Repetition in 1001 Nights*, (Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 111.
- 28 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', in *Essays Literary and Critical*, Tusitala 28, pp. 35, 36, 50.
- 29 Judith Ryan, "Remembering Forward", p. 130.
- 30 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Crabbed Age and Youth', in *Virginibus Puerisque*, Tusitala 25, p. 59.
- 31 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 29.
- 32 Judith Ryan, p. 130.
- 33 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Note on Realism' in *Essays Literary and Critical*, Tusitala 28, p. 72.
- 34 'Lay Morals', in *Ethical Studies*, Tusitala 26, p. 32.
- 35 'Books Which Have influenced Me', in *Essays Literary and Critical*, Tusitala 28, p. 64.
- 36 'A Note on Realism', *ibid.*, p. 70.
- 37 9 October 1883, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Booth and Mehew, vol. 4, p. 180.
- 38 *Ibid.*, ?30 September 1883, p. 169.
- 39 Jenni Calder, Secrets and Lies: Stevenson's Telling of the Past', in *New Critical Perspectives on Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Marroni and Saracino (*Rivista di Studi Vittoriani* vol. 20), Pescara, 2005, p. 11.
- 40 Francesco Marroni, 'Memory and Mortality in Robert Louis





- Stevenson's *Weir of Hermiston*', in *New Critical Perspectives*, p. 156.
- 41 Jenni Calder, 'Figures in a Landscape: Scott, Stevenson, and Routes to the Past', in *Robert Louis Stevenson, Writer of Boundaries*, ed. by Richard Ambrosini and Richard Dury (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 127, 131, 142.
- 42 Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Silverado Squatters*, Tusitala 18, p. 172.
- 43 'A Retrospect', in *Further Memories*, Tusitala 30, pp. 180-181.
- 44 'A Chapter on Dreams', *ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
- 45 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (London: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 61, 56.
- 46 *Further Memories*, Tusitala 30, p. 181.
- 47 'Roads', in *Virginibus Puerisque*, Tusitala 25, pp. 186, 188-189.
- 48 Michiel Dolk, 'Are We Strangers in this Place?', p. 43.
- 49 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Retrospect' in *Further Memories*, Tusitala 30, p 181.
- 50 'Victor Hugo's Romances', in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, Tusitala 27, p. 6.
- 51 Michiel Dolk, p. 20.
- 52 28 October 1885, *Letters*, ed. by Booth and Mehew, vol. 5, p. 143.
- 53 In *Essays Literary and Critical*, Tusitala 28, pp. 36-7.





## Ballad haunting: Stevenson's 'The Song of Rahéro'

*Letitia Henville*

She began with a smiling sadness, and looking on me out of melancholy eyes, to lament the decease of her own people. 'Ici pas de Kanaques', said she; and taking the baby from her breast, she held it out to me with both her hands. 'Tenez – a little baby like this; then dead. All the Kanaques die. Then no more'. [... ] In a perspective of centuries I saw their case as ours, death coming in like a tide, and the day already numbered when there should be no more Beretani<sup>1</sup>, and no more of any race whatever, and (what oddly touched me) no more literary works and no more readers.<sup>2</sup>

In his posthumously published travel memoir *In the South Seas*, Robert Louis Stevenson constantly, repeatedly, found figures of death-in-life. Stevenson believed that indigenous Marquesans – and all indigenous Polynesian people – were in an inevitable decline, and he depicted indigenous people like the woman in the excerpt above as ghostly harbingers of his own culture's looming death. Stevenson responded empathetically to the words of the Marquesan woman; as an author, he imagined the death of a culture as embodied in its most precious cultural productions – literary works. This essay looks closely at one of Stevenson's first pieces of writing from his Polynesian years, 'The Song of Rahéro: A Legend of Tahiti', which was a translation of an indigenous Tahitian legend, and was first published in *Ballads* (1890).<sup>3</sup> Stevenson believed that indigenous Tahitians were near extinction, and so he translated their story into a comparable English-language form that was, he believed, likewise being irreversibly changed by the forces of colonialism: the Scottish genre of the





ballad. What occurs in Stevenson's ballad translation, therefore, is not only a kind of literary salvage anthropology, but also an attempt to share in mourning. By looking first at Stevenson's conception of the ballad as a genre, second at his sources for this specific work, and finally at the differences between 'The Song of Rahéro' and Stevenson's depiction of contemporary indigenous Polynesians in *In the South Seas*, I will argue that his adaptation into the ballad form brings into the poem a fatalistic, haunting undertone that runs counter to the bardic literature of the peripheries of empire that had been produced by Scottish writers a hundred years before Stevenson.

As Katie Trumpener argues in *Bardic Nationalism*, in the late eighteenth century, 'nationalist antiquaries' in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales regarded bardic literature (including ballads) as 'a product of a particular national history'.<sup>4</sup> 'English literature', however, soon overwhelmed and absorbed bardic literature 'through the systematic imitation, appropriation, and political neutralization of antiquarian and nationalist literary developments in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales' (p. xi). The shift, as the title to the second part of *Bardic Nationalism* suggests, was one from 'national memory' to 'imperial amnesia'. In the late nineteenth century, however, Stevenson writes against forgetting, relocating the ballad as a site of memory – in this case, a memory that crosses national borders: a Teva cultural production is preserved for posterity in the English language, in a Scottish genre (or, at least, what Stevenson considered to be a Scottish genre). While bardic literature in the late eighteenth century empire evoked 'amnesia, dissociation, and forgetfulness' (Trumpener, p. 222), this late nineteenth century ballad is a kind of haunting – a refusal to allow forgetting – as it is written in a dead genre, and features a people and a culture who are, in Stevenson's eyes, as good as dead.

Although 'Song of Rahéro' is a work of the Pacific, my analysis is strongly indebted to the transatlantic approaches of Kate Flint,





Meredith Martin, and Michael Cohen. Part of the appeal of a text like ‘Rahéro’ is multiple paradoxes: as a translation, it is the same as and yet different from its sources, and as a ballad it belongs both to a popular genre and a dead tradition. Moreover, as a Tahitian legend, as I will show, ‘Rahéro’ was already multiply remediated before it reached Stevenson as both an oral story and, perhaps, a written text.<sup>5</sup> The ballad is a genre of border regions, and in Polynesia, beyond the peripheries of the British empire but part of what Roslyn Jolly has called the ‘shadow empire,’<sup>6</sup> Stevenson’s poem benefits from being read not as an example of a typical work of a Victorian Brit abroad, but rather as a uniquely Beretani text – one that mourns a shared fate.

Canonically considered an author of adventure fiction, Stevenson was also a poet. While *A Child’s Garden of Verses* is still a popular book of children’s poetry, his other collections – *Underwoods* and *Songs of Travel and Other Verses* – do not circulate much outside of a small scholarly audience. In both *Underwoods* and *Songs of Travel*, the genre used more than any other is the short ode – lyric gifts of two or three stanzas dedicated ‘To Andrew Lang’, ‘To W.E. Henley’, ‘To My Father’, ‘To A Gardener’, ‘To an Island Princess’, and so on. While *A Child’s Garden of Verses* and *Songs of Travel* are entirely lyric, *Underwoods* does contain some examples of narrative poetry in the Scots section: ‘A Lowden Sabbath Morn’, ‘Embros Hie Kirk’, and ‘Late in the night in bed I lay’, for instance. Stevenson, however, doesn’t refer to any of these poems as ‘ballads’.

The poems that Stevenson does describe as ballads were the five original narrative poems published in his 1890 collection: ‘The Song of Rahéro: A Legend of Tahiti’, ‘The Feast of Famine: Marquesan Manners’, ‘Ticonderoga: A Legend of the West Highlands’, ‘Heather Ale: A Galloway Legend’, and ‘Christmas at Sea’. The first two poems in *Ballads*, which feature Polynesian subjects, make up the majority of the work; ‘Ticonderoga’ (first published in *Scribner’s Magazine* in December 1887) and





'Heather Ale' are shorter Scottish ballads about murder and guilt; 'Christmas at Sea' (first published in *Scots Observer* in December 1888) is about a young sailor who misses his family at Christmastime.

'The Song of Rahéro' is a translation of an indigenous legend, based on stories told to Stevenson while he was in Tahiti in late 1888. 'Rahéro', unfortunately, baffled Stevenson's readers. Many critics hated *Ballads* – R. H. Hutton called it unintelligible; Cosmo Monkhouse, a failure<sup>7</sup> – and buyers ignored it. In a letter to his former schoolmate H. B. Baildon, Stevenson derided 'the average man at home' who was so 'sunk over the ears in Roman civilization' that he could not comprehend the legends of non-classical peoples, with the result that 'a tale like that of 'Rahéro' falls on his ears inarticulate'.<sup>8</sup> Responding, perhaps, to his disappointment with readers at home, Stevenson did not persevere in his attempt to write or translate in the ballad form. 'Song of Rahéro' was to be Stevenson's last ballad, as he turned to the lyric in *Songs of Travel* and to prose for the majority of his South Seas works. What Stevenson's Tahitian ballad provides, therefore, is a particular depiction of indigenous people and culture unique in Stevenson's oeuvre.

As Marjorie Stone has argued, Victorian poets and readers used the term 'ballad' in a 'broad and inclusive' manner;<sup>9</sup> for Stevenson, the genre's connotations seem more significant than its formal conventions.<sup>10</sup> Stevenson explicitly discussed the ballad in an 1874 book review in *Academy*, describing 'the object of the ballad' as 'quite at the other end of the scale from any of the realistic arts'.<sup>11</sup> For Stevenson, particular tropes, themes and characters are balladic, rather than particular rhythms or verse forms. Although he certainly would have associated the term 'ballad' with songs and poetry, his references to the ballad tend to emphasise the genre's conventional characters and plotlines: for instance, early in *Kidnapped*, shortly after finding himself on the *Covenant*, Mr. Riach describes David Balfour's disinherited posi-





tion as 'like a ballad', and, at the novel's conclusion, David sums up his situation by proclaiming that 'the beggar in the ballad had come home'.<sup>12</sup> Even at his Vailima estate in Samoa, Stevenson saw echoes of ballad types, noting in an August 1892 letter to Sidney Colvin that Bazett Haggard (brother of Rider, and Land Commissioner in Samoa) once overtook him on horse, 'shouting 'Ride, ride!' like a hero in a ballad' (*Letters* 7: 360).

*Weir of Hermiston*, Stevenson's unfinished final novel, is frequently discussed in criticism as a text highly influenced by the ballad.<sup>13</sup> In *Weir of Hermiston*, the third-person narrator, who looks back to the setting of the novel, imagines its protagonists as 'ballad heroes' displaced in prose:

Some century earlier the last of the minstrels might have fashioned the last of the ballads out of that Homeric fight and chase; but the spirit was dead [...] and the degenerate moorsmen must be content to tell the tale in prose, and to make of the 'Four Black Brothers' a unit after the fashion of the 'Twelve Apostles' or the 'Three Musketeers'.<sup>14</sup>

While David Balfour can picture himself to be a ballad hero, Hob, Gib, Clem, and Dand Elliott – the 'Four Black Brothers' of the narrator's imagined prose-ballad – belong to a time in which balladry is a thing of the past. It is unclear whether the distinction between *Kidnapped's* balladic-hero and *Weir's* proclamation of the death of balladry is due to the different settings of the two novels – David Balfour's narrative is set in 1751, and the death of Gilbert Elliot section of *Weir* in 1804<sup>15</sup> – or to a difference between the perspective of the teenage Balfour, who narrates his story, and the perspective of the backwards-looking omniscient narrator of *Weir*. While almost a decade separates the composition of these two texts, it does not seem to be the case that Stevenson's opinion of the cultural resonance of the ballad genre changed with time, as, within a year of the publication of





the earlier novel *Kidnapped*, Stevenson wrote an essay titled 'The Day After To-morrow' in which he posited a 'New-Old' future of rural rebellion and, potentially, 'a return of ballad literature'.<sup>16</sup> This suggests that Stevenson, like the narrator of his unfinished novel, believed that 'the last of the minstrels' had stopped composing ballads. Stevenson's *Ballads* are thus written in a dead genre.<sup>17</sup>

Stevenson also seems to have associated the genre of the ballad with Scotland, although this connection is not stated explicitly in his writing. The aforementioned ballad allusions come from novels set in Scotland, while the subtitles of 'Ticonderoga' and 'Heather Ale' indicate their origins lie in the West Highlands and Galloway, respectively. Stevenson drew comparisons between Scotland and the South Pacific in *In the South Seas* – Stevenson parallels Polynesian and Scots pronunciation (p. 13) and geography (p. 18) – and, as Jenni Calder has demonstrated, Stevenson's travels in the South Pacific islands caused him to look anew, and represent anew, his homeland.<sup>18</sup>

Again, however, it is the motif of death that unites Stevenson's descriptions of these two cultural groups. In his prefatory comments to *Underwoods*, Stevenson describes the Scottish poets that preceded him as having written in 'the ghosts of speech', the Scots that is 'our own dying language'; he laments, '[t]he day draws near when this illustrious and malleable tongue shall be quite forgotten'.<sup>19</sup> In parallel, in *In the South Seas*, the populations of a number of islands are described as being in rapid decline, with the result that 'pleasures are neglected, the dance languishes, the songs are forgotten' (p. 27). At one point, Stevenson posits 'a graveyard with its humble crosses' as 'the aptest symbol of the future' of the Marquesas (p. 102). In Polynesia, the metaphor of cultural 'death' is literalised: 'the houses are down, the people dead, their lineage extinct; and the sweepings and fugitives of distant bays and islands encamp upon their graves' (p. 58). In both cases – Polynesian and Scottish – the source of this death





is colonialism: ‘an alien authority enforced, the clans disarmed, the chiefs deposed, new customs introduced’ (p. 12). A pervasive theme in Stevenson’s interconnected discussions of Polynesian cultures, Scots language, and the ballad genre, is this inevitable decline towards death.

Stevenson’s equation of the ballad with ‘Homeric’ events in *Weir* is in keeping with a strain of classical scholarship that Simon Dentith has traced from Robert Wood’s *Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer* (1769), through Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842) and William Maginn’s *Homeric Ballads* (1850), and up to the First World War.<sup>20</sup> A number of nineteenth century translators, most prominently Frances Newman, rendered Homer’s *Odyssey* in ballad meter, believing that this rhythm closely replicated, to English-language speakers, the formal associations that dactylic hexameter would have held for the Ancient Greeks. The ballad and epic both held associations of ‘a supposedly unsophisticated ancestry,’<sup>21</sup> ‘a primitive sincerity’ or ‘a past simplicity’ (Miller pp. 29, 30) – what Dentith calls ‘epic primitivism’ (p. 4) – and, as Dentith has shown, because of these primitive associations, many nineteenth-century writers sought to source material for modern-day epics outside of England. As I have argued elsewhere, Stevenson’s use of an irregularly-stressed hexameter line in ‘Rahéro’ brings together the connotations of the classical epic with an attempt to replicate Tahitian rhythms in order to combat contemporary depictions of indigenous Polynesians as ahistorical; the poem is unique in Stevenson’s oeuvre in that it counters evolutionary anthropology and contains a political resonance that was radical for its time.<sup>22</sup>

In her essay ‘Trans-Victorians,’ Meredith Martin argues that Victorian poetry is ‘fundamentally “trans” in that it operates on a spectrum amid and between generic categories, not necessarily settling at any given moment into one or another’<sup>23</sup>. The ballad, a type of poem defined in the period more by content than by form,





is one of these ‘trans’ genres, with ‘ballad heroes’ appearing in Homer’s epics, in adventure novels, in Tahitian legends, and on horseback in Samoa. These ballad heroes, however, carry with them a historical alterity – a connotation of the primitive past.

*Ballads* contains two of Stevenson’s earliest Polynesian writings. Although it is the second poem in the collection, ‘Feast of Famine: Marquesan Manners’ was written first, while Stevenson and his family were staying in Papeete, the Tahitian capital.<sup>24</sup> The titular feast of the poem is a cannibalistic one, as red-eyed, kava-drunk priests call for the body of one of a pair of star-crossed lovers. Excited and distracted by their hunger for a young man’s flesh, the priest and villagers don’t heed warnings of an imminent attack by enemy raiders, and so they are readily defeated and consumed by their enemies. The descriptions of indigenous Marquesans in this poem – ‘Owlish and blinking creatures’; ‘ham-drooped’; ‘bestial’ and ‘swinish’<sup>25</sup> – resonate strongly with Stevenson’s description, in *In the South Seas*, of his first encounter with indigenous Marquesans, including ‘one, who sticks in my memory as something bestial, squatting on his hams in a canoe, sucking an orange and spitting it out again to alternate sides with ape-like vivacity’ (p. 8).

As his first literary production in the South Pacific, ‘Feast of Famine’ represents an attempt to marry the traveller’s first impressions of Polynesia with the tourist’s pre-existing ideas of what the South Pacific should look like.<sup>26</sup> As Graham Tulloch notes, ‘Stevenson did not approach the South Sea islands with a blank mind; he had already surrounded them with stories and ‘literary images’<sup>27</sup> – literary images from works like Herman Melville’s *Omoo: A Narrative of the South Seas*, which Stevenson carried with him on his travels and heavily annotated.<sup>28</sup> While the paratextual comments that follow ‘Feast of Famine’ note the ballad’s fictional status – it ‘rests upon no authority’ (p. 55) – the poem’s eight footnotes point to the accuracy of the ethnographic details in the poem: the priest’s eyes are ‘ruby-red’ because of





'the abuse of kava'; 'the one-stringed harp' is '[u]sually employed for serenades'; the final footnote points to a discrepancy between 'fact' and poetic license (p. 53). While these footnotes seem to suggest the careful observations of a traveller, the poem as a whole is indebted as much to its literary precedents as to Stevenson's own experience in Polynesia. Indeed Robert Hillier notes that a number of the ethnographic details that appear in the poem overlap with Melville's *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*,<sup>29</sup> while the dominance of character stereotypes – the noble and ignoble savage – attest to the influence of the literature that Stevenson consulted in advance of his Polynesian travels, including Charles Warren Stoddard's *South Sea Idylls*, Pierre Loti's *The Marriage of Loti*, and Alexander G. Findlay's *A Directory for the Navigations of the South Pacific*,<sup>30</sup> amongst others.<sup>31</sup>

With time, however, Stevenson's perspective shifted, and his characterization of Native people and cultures became more nuanced. While his letters of 1889 defend the quality of 'Feast of Famine' – it has more 'fire' than 'Rahéro', he tells Colvin (*Letters* 6: 239) – by 1891 he no longer writes of the Marquesan ballad. Calder has described the Pacific as 'Mr. Hyde territory'<sup>32</sup>; in 'Feast of Famine', Stevenson locates Edward Hyde in an 'Other' race, but, with time and experience, he comes to find that Hyde is, as in *The Strange Case*, not found in the Other but in the self. In his later works, Stevenson depicts the negative 'savage' traits evident in 'Feast of Famine' – greed, gluttony, disloyalty – in white men like 'The Beach of Falesá's' own strange Case, a trader who acts the 'gentleman' while manipulating local superstition in order to continue his monopoly on copra,<sup>33</sup> and *The Ebb-Tide's* Attwater, who, as Oliver Buckton has demonstrated, has only a veneer of Cambridge education and Christian manners covering an interiority ' "gone native," acting out his primitive and acquisitive impulses and setting free his aggression from moral restraint'.<sup>34</sup> In his later Pacific works, Stevenson's villains are not cannibals but rather those greedy white men whose lust for fortune parallels





the lust for flesh of the ballad's Native characters. While 'Feast of Famine' reinforces stereotypes of the noble and the ignoble savage, with 'Song of Rahéro' Stevenson sought to present a more complicated picture of 'savage psychology' (*Letters* 7: 187).

'Song of Rahéro', written a few months after 'Feast of Famine', nuances his first impressions, and strives for a 'high[er] degree of accuracy' in its representation of Polynesian people and cultures (p. 55). Whereas 'Feast of Famine' is described in Stevenson's notes to the poem as 'rest[ing] upon no authority' (p. 55), 'Song of Rahéro' is a 'native story' (p. 55), 'received from tradition' (p. 31) when Stevenson was in the rural Tahitian village of Tautira, between 28 October and 25 December 1888. 'Song of Rahéro' is the longest of a number of translations that Stevenson made of the literature of the Tevas.<sup>35</sup> These translations are unique amongst Stevenson's South Seas writing: unlike his Pacific letters, essays, short stories or journals, 'Song of Rahéro' and the associated shorter pieces are pre-contact narratives. The translations are also the only pieces in Stevenson's Polynesian oeuvre that are set in Tahiti and are concerned with Tahitian culture.<sup>36</sup> 'Song of Rahéro', as Rod Edmond notes, represented 'something quite new' in Stevenson's work.<sup>37</sup> As the manuscript for 'Rahéro' is no longer extant, its composition process can only be inferred; however, archival material held in the Beinecke Rare Books Library at Yale University suggests that Stevenson worked with Tahitian friends on the translation of related poems,<sup>38</sup> and in the notes to 'Rahéro' Stevenson claims that 'as many as five different persons have helped me with details' (p. 31).<sup>39</sup>

There is no way to determine how faithful Stevenson's translation was to the version of the story told to him by these five persons, nor should that proximity be the criterion by which Stevenson's poem is judged. On a theoretical level, as Linda Hutcheon notes, a text like 'Rahéro' is 'a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary'<sup>40</sup>; and, on a practical level, one would need to first construct an





‘original’ in order to have something against which to measure Stevenson’s poem. The purpose of describing, in detail, the kind of source material that Stevenson would have drawn from, then, is not to demand fidelity to that source material, but rather to consider how that source material was reworked in Stevenson’s text, and how he understood the oral texts he sought to preserve.

On October 16, 1890, Stevenson first met two Americans who were travelling through Polynesia: the writer and historian Henry Adams, and the artist John La Farge. Adams and La Farge called on the Stevensons in Apia a few times during their five-month stay in Samoa; when the two men said they would be leaving Samoa to visit Tahiti, Stevenson gave them letters of introduction that they could give to members of one of the elite families in Tahiti, the Tevas. It is because of Stevenson that, in early 1891, Adams and La Farge were able to form friendships with Ari’i Taimai, the elderly matriarch of the Teva clan, and her adult children, including Queen Marau,<sup>41</sup> who was the ex-wife of the French Governor King Pomare V, and her brother Tati Salmon, whom Stevenson called ‘the high chief of the Tevas’ (*Letters* 6: 239). Marau and Tati were fluent in English, French and Tahitian, and Tati had been educated in England, perhaps thanks in part to his British father, Alexander Salmon (Solomon); while Marau lived in the Tahitian capital, Papeete, Ari’i Taimai and Tati lived in Papara, about a three-hour wagon-drive south of Papeete. Although they also visited Ori a Ori in Tautira in March 1891, La Farge and Adams preferred Papara and their companions there; they were adopted into the Teva clan, as Stevenson had been, in a name-exchange ceremony in April 1891. Both Adams and La Farge wrote down Teva legends and poems told to them by Ari’i Taimai and her children: Adams privately printed *Tahiti: Memoirs of Ari’i Taimai* in 1901, and La Farge’s *Reminiscences of the South Seas*, which was compiled from diary entries and letters to his son, Bancel La Farge, was published posthumously in 1912.

In his discussion of the difficulties studying indigenous





Tahitian customs and folklore, Niel Gunson describes La Farge as ‘probably the more accurate observer’ of the two, and ‘more likely to be recording what the old chieftainess [Ari’i Taimai] really said’.<sup>42</sup> Gunson’s conclusions are supportable not only by a consideration of Adams’ alterations and omissions – Adams’ book has the pretence of being narrated only by Ari’i Taimai, and makes no mention of her daughter’s or his own interventions – but also by evidence from La Farge’s notebooks and sketchbooks, now held at the Yale University Art Gallery.<sup>43</sup> In *Reminiscences*, La Farge repeatedly states that he has not edited the words of his sources: ‘This is the story exactly as Queen Marau told it’; ‘I leave it as I first wrote it down’; ‘[The above contains] words that I do not quite understand, as given by Marau’.<sup>44</sup> Unlike Adams’ work, La Farge’s claims seem credible, as the rough notes in La Farge’s sketchbook attest: the closing section of the ‘Story of the Limits of the Texas’ in *Reminiscences*, for example, is almost a transcription of pages 31v, 32r and 32v of Sketchbook 8, save a few additions for grammatical comprehension. The strong similarity between the notebooks and the published account suggest a minimal degree of mediation on the part of La Farge and his publishers. Of course, Marau would have been self-editing the story, telling it as it could be received and understood by La Farge – in English, with some indeterminable degree of consideration for the conventions of English-language story-telling. Still, the apparent lack of editorial intervention on the part of La Farge’s text gives us access to what appear to be quotations from a woman who may have been one of Stevenson’s sources.

From La Farge’s text, a few inferences can be made about the kind of work that Stevenson translated into ‘The Song of Rahéro’. There appear to be a number of genres of Tahitian literature in the late nineteenth century, of which four rough categories are apparent: *himene*, or songs for performance; oratory, of which a part includes ‘methods of address [...] – that is to say, [...] the poems or words in order recited upon occasions of visiting, or





that serve as tribe cries and slogans' (La Farge, p. 349)<sup>45</sup>; poetry or 'chant[s] of praise' that commemorate historical events and personages (Edmond, p. 188); and mytho-historical legends, 'the story of the family and [...] its record' (La Farge, p. 349), told as a narrative, and roughly 'compatible' with 'western genres of the folk tale and fable' (Edmond, p. 188). 'Rahéro' seems to belong to this last category. What I call 'categories' should not be regarded as necessarily discrete, as figures in a legend can recite pieces of oratory, and songs can be performed based on legends or poems; this genre-mixing can be seen in Stevenson's poem when Rahéro pauses to compose 'a song of farewell to glory and strife' (p. 7). La Farge's *Reminiscences* include a number of stories that seem to belong to the fourth genre: 'Story of the Limits of the Texas', mentioned above (p. 323); 'Lament of Aromaiterai' (p. 331); 'The Origin of the Texas' (p. 353); 'The Story of Taurua or the Loan of a Wife' (p. 364). Given that Stevenson had also worked on a translation called 'Lament of Aromaiterai', and given that one of the figures who appears in Stevenson's poem likewise appear in La Farge's stories – Ahupu Vahine – it seems safe to conclude that the stories told to La Farge by Marau, Tati, Ari'i Taimai, and Moetia (Stevenson's 'Princess Moë') share qualities with the story that Stevenson translated into 'Song of Rahéro'. That is, like La Farge, Stevenson likely would have heard the story that he translated as 'Rahéro' as a linear narrative, following chronological ordering, in English, mixed with elements of oratory and poetry or song.

The fact that neither La Farge nor Adams included versions of the Rahéro story in their texts should not be considered surprising. In a *New York Times* article published within a month of Stevenson's death, La Farge claims that Stevenson gave to Adams the proof sheet of 'Song of Rahéro', and said they both 'had the pleasure of reading [the ballads] in the places which had inspired' their composition<sup>46</sup>; La Farge also refers to Stevenson's *Ballads* in his *Reminiscences* (p. 328). By the time that Tati





and Moetia were relating their stories to Adams and La Farge, they may have already received their copies of the first edition of *Ballads*.<sup>47</sup> Both parties – American and Tahitian – knew that Stevenson had worked on a version of this legend. There was, therefore, no need to have it translated again. It had already been recorded.

There is one other nineteenth-century text of the legend available in English, but it is as much a reconstruction of the story as is Stevenson's. This version of the legend, 'The Revenge of Maraa', is one of dozens of traditional stories detailed in Teuira Henry's *Ancient Tahiti*;<sup>48</sup> the collection also contains versions of the legends of Honorura<sup>49</sup> and Pai,<sup>50</sup> which are alluded to in 'Rahéro', and which Stevenson translated in prose for *Longman's Magazine*<sup>51</sup>. Although published in 1928, thirteen years after Henry's death, much of the work that went into *Ancient Tahiti* seems to have been done in the late 1890s and early 1900s, when Henry was living in Honolulu and was writing in publications like *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* – a journal that also published articles in English by Tati Salmon.

*Ancient Tahiti* is as much a construction of Tahitian legends as is Stevenson's 'Rahéro'. Of the five prefaces to the collection, none were written by Henry: three are dated after her death, by editors associated with the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, which published *Ancient Tahiti*; one is undated; and one is from 1848, the year after Henry's birth. The 1848 preface is by J. M. Orsmond, an English missionary who arrived in Tahiti in 1817, and who was Henry's grandfather. Orsmond's preface states: 'This folklore I have carefully revised with the aid of the best native scholars of all classes, and to it I have added the modern history of Tahiti from authentic sources and from my own observation' (p. i). Henry finished the project that her grandfather began, working, according to the third preface, from 'all her grandfather's personal notes and original manuscripts and completing it through her own minute researches' (p. iii);





the second preface explicitly labels this project as one of translation, noting that ‘it is fortunate that so much of the invaluable manuscript records made by Rev. J. M. Orsmond during the early part of the last century should have been preserved and that his granddaughter, Miss Teuira Henry, should possess the special qualifications required to translate and edit them’ (p. ii). The fifth preface describes Henry’s project as ‘completing and correcting the voluminous papers of her grandfather’ (p. v). From Orsmond’s ‘best native scholars’ to Henry’s ‘completing and correcting’, ‘translat[ing]’ and ‘edit[ing]’, to the four Bishop Museum editors’ unstated roles, there are multiple layers of construction in the text of Henry’s version of the Rahéro legend. It is, therefore, no more ‘authentic’ than Stevenson’s version.

As in ‘The Revenge of Maraa’, vengeance is the driving force behind the action in ‘Song of Rahéro’. In Stevenson’s version of the legend, the titular character plays a trick on his king – he replaces a tribute of fresh fish with the marred remains of his dinner – which leads to the execution of the trick’s inadvertent emissary, a ‘gullible, simple, and kind’ man named Tāmatéa (p. 5). Tāmatéa’s mother seeks retribution for her son’s death, and, enlisting the help of a local king, Hiopa, she traps Rahéro and his tribe – ‘forty score’ people (p. 18) – in a building that is then set on fire. Rahéro alone escapes, and, with his skin still charred from the flames, he finds and kills a fisherman. Rahéro takes the dead man’s boat and his wife, sailing with her back ‘to the empty lands / And smokeless hearths of my people’, to repopulate his tribe (p. 30).

‘Rahéro’ is thus a story of spiralling revenge: first the nameless king kills Tāmatéa for presenting an improper offering, not knowing that the insult was caused by Rahéro; then, Tāmatéa’s mother and Hiopa’s tribe conspire to kill the Tevas; finally, Rahéro murders the spear-fisher, who had been a member of Hiopa’s tribe. At these moments, explicit calls for revenge-taking are foregrounded. For instance, as Tāmatéa’s mother watches







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

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

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





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

The tone of '*Song of Rahéro*' is thus markedly different from that of Stevenson's later depictions of indigenous Polynesian people. While *In the South Seas* presents village after village and island after island as quiet, still, vacant, where 'sleep and silence and companies of mosquitoes brood upon the towns' (p. 156), the people and places of '*Rahéro*' are passionately, even violently, charged with life. '*Rahéro*' is the poem of the founding of a people; Stevenson's subsequent works focus on decline and death. But while pride and passion drive the characters in '*Rahéro*', Stevenson blends into this depiction an ominous undertone that aligns the ballad with some of the overarching themes of his later texts. While '*Song of Rahéro*' is a kind of origin story – the tribe that *Rahéro* sires, the *Tevas*, is the tribe into which Stevenson was adopted; one of its princes, *Ori a Ori*, is the dedicatee of the poem – Stevenson infuses the legend with an undertone of fatalism. As an extinct genre, the ballad seems an appropriate mode for narrating the legends of a race perceived by Stevenson to be dying. Just as the ballad is a dead genre, so too are the *Tevas* already





doomed, already facing an end that Stevenson saw as inevitable. ‘Song of Rahéro’ closes with Rahéro telling the woman he has kidnapped, ‘Before your mother was born, the die of to-day was thrown / And you selected’ (p. 30); the ballad form reinforces the idea that the same fatalism holds for the descendants of the poem’s central figure. This idea of predetermined, inevitable decline echoes through into *In the South Seas*, as in, for instance, the epigram to this essay, in which Stevenson describes ‘the day already numbered when there should be no more Beretani’ (p. 22).

The conventional way of reading the passage from *In the South Seas* that opens this essay is to see it as typically British or Western displacement. Monica Bungaro argues that the ‘widespread belief in the extinction of other cultures was in part a displaced expression of fear of the extinction of European culture’<sup>52</sup>; John Kucich claims that ‘encounters with decaying cultures often produced melancholic reflections on the inevitability of British imperial demise’<sup>53</sup>; Rod Edmond says that ‘[t]his obsession of Western observers with the death of other cultures was, in part, a displaced expression of fear of the extinction of their own’<sup>54</sup>. What these critics fail to point out, however, is that, in this passage, Stevenson identifies himself not as ‘British’ (or ‘European’ or ‘Western’) but as ‘Beretani.’ That is, he sees himself as part of a group defined by intercultural encounter. To move in this space is, Stevenson suggests, to find yourself translated – from British to Beretani – and in parallel to have your fate yoked to the fate of the people who have named you. ‘Song of Rahéro,’ as one of Stevenson’s earliest Polynesian works, is thus a prescient text; by translating this indigenous Tahitian legend into a ballad, Stevenson emphasises how colonialism decimates all cultures. What Stevenson mourns is not the demise of the British empire, as Kucich suggests, but rather the multiple demises that are the unavoidable result of empire – the deaths of individuals, of cultural traits and stories, of entire genres. This is not to say





that Stevenson's encounters with indigenous Polynesians aren't problematic – as 'Feast of Famine' and *In the South Seas* both show. Rather, my contention is that the critical assumptions that are made about late Victorian representations of indigenous people ought to account for the ways in which translation reveals counter-currents: affinity rather than displacement; empathy rather than narcissism.

Ballads, Romana Huk argues, 'come haunted by what they no longer *can* be; they remain paradoxically occupied – *especially* in updated, single-authored, printed "literary ballad" versions – by their collective past. ... [T]he ballad becomes modern poetry's form *for* the forgotten/familiar, or perhaps the "cultural uncanny"<sup>55</sup> Stevenson's ballad 'comes haunted' by the echoes of a culture that Stevenson perceived to be in unavoidable decline; its critical and popular rejection, however, suggests that the Anglophone reading public did not feel an uncanny attraction to 'Rahero,' which meant that this ballad, at least, did not perpetuate, Teva-like, a cycle of rebirth and revenge.

#### NOTES

- 1 From the pidgin for 'British' or 'Britain,' 'Beretani' seems to have been applied somewhat broadly; Fanny Stevenson, an American, describes a moment in which she is called 'Beretani *fafine*' – Beretani woman. See Roslyn Jolly's introduction to *The Cruise of the Janet Nichol Among the South Sea Islands: A Diary by Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), p. 36.
- 2 Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, ed. by Neil Rennie (London and New York: Penguin, 1998), pp. 22-23, henceforth cited in the text.
- 3 I describe 'Rahéro' as a translation rather than any other term – adaptation, remediation, appropriation – because of Stevenson's paratextual commentary on the poem. In his dedication, to Ori a Ori, Stevenson wrote: 'This story of your country and your clan / [...] I made in English' (p. 3). In introducing his endnotes to the text,





he claimed that he had ‘not consciously changed a single feature’ of the story, of which, seemingly paradoxically, he had ‘heard from end to end [in] two versions’ (p. 31). The contradiction here set up – the story is unchanged, but it exists in two versions; the story is unchanged, but it is in another language – thus accords with a central paradox of translation, ‘the clash of two assumptions with which we are familiar: “all translations differ from their sources” and “they are, or at least ought to be, the same”’ – in Matthew Reynolds, *The Poetry of Translation* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 25.

- 4 Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), p. 4, henceforth cited in text.
- 5 Although the manuscripts for the ballad have been lost, related manuscripts, translating other Tahitian poems, include writing in both Tahitian and English. Sometimes the Tahitian writing is in Stevenson’s hand, and sometimes it is in another person’s hand. See note 39, below.
- 6 Jolly argues that Stevenson’s texts depict ‘unofficial colonialism’ in the Pacific, ‘created by traders and missionaries operating outside imperial boundaries’ (p. 157). See Roslyn Jolly, ‘Piracy, Slavery, and the Imagination of Empire in Stevenson’s Pacific Fiction.’ *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35 (2007), 157-173.
- 7 R. H. Hutton, unsigned review, *Spectator*, 3 January 1891, lxvi, 17-18, and Cosmo Monkhouse, review, *Academy*, 31 January 1891, xxxix, 108-9. Both in *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* ed. by Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 369-371 and pp. 372-374.
- 8 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), vol. 7, p. 187, henceforth cited in the text.
- 9 Marjorie Stone, ‘A Cinderella Among the Muses: Barrett Browning and the Ballad Tradition’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 21 (1993), 233-68 (p. 238).
- 10 Ballad scholars throughout the nineteenth century tended to define the ballad in terms of its content rather than its metrical structure. See Michael Cohen, ‘Popular Ballads: Rhythmic Remediations in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Jason Hall (Athens: Ohio UP, 2001), 267-94 (p. 205), and Cristanne Miller, ‘Dickinson and the Ballad’,



- Genre* 45.1 (Spring 2012), 29-55 (p. 34), henceforth cited in text.
- 11 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Review: The Ballads and Songs of Scotland', *Academy*, 8 Aug 1874, 142-3 (p. 142).
  - 12 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped*, ed. by Barry Menikoff (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Press, 1999), p. 64, p. 272.
  - 13 For example, see Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 196; Antony Hasler, 'Frontier Creatures: The Imaginary Characters of *Weir of Hermiston*', *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 2 (Spring-Summer 2007); Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 168-9.
  - 14 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston*, ed. by Catherine Kerrigan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995), p. 58.
  - 15 As Catherine Kerrigan has noted, the reference to Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* (1844) is an anachronism.
  - 16 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Day After To-morrow' *The Contemporary Review* 51 (April 1887), 472-79 (p. 479).
  - 17 The idea of the ballad as a dead genre was not unique to Stevenson at the close of the nineteenth century. Thomas Hardy, for instance, claimed that the ballad was 'slain at a stroke by [...] London comic songs'. See Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Michael Millgate (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 25.
  - 18 Jenni Calder, 'The Eyeball of the Dawn: Can We Trust Stevenson's Imagination?' in *Robert Louis Stevenson Reconsidered: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. by William B. Jones, Jr. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003), pp. 7-20.
  - 19 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Underwoods* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1887), p. xii, xi. Roslyn Jolly has also noted the connection between Stevenson's writings on the Scots language in the introduction to *Underwoods* and his Tahitian translation, noting that "'The Song of Rahéro" is itself haunted by "the ghosts of speech"' (p. 21). See Roslyn Jolly, 'Stevenson's Pacific Transnarratives' in *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 9 (Autumn/Winter 2013), pp. 5-25.
  - 20 Simon Dentith, *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), henceforth cited in text.
  - 21 Joseph Bristow, 'Whether "Victorian" Poetry: A Genre and Its Period' *Victorian Poetry* 42.1 (Spring 2004), 81-109, p. 99.



- 22 Letitia Henville, “‘The Walter Scott of Tahiti’: Robert Louis Stevenson’s Ballad Translation”, *Literature Compass* 9.7 (July 2012), 489-501.
- 23 Meredith Martin, “Trans-Victorians: Poetics, Translation, English.” *Literature Compass* 9.5 (May 2012), 380-386, p. 380.
- 24 The Morgan Library autograph manuscript is dated 5-16 October 1888.
- 25 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Ballads* (New York: Scribner’s, 1890), pp. 52-3, henceforth cited in the text.
- 26 Stevenson’s use of the word ‘tourist’ in *In the South Seas* is usually pejorative, as in, for instance, his comment that his acquaintance with the Marshall Islands is ‘no more than that of a tourist’ (p. 70), or his reference to ‘a Highland hamlet, quite out of reach of any tourist’ (p. 15). In his commentary on ‘Feast of Famine’, Stevenson describes himself as ‘a traveller’ (p. 55).
- 27 Graham Tulloch, ‘Stevenson and Islands: Scotland and the South Pacific’, in *Robert Louis Stevenson Reconsidered: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. by William B. Jones, Jr. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003), 68-82 (p. 76).
- 28 See Robert Irwin Hillier, *The South Seas Fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 10.
- 29 See Hillier, pp. 61-2.
- 30 In describing his first encounter with Marquesans in *In the South Seas*, Stevenson states that Findlay’s ‘Directory (my only guide) was full of timid cautions’ (p. 9).
- 31 See Hillier, pp. 10-13.
- 32 See Calder, p. 16.
- 33 Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘The Beach of Falesá’, in *Robert Louis Stevenson and ‘The Beach of Falesá’: A Study in Victorian Publishing*, ed. by Barry Menikoff (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1984), 113-86 (p. 117).
- 34 Oliver S. Buckton, *Cruising with Robert Louis Stevenson: Travel, Narrative, and the Colonial Body* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2007), p. 173.
- 35 Stevenson only published two other Teva translations: – ‘Of the Making of Pai’s Spear’ and ‘Honoura and the Weird Women’ were both published in Andrew Lang’s column ‘At the Sign of the Ship’ in *Longman’s Magazine* 19 (1892), pp. 568-72. However, a number





of unpublished translations – including poems that were redrafted a number of times – are held in the Edwin J. Beinecke Collection of Robert Louis Stevenson at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. These include ‘Another [Song]’ (McKay Item No. 5967), ‘Lament of Aromaiterai’ (McKay Item No. 6485), ‘Let Us Come and Join the Clan of the Tevas’ (McKay Item No. 6514), ‘Song of Clan Departure’ (McKay Item No. 6885), ‘Song of Tefari [sic]’ (McKay Item Nos. 6886 and 6888), and ‘Song of the Two Chiefs’ (McKay Item No. 6893). Some of the manuscripts contain writing in Tahitian in a hand other than Stevenson’s (for example, see ‘Let Us Come and Join the Clan of the Tevas’), while others contain both Tahitian and English writing in Stevenson’s hand (for example, see ‘Song of Clan Departure’).

- 36 While the first two chapters of *The Ebb-Tide* focus on Robert Herrick’s arrival in Tahiti, his is not a specifically Tahitian story; while Herrick lands on Papeete, the beach could just have easily have been any one of the Samoan, Hawaiian, or Gilbert Islands (see Edmond, p. 180). Indigenous Tahitians do not figure prominently in the story, and the setting soon shifts to the uncharted ‘New Island’.
- 37 Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 186, henceforth cited in text.
- 38 For a summary of the Beinecke Collection material, including excerpts from letters exchanged between Stevenson and members of the Salmon family, see Ben R. Finney, ‘Robert Louis Stevenson’s Tahitian Poems’ *Journal de la Société des océanistes* 20.20 (1964), 92-96.
- 39 There is no critical consensus as to whom Stevenson collaborated with on the composition of ‘Song of Rahéro’. Fanny Stevenson’s ‘Preface to the Biographic Edition of *Underwoods* and *Ballads*’ suggests that, while Princess Moë – a friend and nurse to Stevenson, and the dedicatee of his poem ‘To an Island Princess’, from *Songs of Travel* – first explained the story, it was ‘afterwards corroborated and enriched by the high chief Tati [Salmon]’, who was Moë’s brother (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905, p. 82). Finney (p. 94) and Edmond (p. 186) claim Princess Moë was Stevenson’s prime source for ‘Rahéro’. Vanessa Smith suggests that the Tahitian handwriting on the manuscript pages held in the Beinecke Collection may belong to Ori a Ori, the sub-chief who lent his house to the





Stevensons during their stay in Tautira – *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-Century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p. 142. Finney suggests that some of the handwriting on these manuscripts may have belonged to Queen Marau, sister of Tati and Moë, with whom Stevenson exchanged letters after his departure from Tahiti (pp. 95-6). Ori a Ori, Princess Moë, Queen Marau, and Tati Salmon: these are possibly four of Stevenson's 'five different persons'.

- 40 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 6.
- 41 Johanna Marau Ta'aroa a Tepau Salmon, called Queen Marau by Stevenson, La Farge and Adams.
- 42 Niel Gunson, 'A Note on the Difficulties of Ethnohistorical Writing, with Special Reference to Tahiti', *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 72.4 (Dec 1963), 415-9 (p. 416).
- 43 John La Farge, 'Sketchbook 8: Tahiti, 1891' in *John La Farge's South Seas Sketchbooks, 1890-1891* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2010) <<http://artgallery.yale.edu/lafarge/#/sketchbooks>> [accessed 10 April 2012].
- 44 John La Farge, *Reminiscences of the South Seas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1912), pp. 323, 364, and 371, henceforth cited in text.
- 45 Teuira Henry's 'The Revenge of Maraa' supports La Farge's depiction of 'methods of address' oratory, describing a group of men from Tairapu as travelling to Maraa and being met as follows: 'Soon they were met and cordially greeted by the inhabitants, who had been on the lookout for their visit for several days, and their orator Te-fa'ahira (Make-bashful) [...] greeted them' (pp. 243-4); when the groups come together to feast, 'the orator Te-fa'ahira stood up in their midst' and gave a speech, which was replied to by 'Tavi, the orator of the guests' (p. 245). The orators' speeches are the only parts of the text provided in both English and Tahitian.
- 46 John La Farge, 'Stevenson's Life at Samoa', *The New York Times*, 30 December 1894.
- 47 See Hillier, p. 67.
- 48 See Hillier, p. 65; Jolly also discusses the differences between Stevenson's ballad and Henry's version, suggesting that '[p]erhaps one should not speak of Stevenson deviating from his sources, but of





- tradition diverging and deviating within itself' (p. 7). See also Roslyn Jolly, 'Stevenson's Pacific Transnarratives.'
- 49 Teuira Henry, *Ancient Tahiti* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1928), pp. 516-36.
- 50 Henry, pp. 578-591, henceforth cited in text.
- 51 In her Introduction to the Oxford edition of Stevenson's collected South Seas short fiction, *South Sea Tales*, Roslyn Jolly suggests that the translation is so true to the original that the *Longman's* stories should not count as authored by Stevenson: 'I do not count as works by Stevenson the "Two Tahitian Legends" published over his name in Andrew Lang's column "At the Sign of the Ship" in *Longman's Magazine* 19 (1892), 568-72, in which Stevenson has merely "slavishly reproduced" local tales told him in Tahiti (p. 571)' (1996: p. x, footnote 3).
- 52 Monica Bungaro, 'Cross-Cultural Encounters in *In the South Seas* and *Heart of Darkness*', in *Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad: Writers of Transition*, ed. by Linda Dryden, Stephen Arata and Eric Massie (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech UP, 2009), 92-108. (p. 93.)
- 53 John Kucich, *Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy, and Social Class*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), p. 7.
- 54 Rod Edmond, 'Home and Away: Degeneration in Imperialist and Modernist Discourse', in *Modernism and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), pp. 39-63 (p. 42).
- 55 Romana Huk, 'On "the Beat Inevitable": The Ballad' in *A Companion to Poetic Genre*, ed. by Erik Martiny (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2011), pp. 117-138. Emphasis in original.





## The Speak House

David Howard

How am I to tell you the terrible news that my beloved son was suddenly called home last evening.

At six o'clock he was well, hungry for dinner, and helping Fanny to make a mayonnaise sauce; when suddenly he put both hands to his head and said, 'Oh, what a pain!' and then added, 'Do I look strange?' Fanny said no, not wishing to alarm him, and helped him to the hall, where she put him in the nearest easy-chair. She called for us to come, and I was there in a minute; but he was unconscious before I reached his side, and remained so for two hours, till at ten minutes past 8pm, all was over.

– Margaret Isabella Balfour Stevenson to her sister,  
Jane Whyte Balfour, December 4, 1894.

*RLS is the speaker inside The Speak House. I have taken the common phrase 'my life flashed before my eyes' as a signpost. The feverish tumble of impressions that is this poem occurs in the final two hours of Stevenson's life, either between his words 'Oh what a pain!' and 'Do I look strange?' or after he lost consciousness. Tagaloa-lagi will not tell me more.*

Fines: \$ 1 dancing  
\$ 5 weapons (concealed)  
\$15 murder  
\$25 stealing  
\$50 lying





At Maraki old men value the word  
yet nautical charts are made of sticks: straight,  
curved, caught by a yellow cowry  
that is an island. Wind-stick, current-stick point  
the coast. One sail is two days, two sails one.

If it rains they say a star sparkles. The tide swells  
like an accordion playing hymns, God  
the Father asks after his family  
without waiting for an answer.  
The trophies of the dead questions the living beg,

far more than weapons are concealed.  
Instead of a seagull its shadow on the shallows.  
Each moment is green, the green grows  
darker as our years float past Maraki  
towards an uncharted reef – or Treasure Island.

Each white sail is a low cloud, surreal  
the shout from the mizzen shrouds:  
'One more step, Mr. Hands, and I'll blow your brains out!  
Dead men don't bite, you know.'  
Fine:     \$15

At Vailima races are more mixed than crops  
but less trouble to cultivate.  
'Lord, that man does not belong  
yet.' We nail civilization into place  
with memory, then forget it. *Pālagi*

tins of kerosene, barrels of salt beef  
lean against palms; we weed the yard  
and call that purpose. I expect a pet dodo  
to pick at the dark tapa cloth





above the bed from Hoffnung's.

'Here, you boy, what you do there?  
You no get work? You go  
find Simile; he give you work. Peni, you tell this boy  
he go find Simile; suppose Simile  
no give him work, you tell him go way.'

The view is more than *Pālagi* can see.  
Rich, we invest in real estate;  
the poor give themselves to the real.  
They plant at full moon, otherwise  
the fruit will be small, it will be ours.

Perfume of bruised peas, sweet  
corn, lima beans around a fowl house  
caulked with guano like a German boot.  
The colonist watches for that golden egg from Aesop.  
An axe is on the stone.

'If horse go lame, bind bacon fat  
it faster than star. Dye mane with lime, trick devil  
it already god.' Globe artichokes grow  
where hooves were planted on the path home.  
The smell of old leather is not a saddle,

it is a whip. Surrounded by mummy apples  
a pullet with its heart torn out –  
is it a pullet? The name is wasted.  
'Too many devil down here...'  
The alphabet cannot contain them.

At Onoatoa the missionary's child called  
*Painkiller*. Simplicity is cynical, a slight





inspiration through the nostrils.  
Figs, limes, bananas are articles of faith.  
Our congregation sings in a thatched birdcage.

The haggard and hard stagger over psalms  
but innocents have perfect pitch.  
(Heaven is the home where tired children go;  
they stroke one another's hands, following  
the heartline. Then they sleep forever.)

The Catholic mission is coral, roof tied to sky  
with sennit and extinct birds' feathers.  
The native girls, their brilliant dresses  
flower on the cliff. Yesterday they slipped on clean shifts,  
clouds were white – now the horizon's hem

frays like servants' nerves: 'Bullimakaw  
too bloody hot by roadside, too much  
shine in sky.' Out of place  
the shouts of the damned, who are frantic  
unloading their cargo of bones

at Saluafata Harbour. The soul trader learns from weather,  
he accepts good and bad, questioning  
what's constant. When those native girls are most tempting  
in early evening, sailors go on the promise of a kiss  
yet spend midnight alone

with their eyes open, afraid to love  
too much. 'Look at me – I no got belly  
allee same bullimakaw!' Squall succeeds squall  
before the harbour is calm, the pilot sees  
clear to the next world...





The dream that is stronger than death is common;  
it does not belong to the feverish solitary.  
It is literature, milk sprayed from a priestess' mouth  
over the corpses of political appointees, business leaders  
and those whose lungs they coated with tar.

The dream that is stronger than death is owned  
by the Samoan who kneads dough, Peni. It is owned  
by the poor white who breaks bread  
to share with his brother, Simile. It is owned  
by the half-caste who untangles the net of words –

the eel of belief is caught in the net, its tail sustains  
more than one True Church. With its mooring rope  
shorter than an eel's tail,  
where will this white man's boat go? Tagaloa-lagi,  
don't borrow mystery from Christians like me.

The sea takes the raindrop because it must;  
that does not mean each soul is predestined.  
My hunting dogs don't bark because they want to know  
right from wrong – they bark for meat.  
The leaves do not rustle because they are uneasy.

If the ship's pilot has lice in his hair, then wind ruffles it  
regardless – wind has no regard for society, it is an anarchist  
like Rimbaud in Java, Gauguin in Tahiti.  
And words are shifty clouds, they replace what was  
solid, they refuse to mean what we think yet leave us

free. The rebel chief Mataafa's men dream of saying  
whatever comes into their heads, godly  
when they step onto the crate of spirits.  
Perhaps words are nocturnal, it is safer to travel





when informants can't follow...

Look, on Apia's side streets there is censer's smoke.  
An ironist, the gendarme leads his horse.  
He will arrest happiness, it is a vagrant  
on the corner of two centuries.  
The priest pretends we must choose right or wrong.

Brothers fight on opposite sides;  
it does not matter who wins –  
each keeps his property. Time is lost.  
How to account for it?  
By straining kava into a bowl.

The worth of a servant's work is fixed,  
the worth of a white man's grace is fixed  
by blood. Dawn arresting, always  
the shackle of earth's curve fits an ankle.  
Thigh-bones are collected for the life to come, here

pubescent girls understand what blood can do.  
The seven acts of mercy are sexual.  
They cannot be buried by dogma.  
We remember living, we do not  
remember living without dirty words.

With the open mouth of a wooden god  
an old man knows if your fish is caught by the lower jaw  
your girl shares her bed with a ghost.  
After she pours cold water, her nipples.  
'Are you kind?' Nod but say nothing, the nothing

that must be said. If she grows heavy  
blame the angel of the annunciation, shirt





tucked firmly in a fresh pair of trousers.

– That is the young sailor’s credo.

His coat black as lava, smile tight as a jailor’s handshake

Captain Smollett walks with Squire Trelawney

on the leeward side, out of the wind

but the sea is a hacksaw

and its teeth wear the leg of a cook, Long John Silver.

‘He’d look remarkably well from a yard-arm, sir.’

The bloody moon could turn yellow as a condemned man

when warders bring the priest. We hope the moon will go on

beyond knowing, dreary, yet somehow lovable.

The body doubles because the heart, my God!

And the head cannot mark eternity.

Seas are light despite the dark above, the dark  
below. Sure enough, the sun.

We see the pilot surrounded by white

bones. He must be the afterlife

of the child who used to skip stones. Let be, let be

poetry of the inconsequential, hope that wraps

a birthday present. From Mulinuu Point to Matautu

the voices of petitioners break in waves:

‘We do not understand.’ Silent swimmers

let the sun mess with their shadows

near shore. Between sea and swamp that will be sea

*the* people, 70% water. They sail

inside the reef, through purple

passages from travel guides. Ink stains

my outstretched hand. It is dark.





'Me too muchee 'fraid, no sleep, no can  
alleetime same cold.' Blinds woven  
coconut fronds, light  
broken coconut fronds. *Yo ho ho.*  
'Too many devil down here,

they make stink from mussaoui, ylang-ylang  
hide salmon, devil like  
with blood young woman.' *And a bottle of rum.*  
Tumble down Mount Vaea  
wrapped in Queen Victoria's damask...

Mrs Stevenson senior says she 'will not be left  
to pray with only servants.' I am afraid  
that distinction is not made in other quarters.  
Mother, my head is a rotten nut  
crumbling under the pressure of Edinburgh's air.

I see that Lutheran, Lucifer, dries tobacco on a rack  
improvised from crosscut saws. *Yo ho ho.*  
And there is the centre of Europe, the mirror.  
'War come sure now; that no thunder, that  
devils fight up in sky. Mean war come quick.'

Mataafa's knife scrapes the rust from cartridges.  
Laupepa's government will be a basket of heads.  
Starlight strikes the dead and the living  
with equal intensity, flesh being what it always was.  
Flies shine where stars fail

in the join of bandage and ulcer, my head  
spins with the world that is beyond  
me, there must be something I'm not  
doing. Dawn is dusk, fire somer-





saults Vailima blistering Meissen from Dresden from Edinburgh

here. Good God there must be something.  
No pilot can see over the horizon no  
Samoan lock my father in a light house  
so I float alone in the row boat  
Treasure Island nowhere. Mataafa told me:

'If man no shadow no man.' I go west,  
leave my youth on the east coast  
stored between two canoes  
beyond high tide. I run over  
the hill where Mataafa's ancestors guard clouds.

As a boy in Edinburgh the sky was always  
falling on my head. Pollarded  
trees hollow as they grow. Tagaloa-lagi,  
I don't feel a thing, breathless  
running after my shadow: that is what writing is.

If you spit a cherry stone then don't expect victory  
in a wrestling contest, you have to practice  
your hold on a shadow.  
A rusty fishhook is not a lot of use;  
cast until your arm is a shiver. Cast farther than this world

I told my self, in Rome the basilica has broken its shoulder.  
In Wittenberg there are ninety-five shards.  
In Upolu there is a fisherman's story,  
the northerly that lifts roofs and eyes  
to the charred sky. For God's sake pay attention.

*Yo ho ho.* Send ahead your voice, when it goes faint  
it can rest in an empty water-trough. There are no horses left.





Laupepa's warriors spooked them, then the warriors' ghosts.  
It may be too late to reinforce 'the window of the soul'  
with shutters made from local timber. 'Devils fight up in sky.'

Storm, conjunct roar of our gods,  
go to France, find Loia.  
If he is not there search the visible world  
then the invisible world  
for our brother. Carry him back by high tide.

Storm, if there is an abscess on Loia's leg  
don't lance it with a dirty fishbone  
or poison will spread through his body and beyond,  
your clouds will become pustular,  
bursting over Samoa instead of Tonga...

It is not as if an island rises from the sea  
to accept the dead, Sonate pathétique  
honouring a mix of animal scent and sandalwood.  
It is not as if the flower behind a widow's ear  
listens for the scent of her ancestor, for

dripping lianas. Yet it has come true,  
the promised land is underfoot.  
Sun stuck on the treetops, love  
tangible in the detail of being  
here, firstborn and fresh

as every morning. I expect to see  
a Christmas tree, hand-made stars  
hanging over bags of sweets  
from an Edinburgh confectioner.  
I expect my father will arrive, laughing.





Once Mataafa asked: 'You believe  
things are in English?'  
I replied, 'English is the lichen  
crumbling that rock it tries to hold  
in the name of...'

When I went into silence, then  
he could follow me. Everything made  
makes sense. When I said  
nothing, he saw the thing  
rather than my failure to say it.

The wave never regrets breaking.  
It was made to, and you and me...  
We must give up what we cannot have  
for ever, let the word go  
its own way, the way of the echo.

When we stop so does the road.  
Except that Vailima is real  
when we're not there, however  
little breath comforts our lungs  
when we hear the last rites

if we hear them, if we follow  
the light house on the sea  
beyond the bar, beyond  
all possibility of *an house not made...*  
And then the wave, and then.



## NOTES

This poem orients itself from *Our Samoan Adventure* by Fanny and Robert Louis Stevenson, edited by Charles Neider (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956); *The Cruise of the 'Janet Nichol' Among the South Sea Islands: A Diary by Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson* (Chatto & Windus, 1915), also the later edition edited by Roslyn Jolly (UNSW Press, 2003); *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Tusitala edition, William Heinemann, 1923-4); and *Miscellanea*, Volume 26, *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926). Swollen with detail of RLS's life at Vailima from December 1889 to December 1894, the poem is necessarily shaped by the power plays that divided Samoa then.

At the time that Stevenson settled in the islands the government, while technically Samoan, was actually in the control of the three great powers which had interests there, and which had come to a determination at a convention in Berlin some few years previously. These powers were Germany, England, and the United States. Under the convention Malietoa Laupepa, previously deposed by the Germans, was reinstated as king, and Mataafa, a popular kinsman with considerable claims to the throne, who was especially obnoxious to the Germans, was overlooked and left in the position of pretender. The distance between the kinsmen grew as native feelings were stirred under the influence of the occupying powers, and war was continually threatened by both camps.

In Stevenson's judgement a native war would be calamitous and would only profit the white officials manipulating the scene. He believed that Laupepa and Mataafa would willingly live in peace if permitted to do so, and it was his notion that Mataafa ought to be given a very high post in the government, to which he believed Laupepa would not object.' Charles Neider, Introduction, *Our Samoan Adventure*, pp. 20-21.

*Maraki*: properly Marakei, now part of the Gilbert Islands, Kiribati; 'the neighbouring island of Maraki, distant about sixty miles' from Butaritari (Makin) Atoll. Lloyd Osbourne, from Nellie Van De Grift Sanchez, *The Life of Mrs Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 155 (Chatto & Windus, 1920).

'One more step, Mr Hands, and I'll blow your brains out! Dead men don't bite, you know.' –*Treasure Island*, Chapter 26, 'Israel Hands'.



*Vailima*: In December 1889 the Stevensons ‘purchased ground for what was to become their estate, Vailima, and left orders to have a patch of jungle cleared and a temporary dwelling built.’ – Charles Neider, Introduction, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 12.

*Palagi*: *Papāalagi*, *Pāalagi* is the Samoan term for foreigners, especially those of European origin.

*Simile*: ‘Henry is a chiefling from Savaii; I once loathed, I now like and – pending fresh discoveries – have a kind of respect for Henry. He does good work for us; goes among the labourers, bossing and watching; helps Fanny; is civil, kindly, thoughtful; *O si sic semper!* But will he be “his sometime self throughout the year”? Anyway, he has deserved of us, and he must disappoint me sharply ere I give him up.’ – RLS, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 32, note 14.

*Peni*: one of the native servants at Vailima. ‘Peni, you tell this boy he go find Simile; suppose Simile no give him work, you tell him go ‘way. I no want him here. That boy no good.– Peni (from the distance in reassuring tones), “All right, sir!”’ RLS, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 57.

*the golden egg of Aesop*: Aesop’s fable (87) as translated by the Reverend G.F. Townsend: ‘A cottager and his wife had a Hen that laid a golden egg every day. They supposed that the Hen must contain a great lump of gold in its inside, and in order to get the gold they killed it. Having done so, they found to their surprise that the Hen differed in no respect from their other hens. The foolish pair, thus hoping to become rich all at once, deprived themselves of the gain of which they were assured day by day.’

*Onoatua Island*: the ‘Janet Nichol’ put in there on 14 July 1890.

*Bullimakaw*: ‘In the midst of my most troublous moments three natives appeared and said they had a bullimakaw for sale. The name seemed very appropriate, for it was very difficult to guesswhether the animal was a bull or a cow.’ – Fanny Stevenson, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 37.

*Saluafata Harbour*: between Solosolo and Lufi-lufi, on the same coast as Apia.

*Tagaloa-lagi*: the Samoan supreme deity, creator of the universe.

*Mataafa*: ‘Mataafa has declared himself king and has made a stand with an immense number of followers.’ – Fanny Stevenson, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 116; ‘While I was away, Lloyd [Osbourne]



accompanied Mrs. Moors to Malie on a visit to Mataafa. The consuls tried hard to prevent Lloyd going. He was charmed with Mataafa, as everyone but his political enemies seems to be.' – Ibid, p. 127.

*Apia*: 'Apia, the port and mart, is the seat of the political sickness of Samoa.' RLS, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 41.

*By straining kava into a bowl*: A fermented drink made from the root of a pepper plant and widely used on ceremonial occasions. 'the virgins of the village attend to prepare the kava bowl and entertain them with the dance.' – RLS, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 41.

*Captain Smollet walks with Squire Trelawney*: the captain and the owner respectively of the schooner Hispaniola in *Treasure Island*.

*'He'd look remarkably well from a yard-arm, sir'*: – *Treasure Island*, Chapter 12, 'Council of War'.

*'beyond knowing, dreary, yet somehow lovable.'*: 'Mr Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance, that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long, dusty, dreary, and yet somehow loveable.' – *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Chapter 1, 'Story of the Door'.

*From Mulinuu Point to Matautu*: 'The western horn is Mulinuu, the eastern, Matautu; and from one to the other of these extremes, I ask the reader to walk. He will find more of the history of Samoa spread before his eyes in that excursion, than has yet been collected in the blue-books or the white-books of the world.' – RLS, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 41.

*'Yo ho ho, and a bottle of rum!'*: *Treasure Island*, Chapter 1: 'The Old Sea-Dog at the "Admiral Benbow"'.

*mussaoui, ylang-ylang*: fragrant bark and tree (*Canapa odorata*) respectively.

*Mount Vaea*: 'behind Vailima, on the summit of which first Louis, in 1894, then Fanny, in 1914, were buried.' – Charles Neider, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p.108, note 11. 'Vaea Mountain about sun-down sometimes rings with shrill cries, like the hails of merry, scattered children.' – RLS, *ibid*, p. 58.

*'...she will not be left to pray with only servants. I am afraid that distinction is not made in other quarters.'*: 'A fight about prayers is really enough to bring a cynical smile to the lips of a bishop. Mrs S. says she will not be left to pray with only servants. I am afraid that distinction is not made in other quarters. I see again she dislikes



the life here which we find so enchanting and is disappointed and soured that she is not able to persuade us to throw it all up and go to the colonies. We have given the colonies a fair trial and they mean death to Louis, whereas this is life and reasonable health.' – Fanny Stevenson, *Our Samoan Adventure*, pp. 129-130.

*'My head is a rotten nut'*: 'But there is nothing in my mind; I swim in mere vacancy, my head is like a rotten nut; I shall soon have to begin to work again or I shall carry away some part of the machinery.' – RLS, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 202.

*Laupepa*: On March 16 1892 'Malietoa [Laupepa] himself, accompanied by Lauili as interpreter, and attended by three soldiers dressed in white coats and trousers and armed with rifles and bayonets, visited Vailima. Malietoa also wore white, with long yellow leather leggings reaching above the knee. The "king" stayed to lunch and drank kava with Louis, the latter a sign of good will.' – Charles Neider, *Our Samoan Adventure*, p. 175.

*Meissen from Dresden*: The first hard-paste porcelain developed in Europe, produced from 1710 onward and collected by the wealthy.

*In Wittenberg there are ninety-five shards*: Martin Luther's *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum*, nailed to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Saxony, on 31 October 1517.

*Loia*: Samoan name for Stevenson's step-son Lloyd Osbourne, with whom he co-authored *The Wrong Box* (1889), *The Wrecker* (1892), and *The Ebb-Tide* (1894).

*Sonata pathétique*: Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op.13.

*all possibility of 'an house not made'*: 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' – II Corinthians 5:1, *King James Bible*.

*beyond the bar*: 'I hope to see my Pilot face to face / When I have crost the bar.' – Tennyson, 'Crossing the Bar', October 1889. I measure this against the prayer: 'Lord, the creatures of Thy hand, Thy disinherited children, come before Thee with their incoherent wishes and regrets: Children we are, children we shall be, till our mother earth had fed upon our bones.' – RLS, 'For Self-Forgetfulness', Vailima Prayers, *Miscellanea*, Volume 26, *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926).

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## Kidnapping the historical novel in Stevenson's *Kidnapped*: an act of literary and political resistance.

*Nathalie Jaëck*

In his dedication of *Kidnapped* to Charles Baxter, Stevenson made a point of defining the book, which was first published in *Young Folks* from May to July 1886, as a light unassuming boys' novel, the only pretention of which was 'to steal some young gentleman's attention away from his Ovid, carry him awhile into the Highlands and the last century, and pack him to bed with some engaging images to mingle with his dreams'.<sup>1</sup> He seemed to be following in the tracks defined by Ballantyne two years before in his own preface to *The Coral Island*: history, like adventure then, ought to be 'the regions of fun' and 'unbounded amusement'<sup>2</sup> said Ballantyne, 'no furniture for the scholar's library' (p. 3) echoed Stevenson. Yet, despite his cloaking himself in the harmless guise of the entertainer, this seems more like an ironic decoy, for Stevenson had another much more critical agenda, and meant serious literary and political business in *Kidnapped*.

What I would like to discuss in this essay is that Stevenson had a double intention, a literary one and a political one, and expressed them both in terms of territorial claims – which should after all come as no surprise since *Kidnapped* is explicitly the story of an illegal expropriation and the efforts of the young hero, David, to reclaim his property. As far as literature is concerned, Stevenson tried a daring formal experiment in *Kidnapped*, and endeavoured to colonise and appropriate the territory of the historical novel as he had inherited it from Scott, to question and redefine its formal positions and come up with a new dissenting literary form. Following the random course of Alan and David through the Highlands, Stevenson indeed kidnaps the historical novel and diverts it along unorthodox lines, crucially replacing





the causal time of the historical novel with the adventurous wanderings of these two literary rebels.

But as he operates the literary mutation of the historical novel, as he resists the authoritative injunctions of historiography and specifically discards the contractual necessity of factual accuracy, Stevenson chooses to tell another story, and to turn the novel into a site of clandestine political resistance. Indeed, Alan and David's active occupation of the Highlands, and their constant escaping the vigilance of the Red Coats, amount to an underlying commentary on English imperialist behaviour in Scotland: it is a way to reappropriate the colonised territory of the Highlands, to walk over it and physically occupy the land that had been lost to English Rule. *Kidnapped* can thus be read as a double site of resistance, as a literary coup enabling to map another version behind the authoritative account of official history – the literary deterritorialisation of the historical novel allowing the re-territorialisation of Scottish identity.

Interpreting the novel in terms of territory is not a random metaphor: Stevenson indeed, as he had already done in *Treasure Island*, chose to position a map, plus a 'note to the map', at the outset of the text, and these paratextual elements stall and complexify any smooth entrance in the novel. Indeed, the reader is forced to halt there, to examine this rather bewildering 'Sketch of the Cruise of the Brig Covenant And the probable course of David Balfour's Wanderings'. Two words from its title immediately indicate that this is certainly no exhaustive map of reference: it is just the *sketch* of a *probable* course, drawn in red through an otherwise blank map. I will try to prove here that the map serves two aims in the novel: as a symbolic transcription of the historical novel, it is the outline for the new type of literature Stevenson wants to create, a metaphor providing him with a method of writing, that should thus be, like the map, exploratory, incomplete, unfinished, open. But it is also a way to empty the territory of the Highlands, to return it to a *terra incognita*, to inscribe it





only with Alan's and David's course and thus to erase the marks of colonial history, to re-appropriate and re-identify with an occupied land. In his deconstructed and unauthoritative map, Stevenson disengages geography from centralised, dominant power<sup>3</sup>, the Highlands are back to an all open territory, for them to explore freely, a 'smooth space' disencumbered from received constructions of political geographies and identities.



In his book *Mapping Men and Empire: a Geography of Adventure*, Richard Phillips demonstrated how cartography was linked with the colonial enterprise, how mapping amounted for Europeans to imaginatively charting the world and materially possessing it: 'The late nineteenth century scramble to map was also a scramble to colonise and consolidate imperial power. European imperialism and map-making reached a simultaneous climax at the end of the nineteenth century.'<sup>4</sup> He developed the idea that maps had 'a measure of authority, a power to naturalise constructions of geography and identity'<sup>5</sup> and shared this power with Realistic adventure stories and the typical Robinsonades that flourished at the time.

For sure, the situation is very different with Stevenson: the map he proposes at the start of *Kidnapped* is a way to acknowledge the fact that the map is a powerful instrument of naturalisation, and to come up with a sort of counter-map or alter-map, the aim of which is precisely to accommodate politics of resistance to dominant literary and imperialist constructions. Before entering into the details of the literary and political interpretation and implications of the map, it is necessary to note its formal characteristics. The most immediately striking feature of the map to me is that it is a blank map, a mere outline map, that has been deprived of most its toponyms, with the exception of those immediately concerned by David's course.<sup>6</sup> It reads as if David were indeed exploring a new virgin territory, and going through it without the constraints of previous constructions, as in a space





full of virtual ways only to be enacted by him. Such emptying of the official and fully documented map results in a map that has no history, a map that is mute.

Another characteristic of the map is that it is intentionally drawn partially wrong, as Stevenson makes it clear in his dedication to Charles Baxter: he explains in a tongue-in-cheek way that 'how the Torran Rocks have crept so near to Earraid' is '[a] nut beyond [his] ability to crack' (p. 3). Indeed, even if the map is otherwise particularly accurate as Barry Menikoff demonstrated in *Narrating Scotland*, Stevenson makes a point of inserting one obvious inadequacy, as if to exemplify the fact that a map is not a truthful representation, but always a choice, a selection and a decision, and a set of conventions as well – it was indeed current cartographic practise at the time to marginally change natural data to serve practical (or ideological) ends, as is virtually true in all mapping: in this case the practical necessity to represent the Torran rocks closer to Earraid for them to fit within the frame.<sup>7</sup> This deliberate mistake in the left-hand corner of the map thus reads as a sort of metatextual wink, as a reminder that representation always takes liberties with facts and should be dissociated from absolute accuracy. This point is reinforced by the fact that the map contains no legend, no scientific referencing, and thus no instruction as to the way of interpreting it, no overhanging or authoritative pre-construction of meaning. The viewer of the map is left to wander over that unreferenced surface, with no selection or hierarchy in the information that is given, no specific direction but the tentative line of escape of David's flight: he is invited to the nomadic reading of a multiple space, endowed with nothing but a map-in-progress, a work map of physical features, mountains and valleys, that does not aim at exhaustiveness or full referencing. Indeed, interruption or lack of completion is made even clearer by another trick: in his instructions to the cartographer, Stevenson insists that the final stage of David's journey will be off the limits of the map, in its unregistered margins:





The line (full again) descends Balquhiddy from the top, turns down Strathire, strikes over Uam Var, hits Alan Water above Kippendaire, descends Alan Water to the Forth, along the N. bank of Forth to Stirling bridge, and *by road* by Alloa, Clackmannan and Culross, till it issues from the map; for I fear we don't reach Limekilns; which we really should have done, for from that point my hero crosses the Forth to Cawiden, and thence to Queensferry. Terminus Malorum. (p. xxi)

Indeed, Stevenson's emphasis on the line leaving the map foregrounds the necessary arbitrariness of the ending, stressing the fact that a map is necessarily a selection, that the frame is never all-encompassing and that representation always leaves elements aside. It plays the exact same function as the arbitrary ending of the novel: 'Just there, with his hand upon his fortune, the present editor inclines for the time to say farewell to David' (p. 219), and I must here disagree with Oliver Buckton, when he says that 'what the map cannot disclose however is the sudden abortion of David's narrative at the end of *Kidnapped*'.<sup>8</sup> Through a technique of its own, through obviously subjective manipulation of its frame, the map reinforces the incompleteness of the text: it exposes strategies of containment as delusive, and treats as a myth the Realist ideal of completion. In *Kidnapped* as in all of Stevenson's texts, there is always a remainder, the closure of meaning can never be fully obtained.

Finally the line itself, the only inscription on the map, displays its own tentativeness despite the red authoritative colour, in two ways. First, as Stevenson explains to his cousin, the red line 'must be sometimes dotted to show uncertainty; sometimes full' (p. xxiv); this is a highly paradoxical and ironic demand, as if there could be some hierarchy of fiction, as if a totally fictive line could be at times less fictive than at others – and this is all the weirder since the reader can most of the time find no objective





reason for the choice of the dotted or the full line: virtually every move is made on open land, off regular roads or on the wide sea, and so there is no justifying why the line should be all dotted across Mull for example, and then full up to Gairloch. It seems to be a playful way for Stevenson to draw the attention of the reader on a crucial point: that there is no coincidence between reality and representation, that representation is by essence an active operation of transformation, hence Stevenson's provocative maxim to Charles Baxter who might reproach the text for its inconsistencies: 'It is more honest to confess at once how little I am touched by the desire of accuracy.' (p. 3) Accuracy indeed is obviously less valued by Stevenson than randomness, as he opts for what Buckton has called a 'cruising' method of writing, i.e. 'a deployment of travel as a basis for narrative structure'.<sup>9</sup> He justifies what he calls 'the improbability' of David's itinerary by the fact that '[his] hero was trying to escape – like all heroes' (p. xxv). Quite clearly then, the red line on the map is very close to what Gilles Deleuze defined as 'a line of escape' on a 'smooth space', a random dynamic direction among a multiple space, and just like the literary hero, it is writing itself that should be a constant attempt at escaping static forms. Modelled on its perplexingly rich map, *Kidnapped* thus presents the reader with a redefinition of historical writing along those geographical lines and comes close to Deleuze's definition: '*Écrire n'a rien à voir avec signifier, mais avec arpenter, cartographier, même des territoires à venir.*'<sup>10</sup>



In his efforts to do away with accuracy, it is notable that Stevenson should provocatively elect the least probable genre for the task – the historical novel, inherited from Scott and a treasured nearly sacred national genre, devoted to signifying the world. As early as the dedication to Baxter, Stevenson departs from the tradition defined by his great forbear, and treats the pivotal historical fact of *Kidnapped*, namely the Appin murder,





as he did central geographical data, braggingly making a point of distorting it: 'you will likely ask yourself more questions than I should care to answer: as for instance how the Appin murder has come to fall in the year 1751' (p. 3). Such an arbitrary decision to change the date of the Appin murder by only one year, 1751 instead of historically validated 1752, does indeed make all the difference – or the 'différance' as Derrida put it. First of all it serves to introduce as irreducible liminal gap between the text and its context; it establishes in the most brutal way (purposefully misdating a historical fact) that writing is always a reorganisation, that as Derrida put it in a brutal formulation as well: *L'écriture interdit toute saturation du contexte*, to mean that *un texte écrit comporte une force de rupture avec son contexte, c'est-à-dire l'ensemble des présences qui organisent le moment de son inscription. Cette force de rupture n'est pas un prédicat accidentel, mais la structure même de l'écrit*.<sup>11</sup>

Such a gratuitous modification of the date of the Appin murder obviously rings throughout the novel, and even if, as Barry Menikoff put it, what Stevenson imagined 'is set within a frame of meticulously charted historical reality',<sup>12</sup> even if many real historical events are accurately recorded, the fictive worm is in the Realist fruit, and coincidence between representation and reality is efficiently prevented. It reads as if Stevenson were colonising the textual space of the historical novel, and emptying it of its contractual *topoï* as he emptied the map from its toponyms<sup>13</sup>. As Buckton puts it: 'he selected the historical novel for his design, and then gave it a deliberate twist. He chose to reproduce and conceal history, to invent a fiction that would paradoxically reveal and veil historical truth'.<sup>14</sup>

One of the major modifications that Stevenson superimposes upon the historical model is the fact that he manages to provide the reader with not one but several versions of history: just as on the map the line may sometimes be dotted, in the novel the way towards historical truth is rather errant as well, and the distance





from one event to another is covered through quite a number of different paths. As he first meets with Alan and can see first hand what a dashing Jacobite looks like, David volunteers a kind of historical abstract for the benefit of the reader, an abstract coming from hearsay, and rather neutral in its phrasing:

At that period (so soon after the forty-five) there were many exiled gentlemen coming back at the peril of their lives, either to see their friends or to collect a little money; and as for the Highland chiefs that had been forfeited, it was a common matter of talk how their tenants would stint themselves to send them money, and their clansmen outface the soldiery to get it in, and run the gauntlet of our great navy to carry it across. All this I had, of course, heard tell of. (pp. 59-60)

Then in chapter XII, Alan gives David his first lesson in history, in the first-person singular this time, with a rather biased kind of vocabulary ('English rogues' on p. 81 for example, has replaced 'the soldiery') and explicitly questioning the official version of the English: 'The Hielands are what they call pacified' (p. 84). A little later, during his rather pleasant encounter with Henderland, David is given yet another version, a 'rather moderate' one according to him. Henderland covers the same historical facts as Alan, but through a marginally different way, adding another perspective to the picture, another layer to history. Finally, towards the end of the novel, it is the turn of Mr Rankeillor to volunteer his own account, to voice the official Whig version, leaving it to David, adequately situated in the middle, 'betwixt and between' (p. 60) to work out his own synthesis, from that profusion of texts, to understand historic events.

Instead of *testifying* to reality as the choice of the historical novel should incline him to, Stevenson thus engages in what we could call a process of *textification*, of narrative proliferation over





reality. The reason is given by mysterious Mr Riach: 'life is all a variorum, at the best' (p. 50), echoing Stevenson's own conception of the multiplicity of reality, and thus the impossibility for art to capture and reduce that multiplicity to one authoritative version, even if it is backed by so-called historical facts<sup>15</sup>. Such a process of textification is amplified by the fact that the historical novel is written over by many other different genres, and quite disappears behind the palimpsest of fictive layers. History is transposed from reality to literature, and Stevenson starts the process as early as his dedication, calling the novel 'a tale' (p. 3), then he superimposes the whole paraphernalia of the Gothic on the early chapters, with the 'dreary' House of Shaws and 'bats' flying from 'unglazed windows' (p. 15), 'a great rattling of chains and bolts' (p. 17), 'a stooping, clay-faced creature' (p. 17), 'a dark passage' and a gaoler, (p. 20). The narrative is further defined as 'a ballad' by Mr Riach, as an 'Odyssey' and an 'epic' (p. 200) by Mr Rankeillor; it is repeatedly likened to a tale of 'adventure' (pp. 7, 13, 200), and even smacks of the picaresque novel in its early chapters when the course of the young hero's journey is determined by his encounters on the road. All this gives David's wanderings a generic nature, as Buckton notes: 'cruising entails a narrative method that produces unstable texts of travel – texts that display narrative hybridity and formal flux'.<sup>16</sup> History is thus reduced to a backdrop, to an outline as in the map: it is then occupied by a story, whose own formal necessities and chosen structures replace those of history. In particular, as far as time is concerned, what is remarkable is that the typical time of the historical novel, ordering reality along a linear and causal line of events, is here totally replaced by another form of time, the wandering, rhizomatic, arbitrary, and above all unclosed, time of adventure.

A comparison with *Waverley*, the prototype of the Scottish historical novel, published by Scott in 1814, is quite telling in this respect. Scott stabilises from chapter one the method of the





historical novel – an omniscient narrator able to tell the story from above, endowed with the authority granted by distance (the subtitle of the book being *'Tis sixty years since*), and a retrospective narration established from the first sentence: 'It is, then, sixty years since Edward Waverley, the hero of the following pages, took leave of his family, to join the regiment of dragoons in which he had lately obtained a commission.'<sup>17</sup> In *Kidnapped*, Stevenson seems to unwrite *Waverley*, by inverting its temporal positions. David is the narrator of his own adventures, and the past tense is replaced by a daring future, inverting retrospection and replacing it with advent and imminence: 'I will begin the story of my adventures with a certain morning early in the month of July' (p. 7). Stevenson makes the intention clearer as the titles of the first five chapters are all in the present tense,<sup>18</sup> which inscribes movement through verbs of action and dynamic postpositions as chapters one to five demonstrate: 'I set off upon my journey to the House of Shaws'; 'I come to my journey's end'; 'I make acquaintance of my uncle'; 'I run a great danger in the House of Shaws'; 'I go to the Queen's ferry'.

*Kidnapped* is indeed remarkable for its efforts to find a temporal alternative to closed and ordered retrospection, to settle narration in what is happening, in suspension or immanent, in what Jankelevitch defined as the time of adventure: '*L'aventure infinitésimale est liée à l'avènement de l'événement. [...] L'aventure est l'instant en instance, l'actualité sur le point de se faire.*'<sup>19</sup> Not only is the novel full of prolepses, anticipating on the future and accelerating the movement forward, replacing suspense by a perpetual sense of suspension and expectation ('as the event proved' (p. 48), 'as you are to hear' (p. 55), but Stevenson also experiments with a sort of narrative present, placing David constantly *on the brink* of adventures to come, as is obvious for example in the siege of the round-house, on the *Covenant*:

By this, my pistols were *ready*, and there was nothing to





do but listen and wait. While the brush lasted, I had not the time to think if I was frightened; but *now*, when all was still again, my mind ran upon nothing else. The thought of the sharp swords and the cold steel was strong in me; and *presently*, when *I began to hear* stealthy steps and a brushing of men's clothes against the round-house wall, and knew they *were taking* their places in the dark, I could have found it in my mind to cry out aloud. (My italics p. 57)

The insertion of anachronic adverbs in this narrative in the past tense, 'now' or 'presently', the progressive forms in -ing working as anticipations ('were taking'), the grammatical decomposition of movement ('I began to hear'), and the sense of 'readiness' it creates, all this places David and the reader just the other side of the door of adventure, in the near future they can anticipate. Such a process of inversion finds its climax at the very end of the novel, when David is left to stand there in the very intense space of the middle, where he actually belongs. The end of his 'drifting' course brings him 'to the very doors of the British Linen Company's bank' (p. 219), and the novel paradoxically stabilises in that state of unresolved tension, 'just there' as the editor puts it. Here again, the difference with *Waverley* is striking, since Scott's novel ends with full closure, utter 'fulfilment': 'It only remains for me to say that, as no wish was ever uttered with more affectionate sincerity, there are few which, allowing for the necessary mutability of human events, have been upon the whole more happily fulfilled.'<sup>20</sup> 'Fulfilled' is the final word, and the text settles in the motionlessness of *present perfect*, establishing the continuity between past and present, leaving no remainder. In *Kidnapped* on the contrary, Stevenson ends with a final twist, with yet another line of escape, as he grafts a bracket on the main text, and opens up the textual future: 'Just there, with his hand upon his fortune, the present editor inclines for the time to say





farewell to David. How Alan escaped, and what was done about the murder, with a variety of other delectable particulars, may some day be set forth' (p. 219) To Scott's stabilised present perfect, Stevenson substitutes suspended immediacy, prospection and probability, and *Kidnapped* is allowed to remain to the end 'a free and wandering tale'.<sup>21</sup>



The final point I would like to make is that the outline map is also a clue to Stevenson's political intention in *Kidnapped*, a further attempt at deterritorialisation. Indeed, I would like to consider the idea that the mute map is a way for Stevenson to wipe English rule off the Highlands, to leave the Scottish space open to David and Alan's indigenous course, and to use fiction to soothe history, as a counter discourse of re-appropriation.

In *Robert Louis Stevenson's Anti-Imperialism*, Jamie Rothstein highlighted the anti-imperialist nature of Stevenson's novels, and argued that 'the Scottish novels, set in the years immediately following the final Jacobite defeat at Culloden, suggest the adverse ramifications of England's influence over Scotland, the injustices perpetrated against the Highlanders, the deepening divisions and growing inequities among Scots, the misalignment of power, and political corruption.'<sup>22</sup> To be sure, though open resentment of English rule is always expressed through the veiled and biased screen of Alan's strong enmity, there is material in *Kidnapped* to prove that Stevenson also used the novel as a militant symbolic space, to enact quite flamboyant, though fictive, Scottish re-appropriation.

The signs of English authoritative presence are indeed detailed quite extensively in the novel, hinting at the fact that though Scotland was never actually 'colonised', it still occupied a subordinate position within the Union and was in danger of both complete assimilation and expropriation. The historical fact of the English presence is constantly made felt in the novel: the King's ships besiege the Scottish coast – 'the King's cruisers [...]





were kept along that coast, both summer and winter, to prevent communication with the French' (p. 108) – and the heathery hills are all dotted with invasive of red-coats: 'About half a mile up the water was a camp of red-coats; [...] All the way down along the river were posted other sentries. [...] Higher up the glen, [...] the chain of posts was continued by horse-soldiers. [...] Lower down, the infantry continued' (p. 140). Physical occupation is but the sign of legal domination and the several characters echo one another to describe the several acts that were taken to ensure surrendering: the Disarming act (pp. 111, 105), 'the Highland dress being forbidden by law since the rebellion' (p. 101), with a more graphic version from Alan: 'It's now a sin to wear a Tartan plaid, and a man can be cast into a goal if he has but a kilt about his legs' (p. 81); the fact that that 'the law was harshly applied, in hopes to break up the clan spirit' (p. 102), a process of evangelisation typical of imperialist routine, with catechists 'sent out by the Edinburgh Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, to evangelise the more savage places of the Highlands' (p. 111), and eventually financial oppression through deceit and corruption to drive rebellious highlanders off their own land: 'The kindly folk of that country must all pack and tramp, every father's son out of his father's house, and out of the place where he was bred and fed' (p. 83); English rule has contributed to the impoverishment of the country, and the Pound Scots, (a fact that David's uncle tries to take advantage of) is no more than one English shilling (p. 26).

Yet, such recorded *history* is then confronted by and clashes with Stevenson's *story*, as it fully occupies the map; two elements in David and Alan's private course enable Stevenson to counter the public official version, a re-appropriation of space, and a return to native language. Indeed, no matter how many soldiers the English might post on the roads, no matter how close the meshes of their nets, David and Alan always manage to cut through, through native better knowledge of the ground, and in particular through their ability to avoid the mapped network,





while English soldiers are stuck to referenced topography. As Alan explains to David, the Highlands are all transparent territory to their native folk: they do flourish and develop within the blank space in between official lines of the map. What is wild inhospitable *terra incognita* to foreign occupants is their own favoured environment, an intense middle-ground, a ramified active multiplicity:

A bare hillside (ye see) is like all one road; if there's a sentry at one place, ye just go by another. And then the heather's a great help. And everywhere there are friends' houses and friends' byres and haystacks. And besides, when folk talk of a country covered with troops, it's but a kind of a byword at the best. A soldier covers nae mair of it than his boot-soles. I have fished a water with a sentry on the other side of the brae, and killed a fine trout; and I have sat in a heather bush within six feet of another, and learned a real bonny tune from his whistling. (p. 82)

While the soldiers are forced within pre-established organised ways, within territorialising lines, the population of the Highlands is highly rhizomatic, they imagine their own ever-changing lines of escape in a territory with multiple entrances and moving direction, like an ever-adaptable burrow. 'No soldiers would find the way that we came' (p. 129) confirms Alan, since indeed, the Highlands are 'trackless' (p. 100) to those who do not practise them. David himself confesses to his own disorientation in this open surface. To him it is indeed a desert, a blank space: 'the country appeared to be a desert' (p. 136); 'a piece of low, desert land' (p. 152), 'a country that lay as waste as the sea' (p. 153). To the native Highlanders, it is dynamic and occupied, 'with huts and houses of the people hidden in quiet places of the hills' (p. 136), it seems to be infinitely mouldable when trusted to them, an inalienable private space, a labyrinth to exogenous elements:





'but for the details of our itinerary, I am all to seek; our way lying now by short cuts, now by great detours' (p. 136). As they walk through the occupied territory together in *Kidnapped*, Alan and David rewrite an alternative story of Scotland; this improbable couple – the Jacobite Highlander and the Whig Lowlander – celebrates Scottish solidarity against English rule, and as David concludes: 'It is all Scotland' (p. 124).

Finally, political resistance is achieved in *Kidnapped* through linguistic insubordination: the names on the map inscribe Scottish spelling, and indeed the whole novel is remarkable for its refusal to internalise and legitimise domineering official English language. The first interesting point to notice is that everyone Scottish has got an accent in *Kidnapped*, even the King's ally, Mr Campbell: 'Be soople David [...] Dinnae shame us [...]. As for the laird, remember he is the laird' (p. 9). Stevenson systematically distorts both official grammar and spelling to inscribe the vernacular discrepancy that signals an appropriation of language – and indeed, it is Scots and not English that is spoken in *Kidnapped*: when Alan wants David to understand, he asks his Highland friends to speak 'Scottish': 'Speak in Scotch' (p. 129). The picturesque effect clearly disappears behind the political claim that language is an essential means to resist assimilation. But Scottish is only the first step towards the gradual erasure of English, and it is Gaelic that serves the most dissident function in *Kidnapped*, even as it remains impenetrably alien to Davie.

Just as their familiarity with the ground enables Highlanders to dodge English vigilance, so their use of Gaelic is an efficient means to resist assimilation. It works as a code, excluding those who do not belong, as David finds: 'Few had any English, and these few [...] were not very anxious to place it at my service. I knew Torosay to be my destination, and repeated the name to them and pointed; but instead of simply pointing in reply, they would give me a screed of the Gaelic that set me foolish' (p. 102). Such a technique of 'pretending to have no English' (p.





102) is basic enough, and a trick quite well-shared among local populations.

But Stevenson gives Gaelic another more original function: he embeds it in the novel as the language of fiction, able to reconfigure reality, and it is Alan who is in charge of such reconfiguration, 'a well-considered poet in his own tongue' (p. 84). Quite immediately after meeting David, still on the boat, Alan improvises a song in Gaelic, a song of his own creation, and as he translates it for the reader, David ironically comments on poetic licence – regretting that Alan's should pay no tribute to his role in their common victory against the crew, and should pocket all the credit: 'I might have claimed a place in Alan's verses. But poets (as a wise man once told me) have to think of their rhymes; and in good prose talk, Alan always did me more than justice' (p. 70). What David makes clear is that fiction is always a transformation of reality, that it owes nothing to facts but to internal coherence, aesthetic beauty, and idealisation, as Stevenson maintained: '[The writer must be disengaged] from the ardent struggle of immediate representation, of realist and ex-facto art. [Art lies in] the crystallisation of day-dreams, in changing not in copying fact; in the pursuit of the ideal, not in the study of nature.'<sup>23</sup> In reality, Alan may not have been as dashing or as heroic as in his own Gaelic poem, and so he does rewrite history. But fiction is always already a foreign tongue, and it never speaks the same language as facts: so one can say about Alan's song exactly what one can say about *Kidnapped* as a whole: 'It's in a manner history' (p. 183)

#### NOTES

- 1 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), p. 3. Henceforth cited in text.
- 2 Robert Michael Ballantyne, *The Coral Island* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1995), p. 9.
- 3 Edward Said showed how much in mapping 'territory and





- possessions are at stake, geography and power', in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, Vintage, 1994), p. 5.
- 4 Richard Philips, *Mapping Men and Empire: Geography of Adventure* (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 9.
  - 5 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
  - 6 In 1886 the Highlands were obviously quite accurately mapped already, and Stevenson could have opted for a much fuller map: this decision to use only the background map is thus the symptom of a further intention.
  - 7 In other instances, manipulating natural data has clear ideological motivations: for example, in the projection of Mercator, Africa is represented much smaller than it actually is, and this seems to naturalise the domination and superiority of Europe over Africa.
  - 8 Oliver Buckton, *Cruising with Robert Louis Stevenson. Travel, Narrative, and the Colonial Body* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), p. 135.
  - 9 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
  - 10 'Writing has not anything to do with signifying: it is about walking, mapping, even territories yet to be' – my translation. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2: Mille plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p. 11.
  - 11 'Writing makes saturation of context impossible [...] a written text contains a force of rupture with its context, i.e. all the presences that organize the moment of its inscription. Such force of rupture is not a accidental predicate, but the very structure of writing' (My translation). – Jacques Derrida, 'Signature, événement, contexte', in *La Communication. Actes du XV<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l'Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française* (Montreal: Éditions Montmorency, 1971-1973), t. II, p. 53.
  - 12 Barry Menikoff, *Narrating Scotland: the Imagination of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), p. 48.
  - 13 The map is empty of names, except for those relevant to the story, and the settlement names are small in contrast to the names of natural features in capital letters, suggesting the superiority of territory over human settlement.
  - 14 Buckton, p. 129.





- 15 The point is very clearly made in 'A Humble Remonstrance' published in *Longman's Magazine* as an answer to James's 'The Art of fiction': 'Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt. [...] No art is true in this sense: none can "compete with life": not even history, built indeed of indisputable facts. [...] Literature, above all in its most typical mood, the mood of narrative, similarly flees the direct challenge and pursues instead an independent and creative aim.' See 'A Humble Remonstrance' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (London: William Heinemann, 1924), Tusitala 29, p. 136; p. 135.
- 16 Buckton, p. 7.
- 17 Walter Scott, *Waverley* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1998), Chapter 2, p. 5.
- 18 Indeed, this is a convention of chapter titles, and as such it also highlights and reinforces the metatextual nature of the discourse.
- 19 'Infinitesimal adventure is linked to the advent of an event. [...] Adventure is the impending instant or immediacy about to happen' (my translation), see Vladimir Jankélévitch, 'L'Aventure, l'ennui, le sérieux', in *Philosophie morale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), p. 828.
- 20 *Waverley*, p. 339.
- 21 Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (London & New-York: Norton, 1996), p. 5.
- 22 Jamie Rothstein, *Robert Louis Stevenson's Anti-Imperialism* (Dekalb Il.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), p. 16.
- 23 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Ernest Mehew (London & New-Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 235.





‘His bachelor house’: the unhomely home of the *fin de siècle*’s bourgeois bachelor in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

Ashleigh Prosser

Robert Louis Stevenson’s gothic novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* has been textually re-embodied and figuratively re-imagined since its debut in 1886. The character of Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde has become iconic in popular culture and his name(s) has even entered our modern lexicon as a colloquial term. The novella has also attracted much critical attention since its publication, and previous scholarship has explored many diverse interpretations regarding the contextual significance of the story and the potential allegory it represents. It has been argued, for example, that the novella’s story expresses Victorian society’s fears over a ‘crisis of civilisation’ at the *fin de siècle*, that Dr Jekyll represents the deterioration of the middle-classes, that Mr Hyde’s character is exemplary of theories of degeneration, atavism, sexual deviation and of the latent violent, criminal tendencies of the lower working classes, to list only a few.<sup>1</sup> However, the scope of this paper is limited to the discussion of constructions of masculine domesticity in the novella.

The study of constructions of masculinity in Stevenson’s text and more widely in Victorian *fin de siècle* gothic fiction is not a new endeavour and there is an array of scholarship available on the Victorians’ literary representations of gender in gothic fiction.<sup>2</sup> However, this paper seeks more specifically to examine the ways in which the figure of the bourgeois bachelor and his construction of an alternative form of masculine domesticity in Victorian *fin de siècle* society, are conveyed in Stevenson’s gothic novella via the unhomely home space. By applying Freud’s theory of *das unheimliche* (the uncanny, literally translated as





‘unhomely’) to a close reading of the text, this paper seeks to identify moments of the unhomely within the home and read them as spaces through which the bourgeois bachelor’s alternative form of masculine domesticity at the *fin de siècle* can be understood. This interpretation of Stevenson’s text is founded on reading the unhomely home as a literary chronotope, a symbolic representation of the experience of masculine domesticity within a specific moment in time, the Victorian *fin de siècle*, through a specific space, the bourgeois bachelor’s home.

### Das unheimliche

The concept of the uncanny has been widely discussed across a variety of disciplines which has resulted in various wide-ranging analyses of the term. This paper, like most scholarship, begins with Sigmund Freud’s seminal essay published in 1919, *Das Unheimliche*, or *The Uncanny*. Freud’s essay is one of the earliest cross-disciplinary studies of the uncanny that embraced aesthetic, literary and psychoanalytic approaches to this ‘particular species of the frightening’.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, Freud argues that defining the concept of the uncanny is particularly elusive in many languages, but concludes that etymologically, the German word *unheimlich* and the English word *uncanny* are the closest semantic equivalents. By comparing various dictionary definitions of *heimlich*, ‘homely’, it appears to become ‘increasingly ambivalent’ until it ultimately ‘merges with its antonym *unheimlich*, ‘unhomely’, which, Freud argues, demonstrates that, ‘the uncanny (*das unheimliche*, ‘the unhomely’) is in some ways a species of the familiar (*das heimliche*, ‘the homely’)’.<sup>4</sup> Freud cites a particularly pertinent example from the 1877 German Dictionary of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, in which the *unheimlich*, ‘starting from the homely and the domestic’, is defined as ‘a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret’.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Freud develops the argument that an uncanny experience, such as the





feeling of *déjà vu* or meeting a *doppelgänger*, can be attributed to a personal psychological encounter with the return of ‘repressed childhood complexes’ (originating from within family life) and the ‘primitive beliefs’ of pre-modern society, which have been ‘surmounted’ through our entrance into adulthood within modern society but in an instant can ‘appear to be once again confirmed.’<sup>6</sup> Freud argues that this confirmation occurs in the moment when fantasy and reality become unknowingly blurred: ‘when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolises.’<sup>7</sup>

This uncanny blurring between fantasy and reality is a frequent feature of Victorian gothic fiction, particularly within *fin de siècle* works in which post-Enlightenment dominant understandings of reality are commonly blurred with the fantasies of pre-modern society’s gothic supernaturalism. Stevenson’s *fin de siècle* gothic fiction appears to explore what Anthony Vidler alleges to be the ‘yet unfinished history’ of the uncanny, whereby ‘the homely, the domestic, the nostalgic,’ are challenged by their ‘ever-threatening, always invading, and often subversive “opposites.”’<sup>8</sup> This paper thus seeks to suggest that in Stevenson’s text, the experience of the unhomely within the home space functions to represent the challenges faced by Victorian middle-class society’s ideologically imagined conception of male middle-class domesticity and the home space itself, and its paradoxical existence within the real world of middle-class Britain at the end of the century.

### **Home is where the heart(h) is: middle-class domesticity in *fin de siècle* Britain.**

During the Victorian era, Britain experienced remarkable periods of transformation through industrialisation and urbanisation, technological and scientific advancements, global trading and capitalist economic market growth, imperialist expansions





and colonisation, and various other political, social and cultural changes that completely revolutionised its people, their ideologies, and their perception of and position within the modern world.<sup>9</sup> Britain's internal and external transformations were both based on the self-interested expansionist principles of consumer capitalism, which arose from domestic political, social and economic changes that were the result of the nation's development from an ambitious agrarian country to an urban trading and manufacturing market-economy. These changes, propelled by the rise of the middle classes and the dominance of emerging bourgeois capitalist ideologies, produced a British Empire that was to occupy the richest and most powerful position in the world for the majority of the nineteenth century. However, by the end of the century, Victorian Britain had begun to feel the effects of such an accelerated rise towards modernity.

In the *fin de siècle*, Britain began to fall from its imperial pedestal, vulnerable to the rise of other international powers such as the United States and changing attitudes concerning the morality of colonisation.<sup>10</sup> Closer to home, all classes of society suffered the social and cultural effects of the Industrial Revolution as large-scale urbanization transformed everyday life itself, not just where it took place. It was these changes to the everyday life of most of society that opened up a space through which the dominant middle-class ideology of domesticity, traditional gender roles and the family structure could be actively questioned for the first time. The contextual focus of this paper is on this liminal space in time in which Stevenson's novella was written, and through which one can potentially read alternative constructions of middle-class masculinity in Victorian society at the *fin de siècle*.

John Tosh, in his seminal study *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, argues that domesticity in the Victorian period was 'an integral aspect of modernity' because the ideological development of the concept





was socially and culturally ‘inconceivable without large-scale urbanization’ to offer a dichotomous ‘other’ space – the city.<sup>11</sup> Tosh maintains that it was the ‘well-ordered home, with its welcoming hearth and its solid front door’ that provided the ‘most reassuring antidote to the alienation of city life’ (p. 32). Tosh argues that because of this relationship between the rise of modernity driven by the middle classes and their development of domesticity and the home space as a moral sanctuary, the concept became the ‘talisman of bourgeois culture’ and eventually the ‘goal of the conventional good life’ for almost all Victorian families, regardless of class (p. 4). For Victorian men, the dominant understanding of masculine identity was constructed around the home, the workplace and all-male associations, particularly because, as Tosh has suggested, middle-class men’s power came from ‘their privileged freedom to pass at will between the public and the private’ (p. 2). Thus, for men, the Victorian moral ideology of domesticity created a distinctly middle-class concept of acceptable masculine public *and* private identities as professionals, husbands, fathers and sons.

Tosh proposes that for women, this gendered, spatial understanding of domesticity was limited to the private sphere, and thus created a ‘cult of the home’ that was most commonly associated with women’s ‘proper’ fulfilment of masculine expectations of feminine domestic roles as morally upstanding wives, mothers and daughters (p. 5). Therefore, the middle-class home became an idealised space for Victorian society in which domesticity could unite the masculine and feminine, to borrow Tosh’s phrase, ‘together in a proper relation of complementarity’ (p. 7). However, by the end of the century, the idealised middle-class ‘cult of the home’ was not as representative of the reality of Victorian domesticity as it had been at the beginning of the era. The late nineteenth century was a turning point for women’s rights as women gained political privileges, economic entitlements and legal liberties for the first time within *both* the public





and private spheres.

By the *fin de siècle*, the public and private lives of Victorian men were exposed to close scrutiny and actively critiqued for the first time in the period. Homosocial relationships and the popularity of the 'gentlemen's club' culture moved into a dominant position within middle-class men's domestic life, male sexuality and sexual practices were publicly brought into question, and the preference not to enter into marriage and thus domestic patriarchy came to be a viable, albeit controversial, choice for many bourgeois bachelors. However, Tosh is quick to maintain that the 'commanding heights of the traditional structure remained intact' and that to argue that the *fin de siècle* middle-class domestic patriarchy was 'in crisis' would be a 'wild exaggeration' (p. 160). Nonetheless, Tosh argues that by the end of the century, Victorian middle class society had witnessed the 'climax of domesticity' and the 'first major reaction against it', which placed this moral ideology of acceptable masculine and feminine roles within the private home space into a precarious position (see pp. 151, 196).

Nicholas Royle has pertinently described the experience of the uncanny as 'a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of the hearth and home.'<sup>12</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is overwhelmed by this sense of 'homeliness uprooted', and this paper wishes to suggest that it the figure of the bourgeois bachelor at the *fin de siècle*, who transgressed the traditional patriarchal expectations of domesticity for men, that is the catalyst for this feeling of unhomeliness within the text's domestic home spaces. The masculine identity of the Victorian bachelor at the *fin de siècle* was constructed around their rejection of the role of the patriarch, the husband and father, of the middle-class home. Instead, the bourgeois bachelor carved out two alternative domestic spaces within the private sphere, which one can argue function as unhomely homes because they represent a form of





homeliness that is uprooted from the dominant ideological understanding of the home.

The first of these unhomey homes was the ‘Gentlemen’s Club’, an exclusively masculine, homosocial domestic sanctuary for men of the middle and upper-middle classes, that offered a private space within the public sphere, an alternative ‘home’ in which, Tosh affirms, an ‘ethos of fraternalism replaced the ties of family’ (p. 129). Tosh argues that the homosocial relationships fostered by bachelorhood within club culture offered an ‘alternative emotional resource’ to that found within traditional domesticity, and by the end of the century, these relationships had become the focus of many men’s lives, often to the exclusion of marriage altogether (p. 185). Therefore, the second unhomey home space inhabited by the bourgeois bachelor of the day was their actual private home, which was often an uncanny reflection of the traditional ‘feminine’ domestic home without its governing women – the wives and daughters of the patriarch. Stevenson’s novella exemplifies the unhomeliness of the two unhomey home spaces of the bourgeois bachelor to a nicety via their transformation into uncanny and sometimes explicitly gothic spaces, in which their inhabitants often appear uncannily ‘at home’. The rest of the paper seeks to explore this interpretation through a close examination of the text.

### **The bourgeois bachelors of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***

*Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is dominated almost exclusively by the figure of the professional middle-class bachelor, represented by the two doctors, Dr Jekyll and Dr Lanyon, the lawyer Mr Utterson, and two gentlemen, Mr Enfield and Mr Hyde.<sup>13</sup> Stevenson demonstrates that middle-class masculine identity was defined by status, profession and public persona by introducing characters first through their professional status (which is occasionally substituted for their name), and then





through the company they keep. Mr Utterson is introduced as 'the lawyer [...] a man of rugged countenance' whose helpful nature led him to be the 'last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of down-going men' but whose friends 'were those of his own blood or those whom he had known the longest'.<sup>14</sup> Mr Enfield is introduced as Mr Utterson's 'distant kinsman' and a 'well known man about town' (p. 5). The 'great' Dr Lanyon and Mr Utterson are 'old mates both at school and college' and are the two oldest friends of Dr Jekyll (p. 12).

Furthermore, Dr Jekyll self-consciously asserts his own middle-class position in professional, bourgeois society in his full statement of the case which opens with a brief biography of his life born to 'a large fortune, endowed besides with excellent parts, inclined by nature to industry, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellowmen [...] with every guarantee of an honourable and distinguished future' (p. 53). Consequently, Stevenson signifies very early in the text that the main characters are associated by a network of professional and personal relationships that have arisen from their status as well-established bourgeois bachelors.

As previously discussed, the domesticity of these professional middle-class bachelors transgressed Victorian society's dominant understanding of the gendered, spatial ideology of the domestic by supplanting the traditional concept of the feminine domestic home space with the exclusively masculine brotherhood of the 'gentlemen's club', a private domestic space completely outside of the traditional home. In the novella, the homosocial relationships between the main characters represent the dynamics of this alternative space for masculine domesticity at the *fin de siècle*. The action of the novella is driven by Mr Utterson's dedication to the protection of Dr Jekyll's reputation from the disgrace of his association with the violent transgressions of Mr Hyde. As Stephen Arata concisely states, what unites professional men together in the public-cum-private exclusively





masculine domestic space of the gentlemen's club is precisely this 'commitment to protecting the good names of oneself and one's colleagues.'<sup>15</sup> Therefore, Stevenson's characters appear to represent a microcosmic representation of the time's professional (and thus necessarily male) middle class, who, in order to protect their pretence of respectability as society's elite, must seek refuge in the confidences of one another, so that their own or their companions' transgressions can be kept hidden and safe within the bounds of society's expectations. By the *fin de siècle*, the role of the confidant and protector of reputations of middle-class men, once considered the duty of a trustworthy, discreet and morally-upstanding wife, was now a duty expected of a fellow gentleman of the bachelor brotherhood.

Furthermore, in Stevenson's novella middle-class women, traditionally considered symbols of the ideal domestic home space in the Victorian era, are notably absent. The novella places the main characters in both solitary and exclusively homosocial domestic scenes within middle-class home spaces that emphasise the unhomely realities of the bourgeois bachelor's alternative form of masculine domesticity. When at home, Mr Utterson, Dr Lanyon and Dr Jekyll can all be found alone, sitting close by the fire of a glowing hearth, possibly reading 'some dry divinity' with a glass of wine in hand (pp. 11, 12 and 24). Mr Utterson, seen the most times at his own hearth, which made the room 'gay with firelight', on one occasion shares a 'bottle of a particular old wine' with his head clerk, Mr Guest. These scenes of masculine domesticity evoke an atmosphere of unhomeliness, of isolation and emptiness in a space which according to traditional domestic ideologies they should not, because they lack the defining feature of Victorian society's dominant understanding of the home, the family and its women and children. Arata similarly argues that the arousal of these unhomely feelings comes from Stevenson's transformation of 'the hearth – that too familiar image of cosy Victorian domesticity – into a symbol of these men's isolation





and repression.<sup>16</sup>

All the scenes of domesticity in Stevenson's novella lack the feminine and familial presence that was understood to have defined the dominant ideological conception of the private home space for the Victorian middle classes. The novella is void of any representation of the middle-class family, or the middle-class woman; the only women who are fleetingly present in the text are of the lower, domestic and working classes.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Stevenson goes so far as to make women completely superfluous as a sex. As Judith Halberstam compellingly argues, the birth of Mr Hyde literally comes from the flesh of Dr Jekyll who 'felt it struggle to be born', and was brought about by scientific experiment which conveys 'a gruesome parody of pregnancy'.<sup>18</sup> Dr Jekyll's experiment symbolically renders women's natural reproductive powers redundant.

Thus the late Victorian London of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is depicted as a homosocial space occupied entirely by bourgeois men, products of the nineteenth century's rise of modernity and the professional, scientific and technological world of the times. The setting of Stevenson's novella can thus be understood to be an uncanny gothic reflection of the microcosmic world of the *fin de siècle* bourgeois bachelor, without middle-class women or any portrayal of their public or personal lives, relationships or families. It can be argued that through this exaggerated absence of the feminine in the novella's homosocial representation of Victorian London, Stevenson's depiction of the unhomely home space functions symbolically to represent contemporary issues concerning the bourgeois bachelor's rejection of the dominant middle-class ideological conception of an idealised familial, feminised home space governed by the patriarch.

### **The uncanny gentleman Mr Hyde's unhomely home**

Stevenson's representation of Mr Hyde's class status as one of these bourgeois bachelors is another instance of the uncanny





within the masculine home space. In the novella, many characters describe him as a villainous monster, and yet he is most frequently referred to as a gentleman.<sup>19</sup> For example, Mr Enfield, when recounting to Mr Utterson Mr Hyde's trampling of a young girl, consistently refers to Mr Hyde as 'my gentleman', suggesting that he is of equal class. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge the possibility that the characters' use of the term 'gentleman' may be being applied ironically by both the characters and the author. This argument rests on an interpretation of the term being used by the characters as an actual description based on considerations of class. For example, one could assume if Mr Hyde was not a gentleman, but rather a lower working-class man, that his speech and accent would contextually be very different from that of the middle and upper-middle classes, and that this would be noted by the characters in their description of his behaviour and physical characteristics; yet no characters make any claim that Mr Hyde is not well spoken, or speaks colloquially, or with an accent not of their own refined, middle-class tongue.

Furthermore, Mr Enfield, the doctor 'Sawbones' and the child's father promise to enact their own distinctly middle-class punishment on Mr Hyde: 'killing being out of the question' they do the 'next best' and vow to 'make such a scandal out of this [...] to make his name stink from one end of London to the other' (p. 7). Mr Hyde emphasises that 'no gentleman but wishes to avoid a scene,' and responds to such threats with the expected reaction of an urbane, middle-class gentleman of the period by offering a monetary bribe (p. 7). The men all agree to rest until morning in Mr Enfield's chambers, they even breakfast together, before going to the bank to witness Mr Hyde cash the cheque (signed by Dr Jekyll) to prove it is not a forgery (p. 8). The act of Mr Hyde breakfasting with these men, after Mr Enfield has offered them his home as a resting place, seems unusual unless Mr Hyde is considered to be at least of the same class. Stephen Arata further affirms this theory, suggesting that the entire scene exhibits





the men's recognition of Mr Hyde as 'one of their own.'<sup>20</sup> They address Hyde with the 'politeness due to a social equal,' and the men 'literally encircle Hyde to protect him' from the women 'wild as harpies' so that they may handle the situation within their own private masculine 'club' world.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, they threaten the punishment most feared by a middle-class gentleman, a disgraced reputation. This scene reveals that Mr Hyde, in the words of Arata, 'may not be an image of the *upright* bourgeois male, but he is decidedly an image of the bourgeois male.'<sup>22</sup>

The private domestic space of Mr Hyde's rooms in Soho, further conveys the uncanny because it offers the reader another representation of 'unhomely' masculine domesticity. The house's location within the city of London suggests that it should not be the home of a bourgeois gentleman who was 'heir to a quarter of a million sterling' (p. 22). Linda Dryden argues that *fin de siècle* gothic literary representations of London illustrate Victorian popular perceptions of the 'threatening nature of the metropolitan experience,' in which the city is a 'schismatic space that contains extremes of wealth and poverty' as exemplified by the class divisions of the East and West Ends.<sup>23</sup> Stevenson physically embodies such *fin de siècle* anxieties within the geography of London by gothicising the juxtaposition of the lower socio-economic suburb of Soho with the light, bright busy squares and main streets of the West End, where the majority of the novella's bourgeois bachelors' houses are situated.

In the novella, the suburb of Soho is depicted as a specifically gothic topography because its neighbourhoods and by-streets are described as dark, dangerous labyrinths of vice and sin, frequently obscured by thick layers of fog, which produce the appearance of an endless night (p. 22). Furthermore, Mr Hyde's house is situated in a 'dingy street' in a 'dismal quarter of Soho', between 'a gin palace, [and] a low French eating house', where 'many ragged children huddled in the doorways, and many women of different nationalities passing out, key in hand, to





have a morning glass' (pp. 21-22). Soho is also described by Mr Utterson as a 'district of some city in a nightmare' (p. 22). Mr Utterson's own nightmare of the 'nocturnal city' haunted by 'that human Juggernaut' Mr Hyde, who glides 'stealthily through sleeping houses [...] through wider labyrinths of lamplighted city,' to intrude into Dr Jekyll's bedroom and force him to do his bidding, crushing children in his wake, more than reinforces this gothic vision of London (p. 13).

The unhomely sense of domesticity within Mr Hyde's residence in Soho offers an equally strange encounter for Mr Utterson and Inspector Newcomen. Mr Hyde employs a housekeeper, a 'silvery-haired old woman' with an 'evil face'; but when confronted with Mr Utterson and Inspector Newcomen, her 'manners were excellent' (p. 22). The presence of a housekeeper suggests a bourgeois home-owner, and interestingly, she mirrors the uncanniness of her employer who is also described as evil and yet well mannered. Another encounter with the unhomely is Mr Hyde's decision to occupy only a few rooms, leaving the rest of his house empty. However, the rooms he has chosen have been decorated to the standards of a bourgeois gentleman's refined, expensive tastes: 'The closet was filled with wine; the plate was of silver, the napery elegant; a good picture hung upon the walls [...] and the carpets were of many plies and agreeable in colour' (p. 22). Mr Hyde's home can thus be read as an unhomely space of masculine domesticity because of its scandalous (for an apparent gentleman) lower-class location in London's disreputable Soho district, the presence of an 'evil-faced' yet well-mannered housekeeper, and its considerable uninhabited emptiness. Nevertheless, his rooms are notably agreeable to Mr Utterson and Inspector Newcomen for they appear to simulate the tastes of a bourgeois gentleman, much like Mr Utterson himself.

### **The doors to the uncanny duality of Dr Jekyll's house**

The uncanny is further manifested in this unhomely domestic





way through the respectable frontage of Dr Jekyll's house, which architecturally conceals the identity of Dr Jekyll's old medical theatre and laboratory cabinet through the buildings' apparent physically separate existences. Dr Jekyll's home, situated in a 'square of ancient, handsome houses', obscures its relationship to its own gothic double through external physical appearances (p. 16). The disused theatre and laboratory appear as a 'sinister block of building' that 'bore in every feature, the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence' located in a 'dingy neighbourhood' (p. 6). In actuality, these structures are situated inside the property of Dr Jekyll's home, and are internally connected to the house itself. The gothic secret of the uncanny nature of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde's dual existence is thus concealed within, and symbolically reflected by, the house's architectural 'split personality'. The doors to Dr Jekyll's house, the old medical theatre and laboratory-cum-cabinet are thus of great significance for this discussion of the uncanny, gothic depiction of the bourgeois bachelor's home space because they can be read as symbolic thresholds representative of his transgressive experience of masculine domesticity at the *fin de siècle*.

The door which Mr Hyde uses to access Dr Jekyll's laboratory opens the novella as the subject of 'Story of the Door' recounted by Mr Enfield as a 'very odd story' (p. 6). Mr Enfield and Mr Utterson both remark that they have taken note of the door previously because the door itself is very odd; it is 'nothing but a door' and yet it is also unusually 'blistered and distained' and 'equipped with neither bell nor knocker' (p. 6). The door is further described as set in what appears to be a deformed face, 'a blind forehead of discoloured wall' which lacks eyes for it 'showed no window' on the upper storey, and on the lower storey, the strange door appears to be its tightly closed mouth. David Seed pertinently suggests that Stevenson is employing the 'traditional trope of the house as body, the house as the container of the soul.'<sup>24</sup> Thus the building's uncanny face both masks and





reveals the duality concealed within its structure and its owner's bodies and soul(s).

Furthermore, this mysterious introduction to the physical and symbolic duality of Dr Jekyll's house is Stevenson's first use of the uncanny as a gothic technique of foreshadowing for the story that is to follow. In this sense, the recounting of the 'Story of the Door' is uncanny because the story is being retold, it is both foreshadowed and foreshadowing the novella. As Shafquat Towheed has confirmed, the 'Story of the Door' is not a 'new adventure into the unknown' but rather a 'return to the familiar', particularly evident when Mr Utterson states, 'I do not ask you the name of the other party [...] because I know it already,' thus revealing that Mr Enfield's 'tale has gone *home*' (p. 9, my emphasis).<sup>25</sup>

The foreshadowing of uncanniness is clearly revealed once the door is found to be the back door to Dr Jekyll's laboratory in the 'Incident at the Window', thus positioning it as a gothic double of the front door to Dr Jekyll's house. The entrance hall to Dr Jekyll's home reflects its distinguished owner: it 'wore a great air of wealth and comfort' and opens to reveal a 'large, low-roofed, comfortable hall paved with flags, warmed (after the fashion of a country house) by a bright open fire, and furnished with costly cabinets of oak.' Mr Utterson considers this hall to be the 'pleasantest room in London' despite his feelings of 'a menace in the flickering of the firelight' and the 'uneasy starting of the shadow on the roof, a response that is perhaps a reflection on the reality of the unhomely-homeliness of his own bachelor house (p. 16). It is by such symbolic means, then, that the ideologically transgressive nature of the *fin de siècle* bourgeois bachelor's alternative form of domesticity is represented, as Stevenson shows the entrances to bourgeois bachelors' home spaces, in this instance Dr Jekyll's hall, to be uncanny thresholds indeed.

In the novella, the very last threshold to be crossed by the characters (and the reader) is the red baize door to Dr Jekyll's cabinet, set at the top of a flight of stairs within the disused





medical theatre. The cabinet is only encountered once before 'The Last Night', when Mr Utterson goes to visit Dr Jekyll after Sir Danvers Carew's murder. He is received, unusually, in Dr Jekyll's cabinet and experiences a foreboding 'distasteful sense of strangeness' when he is brought through the courtyard into the 'dingy, windowless structure' (p. 24). These feelings of uncanniness occur because Mr Utterson is encountering the 'innermost part' of Dr Jekyll's house, which Seed suggests represents the 'spatial correlative of the secret embedded in the narrative.'<sup>26</sup> One can argue that it is for this reason that the cabinet door is frequently depicted as closed and locked. The fittings and locks are described to be of 'excellent workmanship', the wood 'tough' and the door itself 'very strong', hence the violent force needed by Poole and Mr Utterson to break it down, and the two hours it took Dr Lanyon's locksmith to open it (p. 40, p. 46).

In fact, Seed further suggests Poole's violent axe blows literally and metaphorically break the liminal boundary between the known and the unknown, represented by the cabinet door, and appear as if they are 'killing the occupant who is temporarily conflated within the room itself, and once the door is breached sure enough he is discovered in the death throes of cyanide poisoning.'<sup>27</sup> It appears that the moment of revelation of the secret that lies within the cabinet simultaneously brings both the (literal) death of the known *and* the unknown, leaving only unanswered questions – for characters and readers alike – in its wake. As Shafquat Towheed has argued, this 'architecture of the uncanny' ultimately leads to the cabinet because it is the final private masculine space of the novella, which conceals the climactic gothic secret that has been uncannily foreshadowed throughout, in which the homely and the unhomely shockingly collide.<sup>28</sup>

### **The horror of the homely in Dr Jekyll's cabinet**

Dr Jekyll's cabinet is the most disturbing home space in the novella precisely because it is uncannily homely. It is the 'last





earthly refuge' of Dr Jekyll / Mr Hyde, and it appears in 'The Last Night' as a scene of private domesticity concealed within the utterly gothic exterior of the old dissecting theatre. When Poole's axe causes the lock to 'burst in sunder and the wreck of the door fell inwards', Mr Utterson and Poole find:

the cabinet before their eyes in the quiet lamplight, a good fire glowing and chattering on the hearth, the kettle singing its thin strain, a drawer or two open, papers neatly set forth on the business table, and nearer the fire, the things laid out for tea; the quietest room, you would have said, and, but for the glazed presses full of chemicals, the most commonplace that night in London' (p.41).

One can argue that the scene seems so 'commonplace' because it simply reflects every other scene of bourgeois masculine domesticity within the novella.

The central focus of the room is, once more, the hearth, around which the actions of Dr Jekyll / Mr Hyde have revolved: 'the easy-chair was drawn cosily up, and the tea things stood ready to the sitter's elbow, the very sugar in the cup' (p. 42). However, the room is also portrayed as lifelessly empty and its dweller(s) isolated and solitary, like its previous unhomely counterparts. This uncanny reflection is literally reflected back upon itself when 'the searchers' peer into the depths of an out-of-place cheval-glass mirror 'with an involuntary horror' expecting, according to Towheed, to find a 'revelation in this symbolic epicentre of the uncanny.'<sup>29</sup> However, they only find that –

it was so turned as to show them nothing but the rosy glow playing on the roof, the fire sparkling in a hundred repetitions along the glazed front of the presses, and their own pale and fearful countenances stooping to look in. (p. 42)





This moment, which is so shocking to Poole and Mr Utterson, is perhaps founded on the realisation that the presence of a full-length mirror in Dr Jekyll's laboratory is uncannily 'out-of-place'; it is an object with a specifically domestic, feminine, and suggestively narcissistic purpose (p. 42). Indeed, from Stevenson's descriptive language it is possible to argue that the room itself depicts a traditionally feminised form of Victorian domesticity; there is a 'quiet lamplight', a 'rosy glow' from the hearth to which the 'easy-chair was drawn cosily up', a 'singing kettle' and 'tea things' neatly ready, the 'very sugar in the cup' (p. 40-42).<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the feminine domesticity of the scene that appears to be evoked by this imagery is the very same descriptive language used previously to portray the bourgeois bachelors' private homes.

It should be noted that it is doubly uncanny that the cabinet should appear like the novella's previous representations of bourgeois bachelor homes, simply because it is not supposed to be one. The cabinet is Dr Jekyll's laboratory, and so by the nature of its professional usage for 'scientific studies', it should not be presented as a predominantly domestic space, let alone a feminised one (p. 52). Thus the scene suggests once more that the bourgeois bachelor's masculine domesticity, as a displaced all-male manifestation of traditionally feminine domesticity, is paradoxically unhomey because it is so homey.

The unhomey-homeliness of the cabinet is further disturbed by the final uncanny gothic intrusion on the scene: 'right in the middle there lay the body of a man sorely contorted and still twitching' (p. 41). This man is Mr Hyde, who appears to have been simultaneously both 'at home' and yet completely out of place within such surroundings, and the presence of his corpse in the cabinet is the final and literal embodiment of the unhomey within the home space. The reader learns from Dr Jekyll's full statement that the transformations between the two bodies had become uncontrollable, hence Dr Jekyll's retreat into





the safe seclusion of the cabinet. However, it is also revealed that Poole believes his master to have been ‘made away with, eight days ago’ and since then he has only heard and caught glimpses of Mr Hyde (p. 36). It follows that what Mr Utterson and Poole discover in the homely tableau of Dr Jekyll’s cabinet are the perfectly domestic activities of Mr Hyde, the gentleman murderer and trampler of children. This jarring discovery, in which the capacity for homely, feminine domesticity is unfathomably found within a figure of gothic horror, can be read as the final representation of Victorian society’s anxieties over the bourgeois bachelor’s transgressive creation of an exclusively homosocial domestic world.

### Concluding remarks

Stevenson’s portrayal of the bourgeois bachelor in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, presents the reader with an ambiguous, and at times gothic image of middle-class masculine domesticity in Victorian *fin de siècle* society. Such a portrayal has left the text open to a multitude of possible interpretations regarding its constructions of masculinity. By applying Freud’s theory of *das unheimliche* to a close reading of the novella, I propose that one can read the way in which the uncanny functions in the text to reveal Stevenson’s creation of the unhomely-home as a chronotopic space, through which the bourgeois bachelor’s alternative form of masculine domesticity can be symbolically investigated. This unhomely-home space functions chronotopically because it is where ‘the interconnectedness of [the] temporal and spatial relationships’ of *fin de siècle* Victorian London and the bourgeois bachelor’s formation of an alternative masculine domesticity are to be found.<sup>31</sup> Bakhtin argues that it is through the literary chronotope that ‘space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history’<sup>32</sup> and he goes on to claim that such chronotopes are ‘organising centres’ and ‘the place in which the knots of narrative are tied and untied





[...] to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative.<sup>33</sup> The uncannily homely and unhomely bachelor spaces of Stevenson's most famous novella exemplify this understanding to a nicety.

## NOTES

- 1 Many scholars have explored these specific interpretations, and there are simply too many examples to list here. However, I find Andrew Smith's discussion of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in his monograph, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin De Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) to offer an excellent analysis of each of these interpretations through his own expertly argued proposition that the relationship between dominant scientific discourse and degeneration theory at the *fin de siècle* functioned to pathologise discourses of middle-class masculinity.
- 2 For example, see Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); and the seminal text by Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- 3 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock, ed. by Adam Phillips (1919; London: Penguin, 2003) p. 125.
- 4 Freud, p. 134.
- 5 Freud, p. 133. Interestingly, the first collection of fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm, which are renowned to be both Gothic and decidedly uncanny retellings of folk tales, is aptly titled *Children's and Household Tales* (1812). See Brothers Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, trans. and ed. by Jack Zipes (London: Vintage Books Random House, 2007).
- 6 Freud, p. 155
- 7 Freud, p. 150
- 8 Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essay in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge Mass, London: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 13.
- 9 For an introduction to the Victorian era's rising modernity with reference to middle-class society, see F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (London: Fontana Press, 1988).





- 10 For further discussion of these points on Britain's decline at the *fin de siècle*, see Glennis Byron, 'Chapter 11: Gothic in the 1890s,' in *The Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).
- 11 John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 4, henceforth cited in text.
- 12 Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) p. 1.
- 13 Mr Hyde's contentious status as a gentleman, and its importance, shall be explored in more depth later.
- 14 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 5, henceforth cited in text.
- 15 Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Identity and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 40.
- 16 Arata, p. 42.
- 17 The female characters in the novella are the young girl trampled by Hyde (p.7), the maidservant who witnesses Sir Danvers Carew's murder (p.20), Hyde's housekeeper (p.22), and a hysterical servant girl (p.35). Stevenson mentions briefly the women who gather around Hyde after the trampling (p.7), shop girls and a street vendor (p.64), and lower class drunken women on the street suggested to be prostitutes in Soho (p.22).
- 18 Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 76, p. 65.
- 19 Stephen Arata also notes this reference to Mr Hyde as a gentleman, see Arata p. 38.
- 20 Arata, p. 38.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 16.
- 24 David Seed, 'Behind Closed Doors: The Management of Mystery in





- Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in *Gothick Origins and Innovations*, eds. Allan Lloyd Smith and Victor Sage (Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), p. 181.
- 25 Shafquat Towheed, 'R. L. Stevenson's Sense of the Uncanny: 'The Face in the Cheval-Glass,' *English Literature in Transition: 1880-1920* 42.1 (1999): 26.
- 26 Seed, p. 182.
- 27 Seed, p. 184.
- 28 Towheed, p. 29.
- 29 Towheed, p. 32.
- 30 This conclusion is also reached from a contextual understanding of Victorian gender ideology, previously referenced in this paper.
- 31 See the discussion of chronotopes in Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics', *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Carly Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) p. 84.
- 32 Bakhtin, p. 84.
- 33 Bakhtin, p. 250.





## Fanny Osbourne Stevenson's fiction: 'The Nixie' in context

*Hilary J. Beattie*

Fanny Stevenson's career as a writer of fiction is today little recalled, aside from the inglorious episode of her alleged plagiarism of 'The Nixie' from her husband's cousin, Katharine De Mattos, and her earlier collaboration with Stevenson on *The Dynamiter*. Yet 'The Nixie' (1888) was the fifth of eight stories that she published over some twenty years, from 1878 to 1899, along with a non-fiction piece and one play (the latter another collaboration with Stevenson). I contend that one cannot understand the significance of 'The Nixie' in isolation, and therefore propose to examine the story itself in the overall context of Fanny's other authorial ventures.

None of the biographers, of Fanny or of RLS, has discussed Fanny's fiction in detail, and their estimates of her abilities have varied, depending partly on whether they see her as a positive influence in Stevenson's life, or as a feminist pioneer. Some critics have been kind. Her friend Henry James noted her 'light and practised' hand in *The Dynamiter*,<sup>1</sup> and a century later Jenni Calder considered Fanny's situation to be the 'potentially tragic one of so many women of that time', in that 'her abilities were striking, yet her talents were not [...] distinct enough to carry her over the barricades of convention and prejudice', despite her 'energetic style and [...] almost apocalyptic imagination'.<sup>2</sup> Yet Margaret Mackay, Fanny's first modern biographer, thought she had no 'compulsive' vocation, and that her style in fiction (unlike in her often 'attractive' letters) was marred by a 'coarse texture and synthetic manner' quite unlike that of her husband.<sup>3</sup> J. C. Furnas also noted the 'vulgar flavour' of her fiction and described her as a 'fascinated dabbler', an unlikely collaborator for a professional writer of vastly greater gifts, but who nonetheless





in her role of attentive listener, consultant, and critic did exert some influence on Stevenson's 'aesthetic destiny'.<sup>4</sup> So was Fanny Stevenson merely a pretentious literary camp follower who penned mediocre potboilers as a way to make money, or might her writing tell us something more about her, her relationships within the Stevenson circle, and the ways in which her fiction arose from the shared symbiosis of her marriage to a great writer?

### **The pre-marital years, 1876-1880**

Fanny Van De Grift Osbourne's abrupt entry into Stevenson's life in the summer of 1876 signalled a momentous shift in both their destinies. She was from the outset a larger-than-life character with a personal history both tragic and romantic (abandoned wife, bereft mother and aspiring artist). At Grez she apparently enhanced this through her gifts as a raconteur, elaborating on her adventurous married life in Nevada by portraying herself like some heroine of Bret Harte's tales of Western mining camps. Her San Francisco friend Timothy Rearden, who first encouraged her to write, had been a colleague of Harte's (Mackay, p. 22), and Stevenson himself described Fanny's daughter Belle as having 'spent her childhood among Bret Harte's stories [...] and all the *dramatis personae* of the new romance'.<sup>5</sup> All this, together with Fanny's dark, 'Moorish' looks and exotic glamour, may have attracted the men of the Grez artists' colony but failed to impress other women, one of whom tartly commented on an underlying 'real, unromantic barrenness and poverty of nature'.<sup>6</sup> Though there was a family tradition that Fanny was 'already a magazine writer of recognised ability' who in France supported her family with her pen before even meeting Stevenson, no evidence of that exists. It appears that she grew up with a penchant for dramatic, spooky storytelling, derived from her paternal grandmother, and so with her new connection to a promising writer it was natural to think of easing her financial worries by writing fiction.<sup>7</sup> Her first ventures into print, however, were in collaboration with





the young American artist, Walter Francis Brown, whom she evidently met in Paris and who also illustrated Mark Twain's *A Tramp Abroad*.<sup>8</sup>

Fanny published two fairy tales, with Brown's rather clumsy illustrations, in *St Nicholas*, a popular American children's magazine. The first, 'Too Many Birthdays', appeared in 1878, and is a variation on the fable 'beware what you wish for'.<sup>9</sup> An unscrupulous physician gratifies a young princess's wish to have a birthday whenever she chooses, so that all the children in the land can celebrate with her. He profits from their resulting stomach upsets, but the king in despair tries to marry his daughter off. This ploy fails when, because of all the birthdays, the prospective suitors take her to be far older than themselves. Only when the princess throws away the magic sweets that work the spell are the effects of the birthdays reversed, so that she eventually can marry the prince. Noteworthy are the heroine's apparent blindness to her own responsibility for the disasters, and the idea that rapid aging may disqualify her for marriage to an eligible young man, something that could well reflect Fanny's own current preoccupations.

'Chy Lung, the Chinese Fisherman' (1880), is also about a protagonist who is manipulated into greedy and selfish behaviour but rewarded in the end.<sup>10</sup> When Chy Lung's catch fails, he tricks the Sorcerer of the Sea into helping him, but henceforward his fine fish always disappear after being sold and the Sorcerer, in the form of a malign figure drawn on a wall, persecutes him in his beggarly wanderings. When working for a rich mandarin Chy Lung fishes up two mermaid sisters, one of whom escapes and the other he delivers to the cook. When she in turn hides, he flees to the seashore where he is bribed with all kinds of treasures by her sister. Finally Chy Lung relents and restores the captive mermaid to the sea, whereupon she excuses his earlier selfish wrongdoings, saying they were all caused by the Sorcerer of the Sea. Chy Lung then uses the treasure to become prosperous and





marries the mandarin's daughter.

This tale seems to derive largely from *The Arabian Nights* ('The Story of the Fisherman' and the 'old man of the sea' in the fifth voyage of Sindbad), but might also reflect Fanny's current worries about how to survive in a harsh world. How much Stevenson was involved with these tales is unknown, but in April 1887, when he wrote to Mary Mapes Dodge, the editor of *St. Nicholas*, about possibly submitting some 'juvenile fantastic stories' there, he had this to say about 'Too Many Birthdays': 'I wonder if you observed a singular resemblance between a tale of Mr Howells [...] and one contributed by my wife (while still Mrs Osbourne) to *St Nicholas* in the year '78 or '79? The similarity is striking.'<sup>11</sup> Howells's story is called 'Christmas Every Day', about a little girl who soon repents of getting the Christmas Fairy to consent to her request for daily Christmases, but who has to wait out a year of dreadful forced festivities in order to be taught a lesson. It has a clearer moral message and is more humorous and better written than Fanny's tale.<sup>12</sup> But it is richly ironic to find Stevenson, one year before the Henley quarrel of 1888, insinuating that Howells was guilty of plagiarizing Fanny's work, and suggests that he was both invested in her literary success and quick to feel a personal affront where she and her writing were concerned (just as in 1882 he had taken offense on Fanny's behalf at Howells's seeming disapproval of divorce in *A Modern Instance* –*Letters* 4:35). Oddly, while Fanny's stories were published while she was still 'Osbourne', both came out under the name of Fanny M. Osborne.

When she published 'Sargent's Rodeo' in *Lippincott's Magazine* (1880), they did get the last name right, but the Bret Harte influence was again visible.<sup>13</sup> This lively and quite entertaining bit of reportage, illustrated by Fanny's son-in-law Joe Strong, describes an outing she and her family (thinly disguised) made to see a cattle round-up at a ranch near Monterey, culminating in the killing of a heifer and a campfire cookout





by the rough vaqueros. But Fanny can't resist throwing in two supernatural vignettes as local background, the first of which, about Satanic hauntings around Las Cruces, is reminiscent of Harte's 'The legend of Monte del Diablo'. The second, about a traveller who rescues a new-born baby which suddenly starts growing huge, vampiric teeth in an ever-widening mouth, sounds more like a nightmare vision of the burdens of motherhood, with which the author was well acquainted. This piece too may have been a moneymaking effort, but it foreshadows Fanny's two vivid diaries, written a decade later in the Pacific.

#### **Early married life, 1880-1884**

Already in France, England and California, Stevenson had begun to read his new work to Fanny, always a good listener and never shy with her opinions. But by 1881, during a rainy summer in the Scottish highlands, she became his partner in a joint writing venture. Together they worked on a collection of 'supernatural' stories, projected to include such items as 'Thrawn Janet' and 'The Bodysnatcher'. One of these 'creepers', 'The Shadow on the Bed', was by Fanny alone, but Stevenson evidently had second thoughts about it, because he soon sent it to Henley saying: 'I don't know where to send it; it is Fanny's, so I can't judge it; but it seems to me to have a grue [shudder] in it towards the end' (*Letters* 3:188, 199-200). Some critics have assumed that the story was subsequently lost (one speculating that the 'true shadow on the bed' was Stevenson himself rather than Fanny).<sup>14</sup> But Henley four years later sent it unsuccessfully to the *Cornhill* and to *Longman's*,<sup>15</sup> and early in 1886 Stevenson himself sent it to *Blackwood's*, who refused it, citing the jarring mix of the commonplace and the supernatural, and a fear that the heroine would arouse readers' prejudices (*Letters* 5:176). It finally appeared that year in the declining *Belgravia*, which specialised in sensationalism, though its title had by now been changed (for reason's of propriety?) to 'The Warlock's Shadow'.<sup>16</sup>





The story is told in the first person by an orphaned young woman travelling by train to a post as teacher in Monterey. She is befriended by the handsome Alberto (who looks like a 'Spanish grandee'), and his maiden aunt, but at dusk their train crashes on running into cattle straying on the line. All shelter overnight in the ruinous 'great house' inhabited by one of the vaqueros, the sinister half-breed Manuel: a reputed murderer whose dark looks and 'sweet melancholy voice' fascinate the heroine, as she secretly watches him and his men roasting bits of a cow over a bonfire. Later, she flees in terror after being woken by blood dripping from the ceiling, and is taken by Alberto to his family's home in Monterey, to be nursed through a 'painful nervous fever'. It turns out that the train conductor had been murdered and Manuel arrested on suspicion, but her evidence is needed to disprove his concocted alibi. Before the trial they lodge in a house next to the jail, and the heroine is woken this time by an 'unearthly voice' that lures her irresistibly to the jail window where Manuel grabs her hands through the bars, his song changing to devilish curses. The next day she gives the evidence that is to hang him, but begins to waste away as if bewitched. Manuel proves to be a warlock, so Dolores, a sinister hundred and twenty year old witch, is called in to watch over her at night and twice sees a menacing shadow creep across the bed towards the sleeping girl. The night before Manuel's execution Dolores dies, but as the vengeful shadow settles down upon the heroine she snatches a dagger and plunges it into the head of the bed 'where it stuck quivering'. The next day Manuel is found dead in his cell, with a knife-wound in his heart.

This Gothic melodrama of the American West is told in an earnest, pedestrian manner, recycling bits of Fanny's earlier rodeo account, like the vaqueros barbecuing around the campfire, and the aged witch (based on a local Monterey character). Yet parts of it seem to be echoed in Stevenson's own fiction of the mid-1880s, particularly 'Olalla', his Gothic tale of a degenerate





Spanish aristocratic family with its female doubles, the virginal daughter and vampire mother, as well as a dark and cruel son. 'Olalla' shares the 'Spanish' setting of Fanny's tale, with its once great house 'gone to wreck and ruin', full of dust and spiders, not to mention the atmosphere of sexual attraction and menace, with fires blazing at night, and the smell of dripping blood. In 'Olalla' it is the hero who is fascinated and menaced but then forced to flee both mother and daughter, whereas Fanny's intrepid heroine resists the sexual power of her vengeful pursuer and kills him via his projected apparition. There is even an odd presentiment of *Jekyll and Hyde* in the description of Manuel's 'high falsetto voice, a pathetic unhuman cry' that seems like 'a lost soul crying from hell', just as Edward Hyde is heard 'weeping like a woman or a lost soul'. These could be coincidences, but perhaps too are evidence of the ways Stevenson's own work might have gestated in the fertile medium of his and Fanny's mutual storytelling.

The obvious example is *The Dynamiter* (1885), which began as a set of tales that Fanny, on Louis's orders, made up to amuse him during an illness in Hyères in 1884, using 'an impotent dynamite intrigue as the thread to hang [her] stories on'.<sup>17</sup> Two of these stories were retained in the final version, both melodramatic life histories told to gullible young men by damsels in distress, who eventually turn out to be the conspirators' accomplice, Clara Luxmore, in disguise. Both tales, like 'The Warlock's Shadow', prefigure elements of other Stevenson fiction of the mid-1880s, and again narrate fantastic New World adventures in the first person.

In 'The Destroying Angel' a Mormon girl recounts the terrible fates of her parents at the hands of the Elders of the church and her own escape with the help of Dr Grierson, whose isolated, fortress-like house in the desert was once the scene of a mysterious nocturnal explosion and fire, (like the nocturnal fires in other remote houses, in both 'Shadow' and 'Olalla'). Grierson, a sinister elderly scientist/chemist who pursues the elixir of youth in





order to get the heroine to marry him as his younger self, seems like a prototype for Henry Jekyll, both in the description of his laboratory with its 'glazed cases' and in his repeated failure to perfect his elixir owing to the lack of a certain drug in its 'full purity'.

The 'Story of the Fair Cuban' is an even more exotic farago, recounted by 'Teresa Valdevia', whose warning leitmotif is 'I am not what I seem'. Two themes stand out, the first being the orphaned heroine's 'black blood', inherited from her slave mother yet ennobled by African kings (whereas on her father's side she is descended from 'grandees of Spain'). This surely draws on Fanny's own family romance, since all accounts comment on her dark complexion, inherited from her mother and passed on to her daughter Belle, and in Grez she had apparently boasted of 'Moorish blood streaming for centuries through conquered Spain'.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the question/password in the 'Squire of Dames' chapter, 'Nigger, nigger, never die, Black face and shining eye', was the rhyme with which 'childish enemies' had taunted Fanny back in Indiana. (*Letters* 4:17, n.9) The other theme is Teresa's quasi-incestuous, manipulative relations with older white Englishmen: first, Mr Caulder, who with her help finds her real father's hidden jewels but succumbs to the swamp fever from which her black blood protects her; then Sir George Greville, who has her pose as his ex-wife, the evil mulatto sorceress, Mme Mendizabal, (who died in a tornado at the end of a horrific 'Hoodoo' ceremony), when in fact they voyage to England as 'father and daughter'.

In these outlandish yarns Fanny seems to have relished the opportunity to reprise her earlier role in Grez, telling tall stories about her romantic exploits to impressionable young men. But the 'light and practised hand' commented on by Henry James may have been largely due to Stevenson's editing them to make them cohere with the narrative style of the rest. They do read better than 'The Warlock's Shadow', with touches of humour and





irony as well as lively dialogue, all of which are largely absent in the latter. And odd phrases are echoed in Stevenson's other work, notably the description of the fair Cuban as 'a gem of colour', which he later used of the dark-skinned Olalla, with her 'brown bosom'. There are other premonitions of 'Olalla' too, like the predatory, sorceress mother figure, the heroine's evil double, whose real name 'were a spell to raise the dead'.

### **Bournemouth and Saranac, 1884-1888**

Fanny was disappointed that the reviews of *The Dynamiter* gave her little explicit recognition (it is 'hard to be treated like a comma, and a superfluous one at that'), though *The Times* thought the adventures of the 'protean siren' showed 'real and genuine horror'.<sup>19</sup> But the three difficult years in Bournemouth, marred by Stevenson's recurrent ill health and depression, and his father's decline and death, seemed to stimulate her literary ambitions. One reason could have been the more frequent presence of Stevenson's literary friends, like Colvin, Gosse and Henley, as well as his own growing reputation, which in turn attracted new admirers and friends, like William Archer and, above all, Henry James. Henley visited often in the course of his and Louis's playwriting ventures, and so too did Louis's cousin, Katharine De Mattos, now separated from her unsatisfactory husband and with two children to support. Amid such rarefied company the ever competitive Fanny might have needed to assert herself on more equal terms, especially since she was now so closely involved with her husband's work. In addition to *The Dynamiter* she had had a hand in the final version of *Prince Otto*<sup>20</sup> and had evidently learned much from Louis about the technique and craft of writing. This is clear from the admiring testimony of their local friend, the young, star-struck Adelaide Boodle, who in turn claimed to have benefited greatly from Fanny's intensive tutoring.

According to Boodle, Fanny's next story, 'Miss Pringle's





Neighbours',<sup>21</sup> was written to make money to help another local friend with the birth of a child, and earned her thirty pounds (\$150) from *Scribner's Magazine*. Louis proofread the final copy (prepared by the faithful Adelaide) and sent it to *Scribner's*, where it 'was of course accepted', and appeared in June 1887.<sup>22</sup> Presumably its being submitted along with Stevenson's own essay, 'The Manse', did not hurt (*Letters* 5:357), nor did Fanny's publishing it as 'Mrs Robert Louis Stevenson'. This sentimental story is unlike anything she had written earlier, both in its characters and its genteel English setting. 'Little Miss Pringle', a timid spinster of deep religious convictions, attempts to befriend her new neighbours, who turn out to be a beautiful singer with a freethinking lifestyle, Miss Helen Mainwaring, and her artistic little son, Felix, the product of an unwed union with a fellow artist. Deeply shocked, Miss Pringle retreats from her efforts to bring them the comforts of religion. But after Felix dies suddenly of a heart defect, his passing commemorated at a gathering that seems more like a fashionable garden party, the distraught Helen seeks her help. As Miss Pringle reads aloud from the Bible, Felix seems to materialise outside in the darkness, but when Helen tries desperately to reach him Miss Pringle faints, awakening only to find her neighbour dead, and herself left in after years as their only true mourner.

The overall atmosphere, with its clash between conventional and Bohemian mores and the little boy who falls victim between them, is, dare one say it, somewhat reminiscent of Henry James's recent 'The Author of "Beltraffio"' which Stevenson had critiqued in 'A Humble Remonstrance'. In the death of the golden-haired Felix, Fanny clearly drew on the dreadful experience of losing her third child, Hervey, and perhaps some fantasy of reunion with him. Yet the sophisticated Miss Mainwaring has the name of Katharine De Mattos's young daughter, Helen, and her artistic milieu seems rather like that of the refined Katharine, the now single mother who had to support her family by her talents.





Given Fanny's own history she should have been able to identify with Katharine's plight, but one wonders about latent hostility in a story that kills off both mother and child.

Katharine, who had earlier received Louis's help both with her writing and in her marital troubles, was by now making a career as an essayist, reviewer and translator, but largely with Henley's aid since Louis had switched his literary patronage to Fanny. Yet in January 1886 Stevenson dedicated to Katharine the work that was to make him famous, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, along with a nostalgic poem affirming the indissoluble bond of their shared Scottish childhood (*Letters* 5:168). Since Fanny had some reason to think that she had made a crucial contribution to that story, this was a 'poignant irony' that could have left her feeling both hurt and jealous (Mackay, pp. 207-208). (If so, it was not the first time that Stevenson tactlessly produced such an effect, given that in 1883 he had hurt his mother's feelings by dedicating *A Child's Garden of Verses* to his nurse Cummy.)<sup>23</sup> Fanny had earlier patronised 'dear Katharine' by rewriting a 'paper' of hers, since it was 'too much to ask Louis to do', in an effort to place it in an American magazine,<sup>24</sup> but her own confidence as a fiction writer could have been battered by all the rejections of her story 'The Warlock's Shadow', even if it did appear that March. So when Katharine at some point in 1886 announced her own debut in fiction it could well have been another irritant to Fanny.

The basic 'facts' seem to be that Katharine read her projected story to a group of the Stevenson circle, where it was discussed possibly more than once. It was called '[The] Watersprite' (according to Henley), and was about a man who meets a 'girl escaped from a lunatic asylum' on a train. Fanny, lover of the supernatural, thought it would work better if the girl were really a 'nixie' (a dangerous spirit who lures men to watery deaths) and at some point, when the original story failed to find a publisher, obtained Katharine's 'unwilling consent' to rewrite it in her own





way (*Letters* 6:146, 164-165, 172 and *passim*). Fanny's 'Nixie' was finished by late 1887 in Saranac, and was sent by Stevenson himself to *Scribner's*, where he was contracted to publish a series of essays (of which 'Beggars' appeared in the same issue as 'The Nixie').<sup>25</sup> His recommendation suggests that he was not bothered by the story's collaborative origins, although he had originally asked Fanny not to proceed with it (*Letters* 6: 67, 172). Henley immediately wrote to Stevenson complaining that Fanny had published a story closely based on Katharine's without giving her any credit for it, but the ensuing uproar has since completely preempted discussion of the story itself, which has been dismissed as 'trivial' (Lapierre p. 350), or 'Fanny's droopy little story' (Furnas p. 292) or 'her feeble little tale [...] accepted only because she was Mrs R.L.S' (Mackay p. 242).

'The Nixie' may be mediocre but its themes and imagery are striking. Willoughby, a young gentleman travelling by train on a fishing trip, encounters a strange girl, dressed like a 'workhouse brat' or escapee from some institution. On arrival she follows him to the river, where he becomes intrigued by her freedom and naturalness, in contrast to the stuffy conventionality of his destined bride, Lady Maud Ponsonby, whose parting gift of a red rose lies crushed and forgotten in his pocket. After the girl jettisons her outer garments and makes him a wreath of dripping waterweed, they journey in a purloined boat up the river, through an idyllic landscape. The girl's words are echoed from the bank, and in the distance is heard the piping of the great god Pan. Willoughby now starts to look like the lunatic, and is derided by some passing Cockneys as the 'mad woman in the play', his companion apparently invisible. His own identity seems threatened, by something 'wild and natural' that gives him the sensation of merging with the earth itself. In the river, he joyfully sees 'the girl's reflection beside his own. A passing ripple shook the surface of the water, disturbing the mirrored face; the chin and lips quivered, the eyes became blurred, and the picture shattered into a thousand





sparkles.’ As she urges him on up the river, never to return, he lapses into a dreamlike trance, recounting ‘ancient tales, mixing naiads, and gods, and water-sprites into a romantic story of the present’. But at dusk the dream starts to turn to nightmare. Now in the water he sees ‘only a face that sank deeper and deeper, the smile on it changing grotesquely [...] to the grieved expression of a sobbing child, until it was lost in blackness.’ Vainly he dives after her, only to regain consciousness on the bank, pulled out by the Cockneys, and with nothing to identify him but Lady Maud’s ‘messy old flower’.

‘The Nixie’, like ‘Miss Pringle’, is very English in its setting, characters and class distinctions, and is embellished with literary allusions, notably to the story of Narcissus and Echo from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, but also to Ophelia in *Hamlet*. How much of this comes from Katharine’s lost original is unknown, as Henley says merely that the ‘situation, the environment, the principal figure [...] reminiscences of phrases and imagery, parallel incident’ were derivative (*Letters* 6:130). Yet the naturalistic river setting resembles that found in Katharine’s later novella, ‘The Old River House’, which also features a boating trip ending at dusk with the severing of a couple’s relationship.<sup>26</sup>

Curiously, there is an echo of Stevenson himself, when Willoughby sees their faces, and then the girl’s alone, unstably reflected in the water. Mirroring is a major device in Stevenson’s double stories of the mid 1880s, ‘Markheim’, *Jekyll and Hyde*, and ‘Olalla’, and in ‘Olalla’, mirroring can involve gender mutability, when a man sees himself reflected in, or as, a woman’s face.<sup>27</sup> But faces mirrored in water occur only in his poetry of the early 1880s, notably in ‘Looking-glass River’, in *A Child’s Garden of Verses*:





We can see our coloured faces  
Floating on the shaken pool  
Down in cool places,  
Dim and very cool;

Till a wind or water wrinkle,  
Dipping marten, plumping trout,  
Spreads in a twinkle  
And blots all out.

See the rings pursue each other;  
All below grows black as night,  
Just as if mother  
Had blown out the light!

The only other use of this image is in one of two poems dedicated to Katharine De Mattos:

We see you as we see a face  
That trembles in a forest place  
Upon the mirror of a pool  
Forever quiet, clear and cool;  
And in the wayward glass, appears  
To hover between smiles and tears,  
Elfin and human, airy and true,  
And backed by the reflected blue.

It might have been natural for Katharine to re-use this wavering, unstable, poetic image of herself as human/elfin changeling reflected in water, but perhaps Fanny just found it to be convenient, descriptive material. Yet for her too there could be personal resonances, perhaps alluding to the fluctuating emotional boundaries between Louis and herself, and fears of being pulled into a threatening merger of identities.





'The Nixie' on the surface depicts a man almost losing his sanity and his life in an implied contest between two contrasted women from two different worlds. Fanny (who first met Louis in another idyllic river landscape) could have portrayed herself in the despised waif metamorphosed into an enchanting figure from classical mythology, and the aristocratic Lady Maud with her teas and garden parties might (like Helen Mainwaring) be a sly dig at the more cultured and socially adept Katharine. Even Fanny's transforming the 'principal figure' into a nixie may be pertinent here. It is awkward to insert a supernatural being into the very realistic framework of the tale, since it could make her seem merely the invisible product of a dream or hallucination, but the slang word 'nix' means 'nothing' or to 'cancel' or 'negate', and in America has long been applied to undeliverable or 'dead' letters. Even today, a returned letter in the U.S.A. will be marked 'Nixie' on the label. So was the American Fanny negating Katharine's effort by substituting her own? Henley's later complaint, that Fanny's 'Nixie' 'killed' Katharine's story while he was still trying to place it, makes it sound that way (*Letters* 6:165). All this may be speculative, but it does seem that 'The Nixie' crystallised out of the fluid medium of the shifting three-way relationship between Stevenson and these two important, rival women in his life. His own blurring of emotional boundaries and need for harmony and control may have left him oblivious to the ensuing tensions and therefore vulnerable to nasty surprises (as happened later in Samoa, when Fanny, now feeling superseded by her daughter Belle's taking over as Louis's literary confidante and amanuensis, had a major mental breakdown).

Contemporaneous with the 'Nixie' was Fanny's other attempt to prove the soundness of her literary judgment, when she appropriated an idea discarded by Stevenson and Henley for a play called 'The Hanging Judge'.<sup>28</sup> This was based on a Sheridan LeFanu story and required much reading in Old Bailey trials. Years later Fanny told Graham Balfour that Louis liked her sce-





nario, rearranged it, and wrote alternate scenes with her, which they then exchanged and rewrote.<sup>29</sup> Due to some disagreement over the ending it was not finished until the end of 1887 but was never produced, to Fanny's chagrin. It is not hard to see why. The play is clumsily constructed (e.g. suspense is sacrificed by giving away secrets at the outset), it is legally preposterous, and the dialogue is wooden. More puzzling is what Stevenson himself really thought of it (a question which could be asked about his attitude to Fanny's writing in general). The judge's vigorous defence of conjugal loyalty may offer a clue, however. After insisting on carrying out the death penalty on his wife's first husband to prevent him harming her further, he declares: 'I love my wife; she is ill, her days are threatened; I will defend her. What do I care for laws! I love my wife!' If Fanny hoped this was Louis's attitude to herself and her work, he was to pay dearly for it in the course of the 'Nixie' row. Yet perhaps he was recompensed when this impossible play later gave him one germ of the idea that turned into his unfinished masterpiece, *Weir of Hermiston*, which he did dedicate to Fanny.

No-one emerged with much credit from all the bitter recriminations over the 'Nixie'. Most contend that the real animus was always that between Henley and Stevenson, who resented his friend's jealous insinuations about his wife and reacted with an outburst of narcissistic rage (even if he later grudgingly admitted that Fanny had gone too far – *Letters* 6:172). But the real loser was the hapless Katharine, blamed as the instigator of the whole affair, stripped of her cousin's hitherto undying love, and henceforward banished from his life, leaving Fanny triumphant over both her and Henley.

### **Pacific travels, 1888-1894**

Katharine's nemesis was soon far away in the South Pacific, living adventures more than writing about them. But Fanny had a comeuppance of sorts in that she never regained her position





as her husband's writing partner, a role now played by her son, Lloyd Osbourne, who in Saranac collaborated with Stevenson on *The Wrong Box*, and later on *The Wrecker* and *The Ebb-Tide*. Fanny did nonetheless publish another story, 'The Half-white', which germinated during their 1889 sojourn in Hawaii, and which Stevenson in 1890 also sent to *Scribner's*, (this time with instalments of *The Wrecker*), where it appeared in 1891.<sup>30</sup> It has another convoluted, melodramatic plot, involving a beautiful 'half-white' girl, the young American poet who falls in love with her, and the priest who had been her guardian but claims she has the taint of leprosy in order to save her from sexual exploitation. In the end he confesses that his real motive was his own illicit passion for her, and his final punishment is the dramatic discovery that he is the one with leprosy. Again we see Fanny's fascination with miscegenation and hints of father-daughter incest, plus clear echoes of 'Olalla'. Here too it is her father confessor who warns the hero to renounce Lulani (who despite her heredity 'has a soul as pure as her body is foul'), and tells him that the 'essence of love is self-sacrifice', while Lulani herself shares Olalla's piety and reluctant renunciation of love. Yet 'The half-white' also foreshadows Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesá', where he presented a more nuanced and cynical treatment of relations between a gullible white man and a tabooed native girl.

Fanny's career as a fiction writer was nearing its end. In Samoa her energies were absorbed by work on their house and plantation, and her mental stability was challenged by the strain of managing complex family relationships as well as the unhappy awareness that Louis's work was taking new directions in which her influence counted much less. Here she published only one more, very brief tale, 'Under Sentence of the Law: the Story of a Dog' (this time in the new *McClure's Magazine*), about a lovable canine thief who is tried and condemned to death but then reprieved.<sup>31</sup> It could have been inspired by a local dog whose life she spared after it attacked her pig,<sup>32</sup> but she nostalgically set it





in Davos, in a faraway time and place where her own ascendancy in Louis's life was still unchallenged.

Fanny's stories may always have sounded better in the oral telling than they looked on the printed page, and she herself conceded that her style had a 'dry nippedness' and 'woodenness' that she could never get rid of.<sup>33</sup> Her real talent lay in her diaries, which she kept for her own pleasure and to refresh Louis's memory when needed. They were never intended for publication, though she did bring out the first one as *The Cruise of the Janet Nichol* in 1914, the last year of her life. Her vivid and moving Samoan diaries, with parts censored by an unknown hand, lay unseen until rescued and published in 1956. Some of those censored passages reveal a longing for respect and independence, as in her misery when Louis tells her she is not an artist but has the 'soul of a peasant', and her protestation that with every seed she plants and nurtures she knows she is a creator. Even so, she still hankered after publication: 'I wish I were able to write a little tale that I might save some money of my own [...] Of the last I got twenty five dollars out of a hundred and fifty, which I sent to my dying brother-in-law. I wonder what would become of a man, and to what he would degenerate, if his life were that of a woman's [...] I would work very hard to earn a couple of pounds a month, and I could easily earn much more, but there is my position as Louis's wife, therefore I cannot' (*Our Samoan Adventure*, pp. 54, 61, 243).

### **Postscript, 1894-1914**

Louis's death in December 1894 left Fanny utterly bereft, yet also socially and financially independent, free to invest what he had termed her 'hellish energies' in managing his literary estate and with it her own material and familial interests. She seemed to have no further need for creative writing, with one curious exception, 'Anne', which she published in *Scribner's* in July 1899.<sup>34</sup> Anne wanders in her beloved garden on a spring morning, think-





ing back over her long life and her marriage to John, ten years older than herself. She rejoices in a newfound sense of youth, until she comes to the still pool where long ago she and John held their trysts, and is bewildered to find that her face is not reflected in the water. She assumes she must be dreaming, but only when she encounters Marian, a long-dead relative, does she realise that she too is dead. Shocked, she returns to the house to find her John, to whom she exclaims: 'husband of my youth and of my old age; we are one. We cannot be parted. I will not leave you,' until he too joins her in death.

Here the autobiographical elements are obvious. Anne is endowed with all the qualities Fanny prided herself on, including 'unusual [clairvoyant] powers' and superb taste in literature: 'there was no critic [...] more quick than she to detect a lapse in taste or art, nor with a readier appreciation of style, originality, or even intention.' Though childless, Anne has 'petted and spoiled' her ailing husband, making him 'absolutely dependent on her, almost for his thoughts' (in other words, no rivals intrude in this marriage, she is the dominant partner and the age difference between Fanny and Louis is magically reversed). But why would Fanny write this paeon to conjugal love and indivisibility now, some four years after Louis's death? Did it reflect her current concern for the control of Stevenson's posthumous reputation, through the discreetly edited publication of his letters and the choice of a suitable biographer? Or did it also have to do with the growing irritant of another rival, another Katharine, this time Lloyd's wife, Katharine Durham Osbourne, who detested Fanny and herself had ambitions to become keeper of the Stevenson flame? Perhaps 'Anne' expressed Fanny's defiant assertion that she alone was Louis's soul-mate even beyond the grave, even if without him there was no longer a face reflected in the water ....

### Discussion

What can one conclude from this brief survey? First, that Fanny's





literary talents were indeed modest. Her fiction, even when the Gothic excesses of plot and language are somewhat tamed, always has a stilted, amateurish flavour, as do the inconsistent versions of her name in print. Yet contemporaries such as Gosse and Colvin concurred that her spoken language was 'picturesque', with a 'play of character and feeling and choice and colour of words', that are also often present in her letters and diaries. Even her hated daughter-in-law, the other Katharine, admitted that she could tell 'the most thrilling adventures, a patchwork of many tales she had read, as her own experiences ... [she was] a pure romancer' (Mackay, pp. 132, 134, 478).

This is one key to the vital attraction between Fanny and Louis, the woman who lived in an 'atmosphere of thrilling New World romance' and the man 'who was himself Romance personified', as her sister put it (Sanchez, pp. 1-2). But for Fanny in particular, their marriage posed tensions and contradictions, between devotion to Louis and his writing, and her powerful need for independence and respect. She was no proto-feminist but a courageous, domineering, often histrionic woman who nonetheless had always to be attached to some man, with brief exceptions, since leaving her father's house at seventeen. She struggled between self-assertion and her underlying dependency and need for bourgeois status, perfectly captured in the diary entry above. Publishing fiction was a respectable way of building some financial independence, but it was also a means to assert her own identity, not just as assistant and collaborator but in her 'own write'. Stevenson himself recognised this, which is why he fostered and promoted her writing and defended her against critics, even if he must have had to suspend his own critical judgment in the process.

Fanny's diverse stories may seem like opportunistic responses to her ever-changing life circumstances and surroundings, drawing on stock elements from popular fiction, but their themes still reflect her personal and marital conflicts. In her earliest work





life is a fairy tale, whose protagonists are victimised by malign forces but finally emerge triumphant in marriage and prosperity. Then she portrays intrepid heroines of murky but romanticised antecedents who outwit men and evade or destroy their tormentors. In England she writes with aplomb about women caught between polite society and Bohemian transgression, and in Hawaii plunges into the complexities of interracial unions and forbidden sexuality.

Fanny's stories can also be read as a counterpoint to Stevenson's own, suggesting the ways some of his material may have been rooted in the rich soil of their shared imaginings. This is especially true of his 'Olalla', a nightmare vision of repressed female doubles, demonic versus divine, who threaten to overwhelm the male protagonist and subvert his identity. Fanny's stories, redolent of sexuality, abound with contrasting and conflicting pairs of women, like the innocent girl versus the old witch (and the ambiguously sexed 'man-witch') in 'The Warlock's Shadow', or the aristocratic fair Cuban in *The Dynamiter*, who is threatened both by the revelation of her mother's slavery and by the evil half-breed sorceress who tries to possess her. Then there is the pious spinster versus the amoral Bohemian in 'Miss Pringle', and finally the polite society lady versus the seductive nymph-goddess in 'The Nixie', who threaten contrasting fates for the man whose own mirrored self-image breaks up, merges with theirs and is almost engulfed in the depths. One might see 'The Nixie' as reflecting the tensions and unstable boundaries in the Stevenson marriage, but also the splits in Fanny's own complex and contradictory personality, between the prosperous bourgeoisie and the headlong adventuress. Only in 'Anne', written as from the after-life, is there a resolution, whereby the whole woman now asserts dominance and the man is irrevocably joined with her in death.



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*Robert Louis Stevenson. First Writings*, ed. by Christine Alexander with Elise McPherson (Sydney Australia: Juvenilia Press, 2013), 64 pp., ISBN 978-0-7334-3321-4, £10.00 / AU \$15.00 / US \$15.00.

*First Writings* is a new volume from the Juvenilia Press, a now well-established scholarly project based at the School of Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales. With well over forty titles in its catalogue, the Juvenilia Press bears witness to the increasingly serious critical attention being paid to the earliest writings of authors such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Lewis Carroll, Charles Dickens, and more contemporary figures such as Philip Larkin and Margaret Atwood. Editor and Press director Professor Christine Alexander launched this volume at the 2013 Stevenson conference in Sydney and then again in Britain where she gave a plenary lecture to the third international conference on literary juvenilia, held at the University of Durham.

In the case of Stevenson's 'first writings', juvenilia really means juvenilia, for these six little pieces were produced by him between the ages of six and twelve – all of them dictated to his mother or his nurse. (Being frequently home-schooled in his early years, young Lou's handwriting, even at the age of ten, leaves something to be desired.) His interest in drawing, on the other hand, is well represented by the coloured illustrations he produced as part of his text. The six-year old's lengthy 'History of Moses' was enough to win a family competition, memorably accompanied by eight pages of pencil and watercolour sketches. Professor Alexander comments on Stevenson's fondness for scrutinizing pictures, illustrations, book plates and prints and argues that his mature imagination reflects this highly developed visual sense. One thinks of Stevenson's delight in Skelt's toy theatres of course, and Alexander's case is persuasive, even if the Israelites are seen to be wearing top hats and smoking pipes. Lou raids the Bible again in his rendition of 'The Book of Joseph',





which has been previously published, as have ‘The Antiquities of Midlothian’ and some short pieces dictated to Alison Cunningham. In every case the volume’s excellent introduction, its scrupulous footnotes and the register of textual emendations at the end demonstrate scrupulous scholarship throughout. In addition there are photographs of the family, their houses and rooms, and samples of Stevenson’s scrawling schoolboy hand. A second volume of juvenilia is planned.

Two of these six pieces, ‘The American Travellers’ (1857) and ‘Travels in Perthshire (1859) have never been published before. ‘The American Travellers’ is particularly interesting in that it shows what must be Stevenson’s very first essay into romance, with a tale of exploration and adventure in North America, replete with pirates, storms at sea and those rather delightful illustrations in colour, including a drawing of the rigging of the hero’s brigantine *The Philadelphia*, which is remarkably accurate for a seven year old boy. The story has an unforced, unfinished charm, notable for its author’s somewhat over detailed engagement with the practical problems of how to cross an inlet between cliffs when cut off by the tide. – Ropes, slings and hooks are involved, and it is not difficult to foresee Stevenson’s penchant for the physical details of landscape, travel and mobility in this early text. ‘Travels in Perthshire’ is less engaging, perhaps, in that the author (now nine) is prone to echo what Professor Alexander identifies as his father’s less than favourable comments on the Macfarlane museum in Bridge of Allan: ‘it costs 3d to get in but we apprehend he is a Whig because the working classes get in for a 1d.’ A meal at the Royal Hotel in Dundee, meets with more favour, however, concluding with ‘bread pudding flavoured with ginger’ duly proclaimed to be ‘the best pudding I ever tasted’. We might agree that, in this instance, the boy Stevenson is clearly speaking for himself.

*Roderick Watson*





## Contributors

**Hilary Beattie** is a psychologist and psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City, as well as a faculty member of both the Columbia University Department of Psychiatry and the Columbia Psychoanalytic Centre. Her research interests include psychoanalytic approaches to literature and autobiography, and the Scottish contribution to psychoanalysis, notably the work of W. R. D. Fairbairn. On Stevenson she has published four earlier papers in this journal (2005, 2007, 2009, 2011), as well as 'A Fairbairnian analysis of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*' (1998) and a psycho-biographical essay, 'Father and son: The origins of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*' (2001).

**Letitia Henville** is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of English at the University of Toronto. Her dissertation focuses on late Victorian literary ballads that feature non-British people, cultures, languages and stories.

**David Howard** was born in Christchurch New Zealand. He spent 35 years writing *The Incomplete Poems* (Cold Hub Press, 2011) and collaborated with the artist Peter Ransom on *You Look So Pretty When You're Unfaithful To Me* (Holloway Press, 2012). Reviewing this volume for *Landfall* in July 2013, Robert McLean stated, 'Sounding a Wintersian note from the get-go, I assert that David Howard is our finest poet.' David has received the NZ Society of Authors Mid-Career Writers' Award (2009), the University of South Pacific Poetry Prize (2011), the Robert Burns Fellowship (2013), and the Otago Wallace Residency (2014-15).

**Nathalie Jaëck** is Professor of 19th century British Literature at Bordeaux Montaigne University. She specializes in adventure fiction, and is specifically interested in narratological and philosophical approaches. She has published two books, *Charles Dickens. L'écriture comme pouvoir, l'écriture comme résistance*, (Paris: Ophrys, 2008), and *Les Aventures de Sherlock Holmes*:





*une affaire d'identité*, (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2008), as well as numerous papers on Doyle, Dickens, Stevenson, Conrad, Stoker.

**Caroline McCracken-Flesher** is Professor of English at the University of Wyoming. She writes widely on Scottish Literature and Culture. Her books include *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* (Oxford, 2005) and *The Doctor Dissected: A Cultural Autopsy of the Burke and Hare Murders*, as well as the edited volumes *Culture, Nation and the New Scottish Parliament* and *Scotland As Science Fiction* (both from Bucknell). She edited the *MLA Approaches to Teaching the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (2012) and is editing *Kidnapped* for the Edinburgh Edition.

**Ashleigh Prosser** is currently completing her PhD by research in English and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia. Her doctoral thesis is a study of the gothic in the London-based novels of contemporary British author Peter Ackroyd. Her research interests are in the gothic, the uncanny, haunting and spectrality, with a particular focus on late-Victorian and neo-Victorian literature. Ashleigh is also the Book Reviews Editor of the online journal *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*.

**Alan Sandison** was Professor of English at Strathclyde University for eight years before resigning to concentrate on research and writing. He resumed teaching as Chair of English at the University of New England in New South Wales where he is now an Emeritus Professor. He has written numerous substantial articles on Stevenson and his major books include *The Wheel of Empire: A Study of the Imperial Idea in Some Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Fiction* (1967); *The Last Man in Europe: an Essay on George Orwell* (1974) and *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism* (1996).





# The New Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Robert Louis Stevenson

General Editors: Stephen Arata, Richard Dury, Penny Fielding  
and Anthony Mandal

The NEW EDINBURGH EDITION OF THE COLLECTED WORKS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (EdRLS for short) continues to progress. The first volume, *Prince Otto*, edited by Robert P. Irvine, was published at the beginning of 2014. Next should follow *Virginibus Puerisque*, which only lacks the volume introduction. Five volumes of essays are planned, co-ordinated by Richard Dury; publication is planned in 2015 for *Virginibus Puerisque*, Uncollected essays to 1879 and *Memories and Portraits*. The second volume of Uncollected Essays (which gathers the twelve *Scribner's Magazine* essays together for the first time) and *Familiar Studies* should follow in 2016.

Several other volumes should also be published in the 2014-15 period: *The Amateur Emigrant*, *St Ives*, *Weir of Hermiston* and *Kidnapped*. Julia Reid has been working on the *Amateur Emigrant* MS at Yale and has transcribed the manuscripts; Glenda Norquay has also visited the USA, working on *St. Ives*, looking at MSS, letters etc. in the Beinecke Library, Princeton and the Huntington Library in Los Angeles while the MS is transcribed at Edinburgh; Gillian Hughes is nearing completion of an edition of *Weir of Hermiston* based on a fresh transcription of the manuscript, and Caroline McCracken-Flesher is working away at *Kidnapped*, having now finished a transcription of the manuscript. One of our short story volumes is now underway under the editorship of Bill Gray. He has now made a complete transcription of the Fables manuscript in the British Library, has





finished the notes and collation and is presently working on the volume introduction.

The work of text-conversion from pdfs of the witness texts is being undertaken at the University of Edinburgh (coordinated by Penny Fielding) and at the University of Virginia (coordinated by Steve Arata).

More on progress can be found in the EdRLS blog at <http://edrls.wordpress.com/>.

There is still a great deal of work to be done after the main text is settled as, for example, its collation with other authorial lifetime editions, and the front and back matter, which is where some of the most interesting material will be for many readers. However, the main text is to be prepared first, to be set in camera-ready copy (this will be co-ordinated by Anthony Mandal of Cardiff University) with page numbers that can be used to refer to passages from the volume Introduction and the Explanatory Notes and other back matter.

The Edition office has been set up in Edinburgh and equipped. A major grant from the Royal Society of Edinburgh awarded in March 2011 allowed us to appoint Lena Wångren as postdoctoral research fellow. We are delighted that Lena's Fellowship is continuing for a further year, funded by the MHRA. Lena will oversee the production of digital texts and assist in the research for individual volumes. The Edition also hosts 6-monthly internships for students from the University of Mainz. The interns receive training and act as Research Assistants to scan volumes, store and back up all the text and image files that we acquire, order scans and images from libraries etc. A renewal of the generous donation from the RLS Club of Edinburgh will be used to pay for the setting up of the text of the volumes as they become ready in 2014. The edition has also received a very generous donation from the Liston Charitable Trust, which will be put towards bibliographical expenses.

In partnership with the National Library of Scotland, the





edition has been expanding its collection of fully digitized texts for a database of Stevenson material. The website for this will be hosted at the University of Cardiff. If any reader of the *JSS* would like to collaborate in the work of MS transcription and proofing, please get in touch with Richard Dury ([richard.dury@gmail.com](mailto:richard.dury@gmail.com)).

Richard Dury, Penny Fielding





## Stevenson: Notes and Queries

The *New Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* and the *Journal of Stevenson Studies* invite brief essays, bibliographical information, and/or Notes and Queries, relating to any of the following:

- The whereabouts of uncatalogued material
- Unpublished biographical information
- Supplementary material and emendations to Swearingen's *The Prose Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*
- Information on Stevenson's collaborations
- Details of Stevenson's relations with publishers, both financial and personal
- Distribution and sale of Stevenson's work in Britain and the USA
- Archive collections and printed guides relating to the magazines in which Stevenson published
- Information and opinions on different editions published during Stevenson's lifetime
- The production of illustrations
- Early reception of individual works (reviews not collected in Maixner's *Critical Heritage*)
- Mentions of Stevenson's works in letters or diaries of contemporaries, etc.

Alternatively, information not intended for publication may be sent directly to any of the General Editors, who would be grateful for any such material:

Stephen Arata: [sda2e@cms.mail.virginia.edu](mailto:sda2e@cms.mail.virginia.edu)

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# RLS

## WEBSITE

[www.robert-louis-stevenson.org](http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org)

Funded by a grant from the Carnegie Trust.

Dedicated to the life and works of Robert Louis Stevenson, making texts and information about his life and works freely available worldwide, [www.robert-louis-stevenson.org](http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org) is a primary online resource for students, scholars and enthusiasts alike. Galleries of images of places and people associated with Stevenson, and of RLS, himself are a particular feature of the website. It situates Stevenson firmly in Edinburgh, focusing on the city's, and on Scotland's influence on his writing, while also recognising the international dimension to his work and readership.

Listing past and current scholarly work on RLS, as well as the full texts and a significant proportion of all the available photographs and images, this site reaches a world-wide audience, many of whom cannot travel to the places where such items are located. Back numbers of the *Journal of Stevenson Studies* are also posted on this site in full-text format.

The site is established at the Centre for Literature and Writing (CLAW) at Edinburgh Napier University with support from Edinburgh and Stirling Universities, literary trusts like the Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature, the Writers' Museum of Edinburgh, and Stevenson enthusiasts, museum curators and academics around the globe. It offers a significant contribution to the growing reputation of RLS as an important literary figure and personality of the late nineteenth century



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**Volume 2** in 2005, with essays by Hilary J. Beattie, Sara Clayson, Richard Dury, Liz Farr, William Gray, Gordon Hirsch, Jürgen Kramer.

**Volume 3** in 2006 with a poem by Jim C. Wilson and essays by Giuseppe Albano, Katherine Linehan, Wendy Katz, Katherine Linehan, Laanvanyan Ratnapalan, Roger G. Swearingen, Saverio Tomaiuolo.

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**Volume 5** in 2008 was the special 'Stevenson and the Writers' edition with reflections, memoirs and creative contributions from Ron Butlin, Alan Grant, Diana Hendry, David Kinloch, Patrick McGrath, Donal McLaughlin, Barry Menikoff, Cees Nooteboom, James Robertson, Suhayl Saadi, Louise Welsh, Hamish Whyte.

**Volume 6** in 2009 contained essays from the Bergamo conference by Hilary Beattie, Nicoletta Brazzelli, Nancy Bunge, Gordon Hirsch, Nathalie Jaëck, Matthew Kaiser, Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega, Rosella Mallardi, Burkhard Niederhoff, Laavanyan Ratnapalan, Sara Rizzo, Andrew De Young, Tania Zulli.





**Volume 7** in 2010 contained three poems on Stevenson by Jean Taylor and essays by David Annwn, Dana Fore, Jeremy Lim, Glenda Norquay and Sara Wasson, with 'Uncollected Stevenson' introduced by Caroline A. Howitt and Roger G. Swearingen.

**Volume 8** in 2011 contained essays from the Stirling conference by R. L. Abrahamson, Sarah Ames, Hilary J. Beattie, Jenni Calder, Ann C. Colley, Lesley Graham, Richard J. Hill, Gordon Hirsch, Nathalie Jaëck, Stuart Kelly, Donald Mackenzie, David Miller, James Robertson, Sara Stevenson, Saverio Tomaiuolo, Roderick Watson.

**Volume 9** in 2012 contained essays on Stevenson as an essayist from Robert-Louis Abrahamson, Neil Macara Brown, Richard Dury, Dewi Evans, Lesley Graham, Timothy S. Hayes, Jennifer Hayward, Richard J. Hill, Marie Léger-St-Jean, Andrew Robson, Alex Thomson.

**Volume 10** in 2013 contained essays by R. L. Abrahamson, Neil Macara Brown, Linda Dryden, Christy Danelle Di Frances, Adam Lawrence, Catherine Mathews, Nigel Planer.





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