

Bergamo: Picturesque Notes

by Richard Dury

Beginnings and endings present problems for all our temporal works: poems, phone-calls, songs, seminars, books and billet doux. To start means making the first step, notoriously the most difficult part of the journey; while ending is made difficult by the knowledge that, in a way, there is no ending, and everything is connected to everything else. Yet the successful beginning has the fascination of birth, the revelation of potentialities, and the promise, in a small space, of all to come: misty mornings, overtures, arrivals, aperitifs, the opening chord of a song, first words of a favourite book, March winds – beginnings, beginnings... And endings may contain the idea of repose, a final flash of revelation and the inevitableness and beauty of finished form: the evening of a perfect day, the rippling final chords of *Tristan*, the rhyming couplet that justly ends the scene, the sequence of closures to the book you wish will never end, your luggage in the hall and a last look at the Grand Canal, gathering swallows, sunsets...

Beginnings have a special quality conferred by the magical halo of uniqueness and anticipation. And so it is that a strong memory of the Bergamo Stevenson conference for me is of the Saturday before it all started, when Michele and I put up the Stevenson quotes on the glazing between the columns of the *cortiletto*. All this had been slowly planned (with help from co-organizer Marina Dossena) for months; but solving with Michele the practical problem of placing the cards absolutely straight and central was a satisfying task of collaboration and quiet concentration, the equivalent of the orchestra tuning up before a concert.

Those quotations... we were so proud of them. I even prepared a sheet with the quotes and sources that had to be paired up (prize: the books from the book exhibition that didn't

have to be returned). But nobody commented on them, no chatting groups went from one to another, only one person completed the question sheet. Wow! I got it wrong. But – they did stop people banging into the glazing, and they defined our little space, and they were a kind of wallpaper - and you don't comment on the wallpaper, I suppose.

Sunday – arrival

I met Nick Rankin in the entrance to the hotel on the Sunday evening and as he hadn't eaten, I took him along to the Circolino, our reasonably-priced trattoria, that, with its leafy pergola, always looks like an Impressionist painting. He was very enthusiastic about Bergamo: 'It's so different from North London!' – a judgement that struck me as very true.

On the way back to the hotel, the wind, accompanied by flying rain, suddenly rose and quickly reached a furious pitch: tearing small branches off trees and scattering things off café tables. Back at the Gourmet, we found the person in charge holding the outside door ajar to allow fleeing staff and customers to seek refuge inside.

We sat down at an indoor table to read through, and time, the poems we were to perform on Tuesday – the conference programme was so busy that we wouldn't have any other opportunity for this. Then Robert-Louis Abrahamson joined us and we read the poems together. And so to bed.

Monday

Monday was a sparkling bright morning after the rain. Last-minute organization, greeting arrivals and solving problems filled a couple of hours, and then we were in the long downstairs room for the inauguration. Five minutes to go and Michele started the flute music by

Stevenson (kindly supplied by Jack and Carolyn Fleming) – totally inaudible beneath the hum of voices! Should have thought of that. Then magically we were at the opening welcome from the Head of Department, Marina Dossena no less, and a brief welcome address from myself.

The first speaker was tall, bearded, gruffly-*simpatico* Richard Ambrosini, who gave us an understanding of Stevenson's contribution to the history of European prose narrative. Popular literature arrived with universal literacy in the late nineteenth century: typically, adventure stories notable for racial stereotyping and messages of colonial mission. At this point, Stevenson 'performed a miracle'—reconfiguring the adventure-story genre, by uniting it with aesthetic prose. His example had an important impact on European writers and introduced 'the golden age of the European adventure story' in the twenty years after 1881. In particular, he influenced Jacques Rivière's plan for a renewal of French narrative in *Le roman d'aventures* (1913). Brecht admired *Ballantrae* and his story 'Bargan läßt es sein' ('Bargan Lets it Happen, A Pirate Story', 1921) clearly shows the influence of Stevenson, especially in the narrator who tries to stop the reader identifying with the hero.

Nathalie Jaëck - communicative, intelligent, enthusiastic (one of my favourite speakers) – continued the conversation about adventure with a discussion of the jump, a classical adventure-story topos. In *Kidnapped*, however, while Alan makes adventurous leaps, David (his formal double) only makes half-jumps. He has no adventures on his island – a mock island – and he escapes unheroically by wading across a trickle of water. His hesitation about jumping over the Highland river also goes counter to conventions, and other potentially adventurous situations are downgraded (the aborted fight, the quarrel and the pipe contest). Fast action is replaced by a broken, random course across country. Significantly the accompanying map with its red line to show spatial and narrative progress, occasionally becomes dotted (on the author's instructions) to show uncertainty. David, we may say, deconstructs the adventure genre.

Linda Dryden, tanned and intense, next talked of Stevenson and popular culture, specifically about the way his reputation oscillates between popular writer and literary stylist. Popular and high culture are not, however, hermetically closed: each borrows frequently from the other. And we should have no difficulty in accepting him both as popular and serious writer – the two categories are applied by different groups of readers.

With that, the first morning ended and we dispersed in groups to lunch. I was *Da Mimmo*, where former organizers of Stevenson conferences – a kind of charitable honour, like those offered to old soldiers: they had 'done their bit' so deserved recognition.

How I would have liked a programme of few talks and leisurely lunch-hours – since it is in enthusiastic conversation over restaurant and café tables that ideas are sifted and tested. But alas! we had one parallel session a day and two of the lunch hours were shortened by poetry readings. The first was today, Monday, at which Robert-Louis Abrahamson read poems from *A Child's Garden*, followed by French and Italian versions read by their translators, Jean-Pierre Naugrette and Roberto Mussapi, the latter a slightly eccentric, dandyish poet and radio broadcaster. It was interesting to hear the different 'music' of the three languages. At the end of 'To Any Reader' Mussapi clicked his fingers to underline a word. Hmm, cheap melodramatic trick - must remember to use it myself sometime.

The afternoon started with parallel sessions, and, 'sorry I could not follow both', I had to miss papers on the South Seas by two excellent speakers (Jane Rago and Hilary Beattie) and one new entry, Sylvie Lageaud-Ortega, who everyone was enthusiastic about at break-time. My choice was for the Jekyll and Hyde panel with two promising papers. The first was by Guy Barefoot (stocky, with short greying hair and a precise, ironic delivery) who talked about *Dr Jekyll et les femmes* by Walerian Borowczyk (which circulates only in a range of inaccurate copies under a variety of titles). The superficial theme of this complex version seems to be that

unleashing the beast within is preferable to the banality of bourgeois existence, but Barefoot sees it more as about the impossibility of escape: the desire to reject restraint and the impossibility of that rejection (a theme that could also be seen as central to Stevenson's novella).

Sara Rizzo had the best Powerpoint presentation of the conference: graphs, well-chosen images and 'telling' visual comparisons. Admirably in control despite this being her first conference paper, she started by looking at the early US comic book versions of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1943, 1953) and showing how they were influenced by the Hollywood film tradition, both in specific images, image-sequencing and narrative structure (the anticipation of the first transformation). The 1980s saw a return to the narrative structure of Stevenson's text. But turning then to the European tradition, we see how this anticipates American developments: Dino Battaglia's 1974 version is independent of the film tradition, and explores the new graphic medium freely in an attempt to interpret Stevenson's text. Other interesting Italian versions of the story are those of Sclavi (1990) and Mattotti (2003), all three offering interesting graphic translations of the novella's non-conclusive conclusion.

And so we arrived at the coffee break. The Piazza Rosate building has a steep flight of steps immediately behind the entrance leading to a small first-floor *cortiletto*, cloistered on three sides with glazed archways between 17th-century columns and, on the fourth side, stone steps leading up to a hanging garden. Since we used the two classrooms on this level and had out coffee breaks in the quad, this became our space for the days of the conference, underlined by those Stevenson quotations on the windows... Alas! I often missed the coffee breaks – the chatting, laughter, pleasant stretching of legs outside and in the sunshine – because of having to solve problems.

The last session of the day started with Roslyn Jolly's analysis of Stevenson's symbolic European South. It turned out to be a complex cultural concept, which she analyzed first in

terms of 'health' vs 'disease': the 'healthy' South was the place where people were ill and sometimes died (this we see in 'Ordered South' and 'Olalla'). Then in terms of 'nature' and 'savagery' (in *Travels with a Donkey* and especially 'Olalla', where we find the brutal and divine associated – a theme picked up by Dennis Denisoff later in the conference). The sensual but savage host family in 'Olalla' are typically 'Southern' also because their bodily existence is ever present, a clue to Stevenson's anxieties in this area.

The day ended with Robert-Louis Abrahamson, relaxed in a white linen suit, talking about Stevenson stay in Mentone from October 1873. This was a pivotal experience because he arrived with very little achieved (his first published work appeared during his stay), yet during next the eight months he produced many essays and reviews, especially after Colvin's visit in December.

I then had to hurry over to the Library in Piazza Vecchia to introduce Roberto Mussapi who was presenting his biography of Stevenson, the only one written in Italian. Roberto, the experienced radio broadcaster, took the fact that we were in the 'Tasso Room' as a starting point for a freewheeling discourse, taking in Tasso, the place of poetry in education and many another subject, while I was attempting to see if by thinking *really hard* I could bring the talk back towards Stevenson and the biography. Eventually... he got there – which, if it shows the power of thought, also shows the slowness of its action – perhaps it had to bounce off the Moon first.

Then followed the presentation of the Mirando Haz exhibition of etchings inspired by *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in the Library's cavernous atrium – a moment for people to meet up and chat and exchange opinions about the day, before forming into groups to drift into Piazza Vecchia and then to dinner.

Tuesday

Tuesday started with a session chaired by Eric Massie, cheerily red-faced, bearded, in a neat jacket and bow-tie. He started by reading out the paper by Steve Arata, unable to be present – it was a delight to hear Steve’s droll, relaxed play with the audience, combined with his perceptive insights into the matter at hand, on this occasion in Eric’s Scottish accent, who was clearly enjoying the talk and slipped in a couple of humorous asides of his own. Arata’s opening chimed with Roslyn Jolly’s observations on the more ‘natural’ but ‘uncanny’ South. Like Darwin, Stevenson was impressed by the vitality of the natural world – in his case, by its too-muchness and lack of design. To Thoreau’s material view of Nature (not infused with Wordsworthian mystery), Stevenson adds an uncanny Gothic element. Though his pattern-making can be seen as a way of warding off uncanniness by supplying order, at the same time his style (in its attempt to give words their ‘primal energy’ by slightly skewing them from normal useage) foregrounds the uncanniness of language itself. In this way, Stevenson economically produces ‘Gothic’ writing without Gothic excess: words are put in high relief, and (like Hawthorne) he says less than the situation calls for. On the conundrum of his relation with Modernism, Arata says that Stevenson anticipates it in his abstraction (his focus on form), in the lack of excessive details, his focus on the signifying power of language and emphasis on the ‘Gothic’ quality at the heart of life.

Second in this excellent opening session was relaxed, tall, almost gangling, Burkhard Niederhoff (to whom I apologize for the lack of a second ‘P’ in the spelling of his name on the programme; in compensation, I hereby authorize him to mis-spell me ‘Drury’ – once or twice). Niederhoff has written a monograph on narratorial perspective in Stevenson, and so was the ideal guide to the question of ‘unreliable narration’ in *The Master of Ballantrae*. This favourite topic has usually been approached through internal features of the narrative (inconsistencies between narrators, McKellar’s over-insistence on his reliability). Niederhoff finds confirmation for this by external reference

to the author’s opinions at variance with those of the narrator. While McKellar’s aim is to justify Henry and condemn James, Stevenson in ‘Reflections and Remarks on Human Life’ asserts his epistemological conviction that we know too much to justify ourselves and too little to condemn others. From a moral point-of-view he argues elsewhere (and differently from McKellar) that virtue must be an end in itself, unconnected with reward. In addition, Stevenson’s opposition to Puritanism is well-known: in *The Amateur Emigrant*, for example, he links the Puritan denial of pleasure with a compensatory ‘material greed’. Convinced, then, in various ways, of McKellar’s unreliability, the reader does not accept the presentation of Henry as virtuous victim – yet the fascination of the text is that this does not vindicate James: our expectations of a clear opposition and final judgment remain (as in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the Fables) thought-provokingly unfulfilled.

The next speaker, Matthew Kaiser, tall, bespectacled, contagiously enthusiastic, was for me, in a conference of good speakers, the most brilliant, accompanying his lucid argument with a coruscating sequence of metaphors and rhetorical figures that both instructed and entertained. His subject was ‘play’, which is central in Stevenson’s writings (he extolls child’s play, cultivates the pose of the bohemian idler, emphasizes the ludic nature of his travelling and maintains a mischievous relationship with the reader). We were then given a breathtaking ride through Brian Sutton-Smith’s rhetorics of play: i) as competition, ii) as self-creation, a playful refusal to play the game (an antidote to competition), as seen in ‘Idlers’ and in the narrator’s lifestyle in ‘A Pavilion on the Links’, iii) as subversion, a desire to make mischief (as seen in Villon or even Utterson, when deciding to be ‘Mr Seek’), iv) as learning (evoked in ‘Child’s Play’), v) as the activity of the imagination, the assertion of creative energy as well as acquiescence to it (the player as ‘the surfer *and* the wave’), vi) as identity, a way to connect with others (as canoeing binds together the actors in *An Inland Voyage*), and vii) as fate, the play of the cosmos on fleeting life – obsessively embraced by the gambler but

accepted calmly by the adventurer, who desires to outplay the play of the cosmos. Stevenson's vision of the world is essentially Modern, with nothing external to play, and the world itself 'in play'.

The session after the break was dedicated to Stevenson and three European writers. Cinzia Giglioni (slight, pale, always elegantly dressed, speaking with precision) told us about Montaigne and Stevenson – their affinities (scepticism, tolerance, curiosity) and the influence of the earlier essayist on the later, especially in artful textual shapelessness, in a similar choice of subjects and in the frequent use of quotations.

Then came Vincent Giroud (tall, wiry, with a definite French accent despite his years in the USA) who looked at Cocteau's puzzling phrase in a 1917 draft of *Thomas l'imposteur* (1923): 'if I had Stevenson's pen...'. This Giroud interpreted as 'I am attempting to tell a tale of a colourful character – but we're after the "golden age" of the adventure novel'. We know that Cocteau read Stevenson in translation in 1917, his film *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) later showed the influence of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (probably via film versions), and in the 1920s as a publisher (Éditions de la Sirène) he published four translations (*Treasure Island*, *The Merry Men*, *In the South Seas* and *Island Nights' Entertainments*) with the aim of producing a complete works in translation. In Cocteau's return to classical models in this postwar period, he may have regarded Stevenson not so much as a direct textual model but as a stimulating example of a writer.

The morning ended with Michela Vanon's pertinent paper on Calvino's admiration for Stevenson, who he regarded as 'a true great' on account of his limpid style and the moral at the heart of his works. Both writers loved stylistic economy ('leggerezza') and combine realism and fable. Stevenson also had an influence on Calvino's narratives (*Treasure Island* on *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragni*, *Ballantrae* on *Il visconte dimezzato*).

We then dispersed along the main street of Città Alta for lunch at one of its bars, baretti,

vinerie, trattorie, birrerie, pizzerie, caffè, caffeterie, tavole calde, tavole fredde, mense and ristoranti. My lunch hour was curtailed by preparations for the poetry reading in the quad. This was a high point of the conference for me: the possibility to recite from memory the prose poem 'A Summer Night' – a wonderful evocation of a light Edinburgh summer night with references to sitting up all night with Bob. It also fitted very well with 'My brain swims empty and light' read by Nick Rankin afterwards. We had *Child's Garden* poems by Robert-Louis and myself, some *Moral Emblems* verses and then a three-part reading of 'Robin and Ben' (which we wanted to repeat at the dinner or during the excursion – but the right moment didn't present itself). We ended with some late poems and 'Sing me a song of a lad that is gone'.

The afternoon started, on time, with our day's parallel session – fatally divided into Jekyll and South-Seas rooms (and forcing me to miss promising talks by Tim Hayes on 'Child's Play' and *Falesá*, Neil Hulgren on 'The Bottle Imp', and Tania Zulli on European literary allusions in the South Seas tales). In the room I chose, Jean-Pierre Naugrette (marshalling arguments with the calm control of a *tai chi* master) talked of the insight gained even by false or fanciful interpretations of the name 'Jekyll'. In 1888 Thérèse Benzon suggests that Stevenson was inspired by the work of 'Haeckel and Gegenbaur' on evolutionary morphology (underlining man's animal origins) – actually the work of Haeckel alone (the addition of the second name perhaps showing the influence of Stevenson's tale). Perhaps Benzon is suggesting that the name 'Jekyll' is inspired by 'Haeckel' – as perhaps it was: Stevenson refers to Haeckel in a letter in which he also refers to 'The Travelling Companion', a doubles story later replaced by *The Strange Case*. Naugrette then offered a fanciful onomastic connection of his own. In a 1916 essay, Freud quotes his colleague Ludwig Jekels who analysed Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as two aspects of the same person – like Jekyll and Hyde (though he doesn't mention Stevenson's tale). The better fit of the connection here may help us recognize

Stevenson's tale as less post-Darwinian than pre-Freudian.

The young-looking Andrew De Young (surely better than being the old-looking Andrew De Young) next investigated the way *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* can be seen as a mystery story lacking the central detective. The detective was actually an equivocal figure in late-Victorian England, seen as having more in common with criminals than ordinary middle-class people. The latter felt threatened by the detective's secrecy, disguise and lack of class-solidarity (where, in contrast, Sherlock Holmes works for middle-class clients and keeps stories out of the newspapers). In *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the functions of detective are shared by (i) Utterson (torn between complicity and desire to know), (ii) Jekyll (who goes to low quarters in disguise), and (iii) the reader (encouraged to speculate and interpret).

The Jekyll session ended with Fabio Cleto (wild hair, theatrical gestures, playful) who told us about *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as an uncanny 'queer text' – 'queer' here in the sense of 'strange', 'stimulating troubling doubt'. Meaning also 'not quite respectable' (as in 'Queer Street'), it was a vague term available to describe the undefined homosexual before the definition of homosexual identity with the Wilde trials. Hyde, too, is never fully described and has 'no face' – this (together with more explicit hints) allows one interpretation of the text in homosexual terms, but by 'queer text' Cleto means more a text that destabilizes identity and conventional distinctions.

Today at the coffee break I managed to get a quick *espresso* before going to the office to sort something out. As a consequence I unfortunately missed the talk by Laavanyan Ratnapalan on Stevenson's relationship with anthropology in the South Seas.

Gordon Hirsch (tall, irregularly bearded, with the air of one both dazed and amused at the spectacle of life) talked about Stevenson's typical attitude towards the human condition: 'the truly mingled tissue' of man's nature, typically containing faults and virtues, 'inconsistencies and brutalities', the admirable and the despicable. No doubt reacting against

his Calvinistic upbringing, and in part inspired by the acceptance of all by Whitman, Stevenson refused to isolate the bad from the good, since 'all have some fault'.

The second day had been chosen for the conference dinner (following my theory that participants in a temporal event will normally reach maximum euphoria just before the halfway point). We met at Colle Aperto at 7.30 with sunset not too far away and travelled in minibuses to Ponteranica, only a few kilometres north of Bergamo, then along a sharply-rising wooded lane. La Trattoria del Moro, once a farmhouse and still retaining its rough finishes, is situated in a tiny hamlet of a few houses. A cheery Signora Giuliana helped by her two teenage children served the aperitivo on the homely terrace with views of wooded hills. People were pleased to have a break after two days of papers and to change stone-built Bergamo and its narrow, gully-like streets for an evening among hills and trees. As we chatted, took photos, mingled, the summer twilight grew a little dimmer and we moved up the steep steps to the windowed terrace-room.

Nick Rankin was the after-dinner speaker. The original idea was for him to give a spirited defence of *The Black Arrow* but at the last moment he decided to change this to a talk on 'friendship' and its importance for Stevenson, interweaving this in (in a skilful Rankian texture of themes and coincidences) with his own friendship with Mike Delahunt in Saranac, the dispute of the latter with the Stevenson Society of America (an allusive part of the talk probably not understood by the majority of those present), before ending by linking the feelings of holding Stevenson's boots and holding a first edition of *Don Quixote*. Pity about the spirited defence of *The Black Arrow*! Another time, I hope.

At the end of the excellent dinner Signora Giuliana joined us and I persuaded her to give a brief lesson in the 'rough, ridiculous, barbarous' Bergamo dialect – starting with 'a glass of wine' *an bicer de i* and ending with the useful everyday expression 'look at that cow going into the house over there' *a chela aca-la, che la a an chela ca-la*.

Wednesday

Wednesday morning began with an excellent sequence of papers on travels in France. Morgan Holmes began by placing Stevenson's brutal un-English treatment of Modestine in *Travels with a Donkey* in the context of Victorian views on cruelty to animals. Stevenson was aware of the recent vivisection debate surrounding the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876 and, significantly, *adds* to his journal account the sentimental goodbye to Modestine while *omitting* the disgust expressed by a French peasant at his treatment of the donkey. At the same time, however, Stevenson demonstrates a significant sense of shared animal identity with his companion.

Laurence Davies (benevolent, burly) next talked of the distinctive qualities of *An Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey*. Gypsy-life narratives of breaking away from conventional life provide a literary context. Influenced by French Impressionism (and its typical celebration of moments) and by late-19th century interest in Heraclitean flux, guided by his own training in organizing a text as a train of thoughts (in the personal essay tradition), Stevenson can be seen as a phenomenological writer *avant la lettre*, in these travel accounts of contradiction and zig-zag that highlight the flux of experience. Both books also give us an idea of the flux of the writing experience – of an author working out his ideas about life and his own cultural background at the same time as producing a lighthearted narrative of a journey.

The next talk, by Caroline McCracken-Flesher, emphasized how for Stevenson travel was concerned with understanding of the self. Movement brings the individual into new surroundings and to perception by unfamiliar people, and the gaze of others challenges one's sense of identity (in a strange town 'you do not remember yourself to be a man', and the travellers have their sense of class and national identity destabilized when they are constantly taken for pedlars). In *Travels with a Donkey* we see a development, as the narrator now learns to hear other people and accepts an alteration in his own identity.

Lesley Graham from Bordeaux University ended the session by looking at the

many narratives of travels in the footsteps of Stevenson in the Cévennes. Perhaps the first motivation for these is a desire to strengthen the special bond created by Stevenson between writer and reader. Another is because the derivative text organizes itself easily in fascinating doublings: him and me, then and now, this text and that text, the same and different, biography and autobiography. All these doublings then contribute to 'eerie' and 'uncanny' feelings recorded by most of the travellers: a sense of Stevenson's ghost, and an awareness of mortality and the self, deriving from the experience of travelling (as the previous two speakers had pointed out) and from comparing the two selves making the same journey. Stevenson's text is structured as a difficult struggle followed by understanding, and the followers have also found the experience a therapeutic process – outstandingly Ian Rush, the depressed widower, but also Richard Holmes, conscious of being at a watershed between adolescence and young adulthood.

In the parallel session that followed the coffee-break, I chose to go to the large room downstairs (with the loudspeakers we'd rapidly hired the day before on discovering that the sound system wasn't good enough). This allowed Gilles Menegaldo to show and talk over clips of two film adaptations of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by European directors that modified the dominant Hollywood tradition. The first was Mamoulian, bringing many 'European' elements to Hollywood in his 1931 version: the daring subjective camera and continual tracking shot at the opening, the metaphorical juxtaposition of shots and 'doubled' splits and wipes, and the use of Freudian tropes. Renoir's 1959 version is equally interesting in its framed narrative and other doubling structures, as well as for the finally-tragic figure of Opale (Hyde). The interesting variations of both directors reveal the vitality of this major modern myth.

Rossella Mallardi (quietly-spoken, in a striking dark-orange dress) then talked about how both Stevenson (in his South Seas writing) and Conrad (in *Heart of Darkness*) called into

question Western certainties. Their narratives involve changing perspectives, observation by the 'other', and deceptive and unstable impressions, mental pictures, glimpses and traces – these latter often compared with photographs and the images of the magic lantern.

We were then joined by people from the other parallel session (Glenda Norquay on Scottish place names and Shaf Towheed on logging Stevenson's reading) to see Paul Bush's 5-minute short, jerkily animated from photos of actors replaying scenes from the 1941 *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Pictures of Jekyll were rapidly alternated with overlaid shots of Hyde, creating a feeling of disturbance, accompanied by good old-fashioned film music and the classic dialogue ('I'm Dr Jekyll, I say. Dr Henry Jekyll').

The afternoon was free. About a quarter of the delegates stayed in Bergamo. The rest went by coach to Lago d'Iseo, less sublimely grandiose than its larger neighbours Como and Garda, yet with a picturesque hilly eastern shore and dramatic lake-cliffs on the west. It was refreshing to see – and hear – water, and feel the lively lake air after the busy conference days in the city. Our boatman was relaxed and unrushed, giving us a hint of how landscape influences lives. Our lifestyle changed, too, as, after circling one of the small lake islands, the drinks box was opened. Spumante popped; we mellowed. Hills and vineyards and crags and cliffs sailed past, the breeze blew, the water sparkled...

At seven we had returned to Mont'Isola, a wooded mountain that just happens to come up in the middle of the Lake, with villages and hamlets round the shore. At one of these, a short walk from our restaurant, we moored (an unusually high water level prevented mooring dramatically alongside terrace of the restaurant itself). Dinners, like parties, do not have a single soul and your group may be having a whale of a time while someone at the end of the same table is moodily rolling bread pellets. However, I think for most people this was a memorable meal (and the main fish dish was delicious) in a space

that allowed easy movement to visit other tables. (I finally got a chance to have a good talk with Barry Menikoff, present though not giving a paper.) The fading summer twilight contributed its usual magic, aided by the sound of lapping water and the twinkling lights from the shore. People could have easily stayed another hour over grappa or limoncino, but... we had to get back. As Jane Austin remarked, 'it was a delightful visit – perfect, in being much too short'.

Thursday

Thursday – the last day, when (conscious of the end) experience is heightened by anticipated nostalgia – opened with Alex Thomson (slightly chubby, with short sandy hair, *simpatico*) speaking, in a relaxed way from notes, about ‘moral style’ in Stevenson. For Thomson, Stevenson is interesting and problematic right from his early works in the way he links literary theory and textual practice and for his ‘moral style’. However his is not a conventional morality: the rules (and ‘dooty’) of the pirates in *Treasure Island* parody conventional society, Jim sees his success as merely an exploitation of circumstances and Stevenson in his essays refers to ‘moral sense’ that overrides moral laws and can lead to social rejuvenation.

In the next paper – which made a good companion to the Wednesday-morning French-travels session – Dennis Denisoff talked of Stevenson’s evocation of Pan, in the context of a worldview that goes beyond the stance of the urban and artificial Aesthete to an ‘ecopaganism’ exploring themes such as the relation of the human to the environment, and of the individual to a larger organism. These themes can be seen especially in *An Inland Voyage*, ‘a cult classic of late nineteenth-century neopaganism’, when the narrator finds the blood in his arteries thrilling with the same force running through the river in flood and then, absorbed in the environment, becomes ‘the happiest animal in France’. Pan embodies these linked dichotomies, being both animal and human, and an individual symbolizing the energy and danger of non-rational natural forces.

Scott Hames of Stirling University (youngish, studious, American! – when I’d been mentally translating his emails into a Scottish accent) next gave us some insight into Stevenson’s exclusion from critical consideration – which he saw as not so much a decline in perceived value as a polarity-reversal from positive to negative. This occurred because Stevenson was associated with craftsmanship and style, being praised for this by Raleigh (who ignores Stevenson’s equal interest in style-less narrative and Calvino-esque ‘lightness’). For Stevenson, reading involved an awareness of the reading experience and of

pattern. This idea of reading as an event in which art draws attention to its own artificiality, was clearly at odds with the new professional and formalist criticism which centred its attentions on the well-wrought urn of the finished text. It was Stevenson’s early promotion as the consummate stylist that thus led to his total exclusion from critical consideration.

Interestingly, the next paper, by Ann Colley, also talked of understanding by movement, not through a text, but through a landscape, with the text as a product and trace of that experience. This explains Stevenson’s dislike of the enclosed trap of Davos with its featureless snow and straight unvarying stream, since he preferred movement, irregularity, interruptions both in his prose and in his surroundings.

There followed reports on two projects: Linda Dryden on the planned new Stevenson website, and Martin Danahay with Jürgen Kramer on a research project tracing significant changes in translations of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

At this point, I might make a comment on the pronunciation of Jekyll: at Stirling in 2000 I was the only one who used the long first vowel; now it was clearly the majority pronunciation (and, of course, we know that Stevenson said it was the one he intended), though some wavered, a few kept the short vowel, and Dennis Denisoff used the short title *The Strange Case* ‘as a way of avoiding the J-word’.

After lunch – when the Conference invited the Chairs to lunch in Mimmo’s leafy courtyard, ending with a memorable pear and chocolate crumble – we reassembled to hear a light and lively Laura Chiotasso introduce – in a witty monologue imitating a film script – the subtitled documentary film on the Fables ‘Ai minimi drammi’ in which (mmm, that crumble!) Richard A, Robert-Louis and myself took part, transformed and rendered interesting – even more interesting - by Costantino Sarnelli’s skills of sound and video montage. (It was served with cream.)

The paper by Chris Danta from New South Wales – tall, calm, athletic, a gentlemanly

cricketer, I daresay – would have gone well with Morgan Holmes on Modestine, since both were concerned with late-Victorian attitudes to animals. Chris reminded us of Stevenson’s hatred of cruelty to animals and of vivisection – based not on sentimental identification but on philosophical and metaphysical grounds. ‘The Scientific Ape’ (which possibly mimics Darwin’s 1881 pro-vivisectionist letter to *The Times*) further investigates the immorality of the practice, by means of a post-Darwinian animal fable.

Prince Otto is like those hidden-image stereograms: some people can see a 3-D image in them, while I look, and look, and just see coloured dots. For *Prince Otto* I belong to those who can see what an interesting text it is, while others just can’t see this at all. Oliver Buckton (tall, bespectacled, relaxed, with hair slightly thinning in front in an original way) did see the book as not entirely successful, but placed it in the context of Stevenson’s views on contemporary politics, his interest in questioning binary oppositions (reflected in the indeterminacy of his, and Otto’s, sexual identity as well as of his texts in general, including this one), and his unhappiness with popular success (problematized in the text).

And so we came to the last paper: Julia Reid (hair drawn back in a plait, with glasses of admirable lightness and a striped cotton blouse of pleasing crispness) talked of Stevenson’s exploration of child psychology, especially as a re-enactment of primitive life. To a Romantic regret at adult loss of childhood perception, is now added progress-questioning nostalgia for invigorating primitive ways of thought (also explored in Dennis Denisoff’s talk). Though this latter could be regenerated by adventure stories, his own contain significant deconstructive elements (as Nathalie Jaëck had shown us on the first morning). Childhood imagination was also seen by Stevenson as potentially degenerative: at the mercy of terror and neuroses created by religious teaching.

And so the conference ended. The business meeting was short as Scott Hames immediately proposed the next venue as Stirling – ten years after the first one and a way of

taking stock and seeing how far we’ve come since then.

Conferences fade away gradually, with people leaving like in that Haydn symphony where the musicians put out their candles one by one and disappear, but there were still a good number at the goodbye aperitivo – our *cortiletto* now without quotations (those quotations...), removed from the windows to show the play was over. Looking at the photos, it’s notable how everyone is so much more relaxed after the concentration and the attention of the previous days.

I remained two more full days for Martin and Jürgen’s workshop and it was pleasant to frequently meet up and chat with various others who stayed on – Città Alta became like a village in those days. The conference’s rippling final chords. As Time – *tout doucement* – carried us on and elsewhere:

‘Come back again!’ she cried; and all the others echoed her [...] But the river had us round an angle in a twinkling, and we were alone with the green trees and running water.