He was supposedly a diligent student at the University of Edinburgh: but in reality, Robert Louis Stevenson was trawling through the fleshpots of Leith.

The secret double life of Mr Jekyll and Hyde

Lonely garret became too much to bear, he sought solace in the arms of two-franc ‘French bitches’. On returning to Edinburgh, he adopted a similar lifestyle along with his cousin.

As they discussed art and literature, love and life in the smoky din of Collett’s shebeen, they would have found it hilarious that the Scottish Association for the Suppression of Licentiousness was trying to stamp out nude modeling at Edinburgh School of Art, where Bob was now a student.

To them, it was another symptom of repressive Edinburgh, where in the 1870s sex was sanctioned only within the confines of a marriage settlement, subject to the groom’s social and financial status. While neither cousin was particularly social and financial status. While the girls viewed most of Edinburgh’s Mr Hydes with contempt, they liked Louis and felt unusually inhibited about taking him as a customer. At least one turned him down.

While the girls viewed most of Edinburgh’s Mr Hydes with contempt, they liked Louis and felt unusually inhibited about taking him as a customer. At least one turned him down. Some may even have been a little in love.

Later, she would reveal that a girl called ‘Mary J’, an occasional prostitute when not in work at a factory on Leith Walk, had tried to make him jealous: ‘It never occurred to me that she thought of me except in the way of business.’ It was only years later they had a long chat in a pub and realized they had been dear friends without knowing it: ‘We had much to talk about, and she cried – and so did I.’

The one girl Louis did fall in love with in Leith Street was Kate Drummond, or so the myth says.

There is certainly hard evidence that he turned his back on a working-class girl who could barely afford the postage for the many letters she sent him, c/o Wilson the tobacconist.

Perhaps under pressure from his father, he did not reply and eventually burned them all. In confessing this to a friend, he was racked by guilt, saying: ‘Don’t I deserve the gallows?’

With that, Kate Drummond slipped away into the mists. Louis caused a scandal so severe at home that his distraught parents contemplated leaving Edinburgh to escape its moral censure.

Edinburgh society could go hang for all Louis cared but he did regret aspects of his youthful conduct. In 1884, he confessed in a last letter to Bob that he wished he had been ‘more chaste’ before marriage and had ‘honoured sex more religiously’.

Shortly afterwards, at his new home on the South Sea island of Samoa, the 44-year-old author died suddenly of a stroke – possibly the result of syphilis contracted at the age of 22. It robbed the world of untold works of genius.

As headlines worldwide paid tribute to the memory of a great man, Victorian Edinburgh basked in reflected glory – smiling sweetly on her newfound favourite son, as if nothing unpleasant had ever happened.