

## **RLS 2000**

### **STIRLING: PICTURESQUE NOTES**

The Stirling Stevenson Conference, 10-14 July 2000 - some personal impressions by Richard Dury

#### **Monday - arrival**

Edinburgh to Stirling - one of those train journeys worth more than the ticket - took me across open, green and rolling countryside with a backdrop of mountains, chequered by sunlight under a blue and white heaven.

The University campus, in the park of Airthey Castle, landscaped by Robert Adam in the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is a perfect example of the Picturesque: the element of the rough and wild is given by the Ochil cliffs marking the abrupt start to the Highlands and by the overhanging (and picturesquely-named) Hermitage Wood. The rest is centred around a sinuously irregular lake, reed-ringed and duck-drawn, with constantly varying water: green-reflecting and smooth, or light-catching ruffled. On one morning walk I saw a heron, like a gaunt emeritus professor in a shabby summer jacket over a black waistcoat, contemplating the water from his own small rocky island. Surrounding the water are hillocks of smooth grass (rabbit-run, squirrel-scampered), planted with groupings of varied shrubs and trees, including some magnificent, ancient and spreading fretted oaks. The University buildings, in an early 70s discreet brutalist style, are low and nestle quite well, benefiting from being half-hidden among the picturesque hills.

Monday evening started with drinks in the Court Room, its running windows on two walls overlooking the park and lake. After greetings by the Principal we took our buffet meal to tables, where I found myself with people already friends via e-mail, now met for the first time: Karen Steele, Cathie Linehan and Barry Menikoff. The latter told us about how as a young academic he had interviewed Lloyd Osbourne's eldest son, Alan,

who had said that his grandmother, Fanny, was a wise woman who didn't always tell the truth, while his mother, less wise, was much more reliable (biographers please note).

## Tuesday

After only a brief period of darkness, Tuesday morning dawned to blue skies and a *frisson* of chill in the air. We breakfasted in the canteen and then the morning started, a jovial Eric Massie presiding, with Catherine Kerrigan's talk on 'Stevenson's Constructions of Masculinity'. Kindly, quiet and confident, she outlined a Victorian crisis of male identities caused by the undermining of old certainties and by the anxieties resulting from secret private lives. One reaction to this, 'Christian manliness', is criticized in Attwater and rejected by Herrick (in *The Ebb-Tide*). The other reaction - male hysteria - is seen in Hyde, the Young Man with Cream Tarts, and in Herrick. The stable model of identity that might come from the father was particularly difficult for Stevenson and his male pairings mimic father-son relations in dramas of control and submission.

The following talk, on 'The Campness of *The New Arabian Nights*', was given by the present writer. The idea was that 'camp' (defined by traits such as exaggerated self-conscious theatricality, self-mockery, winking complicity, and an undermining of the categories of dominant ideology, especially gender distinctions) could be a way to understand this elusive text. A series of camp-like elements were identified at various levels in the text, though it was seen to have a final anxiety that works against the perfectly insouciant pose. Role-playing and performance, however, are important in all Stevenson's works.

Gender and performance/play questions continued with the talk by tall, almost gangling, and bespectacled Robert Crawford, entitled 'Stevenson's Journey into Masculinity' and centred on *A Child's Garden of Verses*. Fröbel's pedagogic theories were known to Stevenson and inspired the 'Child's Garden' title. According to the speaker (who, with his clear Scottish accent,

gave some memorable readings aloud of the poems), the collaborative games with Lloyd (unusual for the time) allowed the release of 'the man who could play' from 'the man who could write about play' (in 'Child's Play'), and the playful collaboration with Lloyd and Thomas in the writing of *Treasure Island* allowed him to 'disempurple his prose'. Even masculinity is no problem here, since the male characters in *A Child's Garden of Verses*, *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* play at masculine identity as a game.

After lunch in the Court Room, we settled down to hear a droll and relaxed Barry Menikoff talk about 'Stevenson as a Historian', an exploration of the uncertain border between fact and fiction. Stevenson had a scholarly interest in history which lies behind his 1881 application for the Edinburgh professorship of Constitutional Law and History. This (despite the comments of biographers) was seen as plausible at the time and Stevenson was not obviously less qualified than the other two candidates. In his fiction he was committed to accuracy and called for plain-prose 'originals' on which to base his novels set in the past. The following flurry of questions on Scott and Stevenson led to the conclusion that Stevenson, having less of a belief in historical progress, had no intent or desire to present culture-shaping historical moments in a conventional historical-novel way.

Vincent Giroud from the Beinecke Library, tall and slim and with only a trace of a French accent, next opened up the story of Edwin Beinecke and his Stevenson collection. For him it was 'Father Damien' that started the enthusiasm that led to the collection (and also to the name Skerryvore for his own house). Beinecke also wanted to help the cause of this writer he loved in the face of the low critical esteem he suffered in the 1920s and 30s. The entire collection was donated to Yale in 1951 and the opening of the new Library was marked by the lecture by David Daiches that became *Stevenson and the Art of Fiction*. Giroud's talk ended with valuable news about the progress of on-line cataloguing.

The final session of the day (chaired by Richard Ambrosini in a tartan tie), began with Toshiro Nakajima who took us into the fascinating but relatively-unexplored territory of derivative texts, telling us about *Hikari-to-Kaze-to-Yume*, a novel about Stevenson's life on Samoa by Atushi Nakajima (no relation) and published in 1942. In this work (so far untranslated into any other language, except in the extracts on our handout), the author sees Stevenson as having a similar ethical stance to himself.

Next came an interesting explanation of 'The Bottle Imp' by Sudesh Mishra. Non-experts in Marxist models had some difficulties, but the speaker's communicative verve and clarity of delivery took us over many of these. Despite the 'universal' folk-tale beginning and end, the story has many historical references and can be seen as charting the emergence of an exchange-value consciousness in Oceania. Keawe miraculously enters the bourgeois world by using his soul as collateral, and all the other elements of the tale can be fitted into a model of capitalist exchange and exploitation. The final buyer, the anti-bourgeois destitute, either accepts his fate in bourgeois ideology (damnation) as inevitable anyway, or (ironically) knows there is no hell and so re-appropriates his own property.

The day's work ended in fine style with Dick Ringler's 'Zen and the Art of Stevenson's Fiction'. Stevenson, who repudiated theology but was always interested in ethics and his own conduct, looked not for 'truth' in spiritual matters but 'truthfulness' (cf. 'The Touchstone'). Blythe's *Zen in English Literature and the Oriental Classics* (1942) actually uses three Stevenson Fables to answer the question 'What is Zen?'. Zen acceptance is shown in the late fable 'Poor Thing' and a conscious Zen gratitude in simply eating and sleeping in the poem 'Evensong', written after a sea-breeze slams a door in Vailima: 'I will eat and sleep and not question more'.

After a turn round the lake and dinner in the canteen, George Addis and his wife from the RLS Club took Karen Steele and

myself by car to nearby Bridge of Allan to point out places with Stevenson connections (visits in 1859, 1865, 1872 and 1875), including the Pharmacy with its original façade, then across the bridge of Stirling (with a view of the beautiful old bridge built by grandfather Robert Stevenson) to Stirling Castle. There we found a small crowd around a pipe band - but what I will remember will not be the wide esplanade with its monuments to Imperial battles, nor the massive symmetries of the Castle buildings and all their associated history, nor even the tartan finery of the military pipers, but five graceful girls of about sixteen who, in the apparently unfading evening light and just beyond the fringe of the crowd, tried out figures alone, then joined a crown of hands to step a stately wheel.

### **Wednesday**

The following day began with tall, bespectacled, quiet and confident Steven Arata on 'Close Reading and Contextual reading in Stevenson'. Stevenson's 'A Humble Remonstrance' shows his divided literary loyalties in the debate of the 1880s and 90s about close, skilled reading: (i) 'pleasure' (as in adventure tales) is a central value, an escape from Victorian and high-art earnestness, yet (ii) the reader also needs to work at interpretation since 'literature makes a pattern' by the omission and suppression of details and the inclusion only of those with multiple functions. Taking up Robert Crawford's idea of a stylistic change c.1880, Arata saw this not as an abandonment of dense literary artistry ('disempurplement') but as a new dialogue between 'play' and 'artistic patterning'. Stevenson's essays are contradictory but show the brilliance of a mind at play as he works out 'a highly innovative theory of reading'. These various Stevensons are united by a distrust of in depth interpretative reading and a delight in patterning. At the end of this stimulating talk, the speaker left us with a tantalising clue to further thought: that *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is 'a meditation on surface and in-depth reading strategies'.

That thought on *Jekyll and Hyde* led on to Linda Dryden's

'Jekyll and Hyde: Duality and the fin de siècle city' (part of a forthcoming book on Stevenson, Wilde and Wells). She opened with a presentation of the city as a source of 19<sup>th</sup>-century fears: it was rapidly expanding, contained labyrinths of streets, housing anonymous masses and hiding dangerous individuals. Such fears are visible in *Jekyll and Hyde*: Soho is in almost perpetual night and is perceived as 'a city in a nightmare'. Hyde himself can be seen as a 'metropolitan beast' moving freely about the city. However, Jekyll's destruction of the key confines both Jekyll and Hyde to an increasingly confined space. All the spaces in the city, even the central 'cabinet', are symbolic since they are deceptive and divided into two parts.

After coffee, the 'Jekyll and Hyde panel', chaired by Kathie Linehan, continued with Richard Walker, relaxed and cool in casual black, with gestures of cognitive expressiveness. His was an approach based on philosophical models, starting (after a scene-setting quote from Marx and Engels) with Descartes and the origins of the modern 'dis-identical subject'. This division is visible in Arnold's 'dialogue of the mind with itself', in Gothic fiction and in literary fiction that borrows from the Gothic. A resolution of the problem is in Modernist fluidity of identity (reflected in the shifting Soho fog in *Jekyll and Hyde*). Hyde is variously the alter-ego that disrupts the bourgeois individual, 'bourgeois self-interest incarnate', a by-product of an attempt to re-sanctify the bourgeois individual, and the product of capitalism ('Money is life to the man').

In contrast, the next speaker, Andrew Nash, in loose jacket and open-necked shirt, gave a fascinating archive-based report on the Stevenson collected editions 1894-1924. There were in fact an exceptional number of six collected editions in this period (Edinburgh, Pentland, Swanston, Vailima, Tusitala and Skerryvore). The stately volumes of the Edinburgh Edition in particular inspired other authors, such as Hardy, Kipling and James to plan their own collected editions.

Perhaps at this point we might leave the delegates at lunch and

present a few pieces of Conference trivia concerning pronunciation: (i) for 'Jekyll', /'dʒe kil/, beat /'dʒi: kil/ by about 30 to 4 (the minority group including Jenni Calder, John Macfie of the Stevenson House, the actors on the literary tour and myself); (ii) 'Catriona' varied about equally between /ka tri 'oun @/ (where @ = schwa), /k@ 'tri:n @/ and a diphthongized stressed vowel in /k@ 'tri:@n @/, but here we had the benefit of a Gaelic speaker on the last day who declared the first painful, the second acceptable and the third most correct; (iii) 'St. Ives' split 50:50 between English and French pronunciations (an uncertainty possibly built in by Stevenson himself); and (iv) true Scots seemed to pronounce 'Daiches' as /'dai xis/ (where x = the *ch* in *loch*) but did not swoon away at the sound of /'dei chiz/.

After a day-and-a-half of work, Eric Massie and the organizing committee had sensibly decided to insert a break at this point. So we tumbled into a coach and went off, chatting about talks heard and about Stevensonian things in general (what a joy to be for once in the company of people who've read all the same books!), and in no time at all were sitting with a drink in the Beehive in Edinburgh's Grassmarket. The young actor and actress of the tour then started to present a roughly chronological history (with readings) of writers associated with Edinburgh, starting from Fergusson and the rough life of the Grassmarket through to Burns, then Scott and Stevenson at the Writers' Museum, where we were welcomed by the curator Elaine Greig who was with us at the Conference the day before and after. With another drink from the pub behind the museum we got second scene of readings and interaction (the basic story line was that the man started out vaunting that Scottish literature took its seeds from rough life while the woman was for literature as an expression of refinement; but as she began to be won over to the former, the man suddenly started to have second thoughts - all quite well done), then walked down to get a view to the New Town (where we had an enjoyable piece on Stevenson, Jekyll and Hyde and the divided city), and finally crossed Princes Street to Milne's Bar where we learnt of the poets who had met there before finishing with a quick survey of

recent novelists.

At 7.30 we reconvened at Milne's Bar and went off to the familiar address of 17 Heriot Row, where we were met by John Macfie, the fortunate owner, and Julia, the events assistant, in the drawing room, where in the gathering dusk we could imagine the voice of Stevenson coming from a chair in the window. Standing by the piano Macfie, who grew up in the house, then read to us from one of Stevenson's letters written on a nearby date and then a moving brief essay ('A French Legend') about coming home with death, which was followed by the hope that he has come home here tonight. One appreciated the solidity of the building, the thickness of the walls, the accuracy of the masonry. I noticed that the hallway was paved with flagstones (as in Dr Jekyll's house), and it was fascinating, on the way out, to see the ground-floor study where at least one angry interview had taken place.

Experienced conference-hands hoping, by a judicious cornering of canapés, to substitute supper were doomed to disappointment as the nibbles were all of excellent quality but could not take the place of a meal. Hence on the way back the coach stopped at the Ben Hur chippie. Unfortunately no-one had a camera to immortalize the highest concentration of University professors ever seen queuing up in an Edinburgh fish-and-chip shop...

## **Thursday**

Thursday morning began with Richard Ambrosini on "'Fantastic Elements" and "Human Tragedy" in *The Master of Ballantrae*'. In this text, ill-judged by critics working with conventional genre categories, Stevenson explores the possibilities of post-Darwinian myth and lifts romance 'into a near neighbourhood with epic'. It is the Master who is the protagonist of this modern epic, which ranges (like modern imperialism) over the whole world but which, with no nation-building myth left, consigns him to 'the dustbin of history'. Stevenson uses many historical and ethnographical texts in preparing a work in which the



authority of documents and testimony is nevertheless continually undermined: by the Preface and 'Editor's Note' (ch. 6) as well as by the narrator's own words - his whole stance being finally called into question by the unexpected wording of the double epitaph that he dictates at the end.

After coffee, Rory Watson gave a different view of the same text in '*The Master of Ballantrae* and the wilderness beyond dualism' in which the novel was seen (in a perspective leading up to Modernism) as a romance structured around dualism that subverts both these terms. The romance of the Jacobite myth is shown as negative in its effects and the American adventure ends in the trackless 'existential wilderness'. In both parts, normal cultural meanings are negated by decisions based on the toss of a coin. As for duality, the Master is given Satanic attributes, yet we get no idea of an essential personality beyond appearances: he seems a man of pasteboard (like Conrad's Kurtz). The indifference, fluidity and relativity of landscape, action and personality is also seen in the horrific shapelessness of Hyde (and can be linked to Sartre's 'nausea').

It was fascinating to hear in these two equally interesting but contrasting views of the Master and of the relations of the novel to Modernism. Some may agree more with Ambrosini, others with Watson; and yet others might agree more with Arata's pointing out of pattern-making, so that the two readings - separated only by the coffee break - could be seen as projections from the text's playfully riddling structures: an equivalent of the two epitaphs - separated only by a fine line - at the end of the novel itself.

The next paper, by Glenda Norquay (neatly dressed and with short hair, longer at the back), was on Stevenson's views of reading as revealed in his essays, in particular his account of reading Dumas' *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* (in 'Gossip on a Novel by Dumas'). The reader, for Stevenson, pleasurably inhabits the text and becomes almost the ghost of the writer. Involvement with the text and at the same time self-awareness

are important features of his theory of reading (which possibly links up with role-playing and the switching of roles), together with the idea of a developing role played by the reader and re-reader. The surprising choice of *Bragelonne* as a favourite text can be seen in the affinities he sees with his own concerns in its depiction of problematized ideals of romance and chivalry.

A study of the essays and essay-like writing continued in the following paper by Liz Farr on 'Late 19<sup>th</sup>-century tropes of vagrancy and the picturesque'. Stevenson's travel-writing can be seen as a re-working of 18<sup>th</sup>-century picturesque (with its description of things seen on a tour which contributes to the education of both mind and body), combining it with aesthetic ideas of individual self-fashioning. As ever, we find contradictions (the picturesque stance of 'Roads' and the tramping physicality of 'Walking Tours'), but these can be resolved in a 'boyish' alternation between muscular masculinity and (convention-challenging) girlish gracefulness. The idea of *rêverie* produced not only by reading (as Norquay had pointed out) but also by physical effort links up with Schiller's aesthetics of play. The contradictions of Stevenson's early immature pose are exposed by the writer himself in his later essays 'A College Magazine' and 'Beggars'.

After the lunch break, when we saw that the grey skies of the morning had been replaced by blue again, accompanied by a slight breeze, we settled down to listen to a witty autobiographical-bibliographical talk by Michael Millgate 'On not writing a biography of Robert Louis Stevenson' (despite planning to do so in 1971). The problem with Stevenson is that many documents survive but that they are widely dispersed. Another problem is that Stevenson wrote much about himself and the places he visited - indeed, to free his planned biography of excessive quotation, Millgate had even thought of a companion volume of extracts from Stevenson. If he were to write a Stevenson biography today he would probably put more emphasis on Stevenson's sexuality and on the history of composition and publication of the works. In answer to a question

on existing biographies, Millgate said that Balfour still seems basically reliable, Furnas is important and Calder is useful to have to hand; McLynn takes sides too much, but he deals more thoroughly than anyone else with Samoa; and Roger Swearingen's biography in progress should give us our best source of meticulous documentation.

The next speaker was Oliver Buckton, tall and clearly-spoken with an amusing haircut (slight thinning in front made fun of by a standing-up style), who talked about Stevenson's difficult relation with art and profit. It was in fact with *Treasure Island* that he realized that he had produced a valuable commodity for the first time. This can be called a 'commodity text' (not a formula text), taking its value from the labour put into it and creating its own readership. The early travel books were based on travel for its own sake (*Inland Voyage* characters sharing the same names with their boats), were self-mocking chronicles of escapades and clearly temporary escape. In contrast, *Treasure Island* has a clear goal and a profit-driven motive. A key element in the commodity nature of this text is the map, which has a value in the story and in the literary marketplace. Stevenson accepts that work (travel or writing) should be about making a profit and writes this into the story, with the map as a guide.

Ralph Parfect gave the next talk (his last as an unmarried man), dedicated to 'Stevenson and War', a study of a single topic that turned out to be very revealing. As always, Stevenson is ambivalent: the Samoan wars are 'barbarous' but also 'what fun!'. Although he saw war as a release from Victorian conventionality ('English Admirals'), he undermines war ideology in *The Black Arrow*, the war-game correspondence and *A Footnote to History*. The Jacobite Rebellion is not dealt with frontally but in episodes of its ignominious aftermath. He gathers documentary and eyewitness accounts for *A Footnote*, but at the same time parodies and undermines the European discourse of war in a text that is 'surprisingly camp'.

To end the day we had Kirsti Wishart (bespectacled, short-haired, quietly spoken) on '*Kidnapped* in Samoa: David Balfour and the unsuccessful anthropologist'. Though it might seem to be an attempt to give a totalizing view of a nation, *Kidnapped* in fact shows a sensitiveness to the difficulty of imposing one voice to a disparate people. It also shows David Balfour unable to claim authority and control over an alien part of his own country. In the South Seas, Stevenson continues to explore the impossibility of 'capturing' a region through writing; he is sensitive to how 'looking' may affect what is viewed, and how natives react to outsiders. Once again, we saw Stevenson's ability to see different viewpoints, to explore and deconstruct the discourse of imperialism. Although he adopted the Scottish enlightenment idea of stages of evolution, he also had a cyclical view of history and a relativization provided by empathy and a self-examining 'who's the savage?'.

This was the evening of the banquet in the swish Management Centre (which showed us where the money was in Universities). We were given an easy introduction to the national dish: *nouvelle cuisine* haggis, would you believe! A neat cylinder of layered chopped meat, swedes and potatoes with wavy interfaces, quite tasty - sorry, chaps: very, very tasty - and surprisingly different from the horror dish as recounted south of the Tweed. The guest of honour was Jenni Calder who talked of islands (Scotland as an island, the islands of the Pacific, the open island-like houses of Samoa) before saying that Stevenson's treatment of islands, real and metaphorical, not only guides an interpretation of his work but suggests a more complex and illuminating way of understanding the historical and cultural environment that he inherited. She ended by telling of how, when she climbed up to Stevenson's grave on Mount Vaea, she had found a group of Sunday-school girls chattering and picnicking before jumping fully clothed into the Stevenson's favourite pool, and this had shown her that Stevenson should not be sacralized but be part of a living present.

There then followed the ceilidh, which I had imagined to be 'an

evening of Scottish dance and song', and from which I, feeling unqualified to contribute, Caedmon-like crept away. It turned out, however, from bubbling conversations overheard the following morning, that a more accurate translation might have been 'a knees-up and a sing-song', and I felt I should have stayed on: high points being apparently Barry Menikoff's rendition of 'New York, New York', the Fijian song from Sudesh Mishra, 'White Lightning' from Richard Walker and general humorous sporting participation in song and dance from Oliver Buckton.

Friday dawned a touch cooler (pullover weather) and the delegates seemed a trifle 'kaileyed' (if I may invent the word) as they straggled in, recounting stories of the enjoyable evening before. The morning started well with Julia Reed, hair drawn back and comfortably dressed in grey trousers and a charcoal black jumper, giving a talk ('Superstition and folklore in Stevenson's Scottish and Pacific Writings') that continued the literary/anthropological discourse theme from the end of the previous day. Though Stevenson's Scottish and Pacific writings are often opposed to each other, we can see an anthropological dimension in both. Stevenson read and was influenced by Spencer, Huxley and Tyler in the 1870s and the latter's idea of European superstitions as 'survivals' from an earlier stage of development is adapted in 'Child's Play' (1878) where the child is seen as a mythmaking savage. A similar influence can be seen in the way past superstitions persist into the present in 'Thrawn Janet' and the 'Tale of Tod Lapraik', the use of Scots in both tales only underlining this cultural persistence. In the Pacific writings, Stevenson's interest in different cultures, less conditioned by previous writing, is in advance of contemporary anthropology: European influence is not seen as civilizing, but corrupting; native culture is not seen as primitive 'survivals', but in terms of its 'useful functions in context'; in short, culture is seen from a relativist standpoint (we are revolted by cannibalism, but some of our practices are revolting to others; we are presumptuous to extend our religious taboos to the whole world).

A relaxed and confidently communicative Liam Connell came next, shaven-headed, bespectacled and in a short-sleeved khaki shirt. In his cultural-studies-based talk on 'Location and Stevenson's South Seas Writing' he partially disagreed with Julia Reid's views that Stevenson had an advanced anthropological position, seeing him more as an ethnographer providing raw material for 'imperialist anthropology' and without the modern anthropologists scepticism concerning the reports given by native peoples about their beliefs. The 'location' in the title referred to Stevenson's position on-the-spot, a typical kind of authentication used in *The Illustrated London News* where 'The Beach of Falesà' was first published. The same numbers that included this story also include many colonial reports (diplomatic incidents, exploding volcanoes, life in Uganda, battles) from eye-witnesses, often accompanied with ethnographic details and illustrations. Hence, 'Falesà' would have been read as part of the same 'controlling' discourse.

Next to speak was Olena Turnbull, clearly spoken and emphatic despite a slightly croaky throat, on 'Women Characters in *Catriona*'. Though critics often emphasize Stevenson's problems with female characters, female-male interaction is an important element in *Prince Otto*, *Catriona* and *Weir of Hermiston*. We know that Stevenson had advanced feminist views and *Catriona* was written at the height of the New Woman debate. Indeed, the novel, first serialized in the girls' magazine *Atalanta*, can be seen as a moral tale for girls, an indictment of Victorian patriarchal society (James exploits his daughter for gain, Prestongrange exploits all the young folk), and an incitement to action since it is the young women in the tale who rebel. *Catriona*'s wish to have been 'a man child' can be seen not as problematic sexuality but as a wish to act and be heard. The novel, thus, is not just national myth, but also counter-history and a progressive feminist text.

The conference ended strongly with the talk by Douglas Mack, in reddish shirt and quiet check jacket, entitled 'Can the subaltern speak?: Stevenson, Hogg and Samoa'. Mack has a

charming slight stutter which gives the listener no problems and was even used to fine rhetorical effect at times - as when, after presenting Thackeray's grotesque picture of the half-caste Miss Watts in measured terms, he added 'Of course, Stevenson was far in advance of this c-c-crap' (right on!). The problem with half-castes is that they fall between the sharp division of colonial society between élite and subaltern classes. Stevenson - in contrast to class-bound Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* and Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* - gives the subaltern Uma a voice in 'Falesà' and a value to the oral culture in all his South Seas writing. Agreeing with Julia Reid that the opposition of Stevenson's Scottish and Pacific fiction 'has passed its sell-by date', Mack then went on to show that *Weir* explores similar élite vs subaltern conflicts in a Scottish context. The élite are headed by Adam Weir himself, while the subaltern class and the old oral culture are represented by the four Elliott brothers (one of them, Dandie, resembling Hogg, an emblem of the pre-Union oral tradition), with Christina Elliott occupying a similar in-between role to the half-caste. Stevenson is 'doing something new' in giving voice to the subaltern and taking the old oral culture seriously - yet 'it is marvellous - up to a point' since he is still slightly condescending to Dandie and to Samoan culture, seeing them as at earlier cultural stage. In conclusion, Scottish 19<sup>th</sup>-century texts are important for postcolonial studies since Scots were sensitive to imperial social divisions and moved between the two classes.

## **Departure**

And so the conference ended. Yet not quite, since those remaining had lunch together for the last time in the Court Room; here, the shared enthusiasm of the previous days and the realization of the high quality of all the papers gave to all those present the definite feeling that Stevenson studies had 'come of age'. Two proposals were made and approved: first, to 'meet again' - Richard Ambrosini suggested that this could be in two years' time at Villa Feltrinelli, the University of Milan Conference Centre on Lake Garda. Second, Eric Massie

proposed to investigate with others the possibility of a 'Stevenson Studies' publication to start with the conference papers and continue as a regular journal.

This idea of moving forward took away a little of the sadness of parting, the thought that before too long we would be working together - and then perhaps disembarking from the boat (or more prosaically stepping off the bus) at Gargnano, suitcase in hand, blinking in the sunlight, bathed in the scents and colours of the South.

Let's hope it all comes about - yet in the meantime we can be happy to have met, and happy in the knowledge the writer we study is also a writer we love to read - in texts that please like wine - *vino da meditazione*, as the Italians say: good wine, to be savoured slowly. Cheers!