



# Journal of Stevenson Studies Volume 10







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Contributions to volume 11 are warmly invited and should be sent to either of the editors listed above. The text should be submitted in MS WORD files in MHRA format. All contributions are subject to review by members of the Editorial Board.

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## Editorial

This issue of the *Journal of Stevenson Studies* marks the tenth year of production since volume one was edited by Dr Eric Massie in the aftermath of the influential conference he organised in the year 2000 on 'Stevenson, Scotland and Samoa'. This July saw the seventh such biennial conference run on 'Stevenson, Time and History' at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. Congratulations must go to Roslyn Jolly, Chris Danta and their team at UNSW for the successful conclusion of this conference, and it is hoped that some work from this event will appear in the next issue of the *Journal*.

David Daiches is often credited with the first reassessment of Stevenson's standing among modern literary critics, with *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Revaluation* from 1947. This was soon followed by a significant cohort of American scholars and biographers in the fifties and sixties, further supported by Roger Swearingen's indispensable critical bibliography in 1980 and the Booth and Mehew collected letters from Yale in the 1990s. Alan Sandison's *Appearance of Modernism* study of 1996 heralded a still richer harvest of more internationally focused and theoretically aligned monographs and papers. Stevenson was at last no longer 'only' an essayist, or only 'a children's writer', or indeed only and exclusively 'a Scottish writer'. The last thirteen years have continued this steady development of critical interest in Stevenson, now further supported by the editorial scholarship of the *New Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works*. It is to be hoped that the biennial Stevenson conferences and the *Journal of Stevenson Studies* have played their own lively part in this process by providing a critical outlet for both younger academics and established scholars in the field, and indeed it has been a richly various and finely productive ten years. With this in mind, we begin volume ten with a chronological and title index of all the essays published in *JSS* since its first appearance in 2004. Let





them speak for themselves as ‘guid ale needs nae wisp’. Having said that, special thanks must still be given to all our peer reviewers over the last ten years, and also to guest editors Ann Colley and Martin Danahay for the ‘Saranac’ material in volume 4, and Richard Dury and Robert-Louis Abrahamson for volume 9, the special issue on Stevenson as an essayist.

One of the advantages of journal publication in a single-author field is that time and space can be given to even the most detailed and specialised research. This issue contains two such studies with Neil Macara Brown tracing the most esoteric source material for *St Ives*, and Catherine Mathews uncovering a wealth of hitherto undiscovered writing and commentary on Stevenson from the popular press in Samoa, New Zealand and Australia. These essays (and their substantial endnotes) are a valuable resource and a welcome complement to the more critically focused studies in the same volume.

On a more practical note, the need for renewed subscriptions, and indeed for *increased* subscriptions, remains as pressing as ever if we are to continue with hardcover publication. You will see from the subscription form – in its usual place at the end of this issue – that we can accept cheques in other currencies, but not yet, alas, credit card subventions. We have also removed the distinction between personal and institutional rates. Given that the subscription includes postage, this makes for a better deal for institutional subscribers, and we continue to encourage our readers (if they have not already done so) to press their institutional libraries to subscribe.

Roderick Watson and Linda Dryden







## *'Tis ten years since: a chronological index of the first ten years of the *Journal of Stevenson Studies**

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Oliver S. Buckton, "'Faithful to his map": profit and desire in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*'

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Roderick Watson, "'You cannot fight me with a word" *The Master of Ballantrae* and the wilderness beyond dualism'

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Roger G. Swearingen, 'Stevenson's final text of *Kidnapped*'

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**Book Reviews:**

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Christy Danelle Di Frances, "'Hunted gallowsward with jeers": legal disillusionment and the diasporic impulse in Stevenson's fiction'

Adam Lawrence, "'Playing among the graves" in Colinton Manse: Robert Louis Stevenson's "Scottish Gothic" Garden of Verses'

Catherine Mathews, 'Charting the foreigner at home: contemporary newspaper records of Robert Louis Stevenson in Samoa, New Zealand and Australia 1890–1894'

Nigel Planer, '*Death of Long Pig*'







**Book Reviews:**

Richard D. Fulton and Peter H. Hoffenberg eds., *Oceania and the Victorian Imagination. Where All Things Are Possible*  
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**International Stevenson Conferences**

RLS 2000 (Stirling) *Stevenson, Scotland and Samoa*

RLS 2002 (Gargnano) *R. L. Stevenson: Writer of Boundaries*

RLS 2004 (Edinburgh) *Stevenson and Conrad: Writers of Land and Sea*

RLS 2006 (Saranac Lake) *Transatlantic Stevenson*

RLS 2008: (Bergamo) *European Stevenson*

RLS 2010 (Stirling) *Locating Stevenson*

RLS 2013 (Sydney) *Stevenson, Time and History*





## ‘Such numbers are evidently quite untrustworthy’: Robert Louis Stevenson and the absurdity of calculation

*R. L. Abrahamson*

Let's begin with some science. In a very early paper, delivered to the Royal Society of Edinburgh, when he was twenty-two years old, the former engineering student Robert Louis Stevenson spoke 'On the Thermal Influence of Forests', that is, the effect of forests upon climate, a reasonably important scientific enquiry. After presenting, in meticulous detail, the variations in the temperature of trees compared to the surrounding air, as measured by many earlier reports, Stevenson concludes:

I am afraid that there can be little doubt that the more general climatic investigations will be long and vexatious. Even in South America, with extremely favourable conditions, the result is far from being definite. Glancing over the table published by M. Becquerel in his book on climates, from the observations of Humboldt, Hall, Boussingault, and others, it becomes evident, I think, that nothing can be founded upon the comparisons therein instituted; that all reasoning in the present state of our information, is premature and unreliable. Strong statements have certainly been made; and particular cases lend themselves to the formation of hasty judgments. [...] Be that as it may, however, we have only to look a little longer at the table before referred to, to see how little weight can be laid on such special instances.

There follows further examination of statistics, and the final, dismissive comment: 'Such numbers are evidently quite untrustworthy and hence we may judge how much confidence can be





placed in any generalisation from these South American mean temperatures.<sup>1</sup>

This cautious refusal to jump to hasty conclusions shows a good, though I suppose not particularly exceptional, scientific mind. But when we find this same distrust of numbers and calculations running through the whole body of Stevenson's writing over the next twenty-one years, we might want to pause and ask what is going on. We may then begin to see how Stevenson's suspicion of numbers, calculations and measurements, and indeed of most abstractions, helps shape his fiction and non-fiction, where calculations prove disappointing, or simply wrong, and doubt is cast upon the whole attempt to quantify in any way our complex human experience.

Let us look at four areas where for Stevenson 'numbers are evidently quite untrustworthy': the areas of finance, science, travel and morality.

### Financial calculations

As soon as someone in Stevenson's fiction starts to calculate about money, we know some kind of ironic fall is approaching. It is supposed to be prudent to tot up financial calculations, but they almost always become futile in Stevenson's world. The whole idea of insurance, for instance, calculating risks against money, turns into farce in *The Wrong Box*, with the tontine lottery creating a comedy of errors and manipulation of numbers of all kinds. The lottery offers the whole pot of money to the last of the contributors to remain alive, possibly an enormous sum of money, but of no use to the winner, 'who is probably deaf, so that he cannot even hear of his success – and who is certainly dying, so that he might just as well have lost'. This is a scheme, we are explicitly told, 'by which nobody concerned can possibly profit'.<sup>2</sup>

The consequences are a little more serious with the insurance fraud in *The Ebb-Tide*, where the characters must calculate not only their financial chances but also their chances of escaping





the hand of the law, and the plot twists again when the schemers discover that they themselves have been the butt of a more clever fraud: the cargo of dozens of crates of champagne they have counted on to make their fortune are still dozens of crates, but contain nothing more than water. The numbers they had counted on simply cease to signify. The plot of *The Wrecker* also turns on insurance scams, though here in a much more complicated way, and the calculations of profits and loss are almost impossible to grasp completely. In a world where everyone is frantically calculating his own profits, nothing can be understood for sure.

Once money is in a character's hands, however, the scenes are almost always comic. We come to expect that any cool, business-like act of counting out money will be interrupted by some kind of underhanded miscalculation or embarrassing folly. Here, for instance, is what happens at a crucial moment early in *Kidnapped* as David Balfour is offered payment by his uncle Ebenezer. The episode involves not just the counting of the money but the choice of monetary units by which to calculate: pounds sterling or pounds Scots.

'Davie,' [Ebenezer] said, at length, 'I've been thinking.' Then he paused, and said it again. 'There's a wee bit siller that I half promised ye before ye were born,' he continued; 'promised it to your father [...]. Well, I keepit that bit money separate (it was a great expense, but a promise is a promise) and it has grown by now to be a maitter of just precisely—just exactly—' (And here he paused and stumbled) —'of just exactly forty pounds.' This last he rapped out with a sidelong glance over his shoulder; and the next moment, added almost with a scream: 'Scots!'

The pound Scots being the same thing as an English shilling, the difference made by this second thought was considerable; I could see, besides, that the whole story was a lie, invented with some end which it puzzled me





to guess; and I made no attempt to conceal the tone of raillery in which I answered: 'O, think again, sir! Pounds sterling, I believe!'

'That's what I said,' returned my uncle: 'pounds sterling! And if you'll step out-by to the door a minute, just to see what kind of a night it is, I'll get it out to ye and call ye in again.'

I did his will, smiling to myself in my contempt that he should think I was so easily to be deceived. [...]

When I was called in again, my uncle counted out into my hand seven and thirty golden guinea pieces; the last pound was in his hand in small gold and silver, but his heart failed him there, and he crammed the change into his pocket.<sup>3</sup>

Another uncompleted counting takes place early in *Treasure Island*, where, like David Balfour, the recipient gets less than is due. After the death of Billy Bones, Jim Hawkins and his mother break into the pirate's sea chest to try to recover the money he has owed for his stay at the inn. They find the bag of money, but calculations prove difficult. The whole treasure lies before them, but the confusion of types of coin and Jim's mother's scrupulous honesty, mean that the calculations are never concluded.

It was a long, difficult business, for the coins were of all countries and sizes – doubloons, and louis-d'ors, and guineas, and pieces of eight, and I know not what besides, all shaken together at random. The guineas, too, were about the scarcest, and it was with these only that my mother knew how to make her count.<sup>4</sup>

Their counting is interrupted by the return of the pirates. Jim wants to grab the whole bag of coins without bothering to number them, but his mother 'would not consent to take a fraction more than was due to her'. At the sound of the pirates' whistle,





she stops her counting, even though the sum has not been made up: “I’ll take what I have,” she said, jumping to her feet. “And I’ll take this to square the count,” said I, picking up the oilskin packet.’ The result of this uncalculated attempt to round up the number is, of course, the acquisition of the treasure map, which will pay them back countless times over. So much for the mother’s scruples about not taking ‘a fraction more than was due to her’.

### Travel calculations

Counting money is even worse when you are calculating expenses for a journey. Stevenson, who travelled so often, usually miscalculated and was stuck for money. He knew then, that the only reliable calculation of expenses was to leave the number open. Advising his friend Will Low how much money it would cost to travel from France to England, Stevenson prepared an itemised list of expenses, 50 fr per person for tickets, 10 fr for food, prices for tips, hotel, train, cabs – all very straightforward accounting – but stuck in the middle of the list he added 10 fr, for ‘The expense of spirit or spontaneous lapse of coin on the journey’.<sup>5</sup> The only way to hope to get right is to calculate for the incalculable.

In *Travels with a Donkey*, calculation focuses on items to bring on the journey rather than money. We are given a long, carefully accounted inventory of what Stevenson took with him:

By way of armoury and utensils, I took a revolver, a little spirit-lamp and pan, a lantern and some halfpenny candles, a jack-knife and a large leather flask. The main cargo consisted of two entire changes of warm clothing – besides my travelling wear of country velveteen, pilot-coat, and knitted spencer – some books, and my railway-rug, which, being also in the form of a bag, made me a double castle for cold nights. The permanent larder was represented by cakes of chocolate and tins of Bologna sausage. All this, except what I carried about my person, was easily stowed





into the sheepskin bag; and by good fortune I threw in my empty knapsack, rather for convenience of carriage than from any thought that I should want it on my journey. For more immediate needs I took a leg of cold mutton, a bottle of Beaujolais, an empty bottle to carry milk, an egg-beater, and a considerable quantity of black bread and white, like Father Adam, for myself and donkey<sup>6</sup>

Not long into the journey, all these careful calculations need to be revised. Although he had carefully calculated that a donkey would be much more useful on this trip than a horse, the donkey caused nothing but trouble and he ended up carrying much of the equipment himself. Eventually '[i]t was plain that I must make a sacrifice to the gods of shipwreck. I threw away the empty bottle destined to carry milk; I threw away my own white bread, and, disdaining to act by general average, kept the black bread for Modestine; lastly, I threw away the old leg of mutton and the egg-whisk, although this last was dear to my heart.' As we will see in a minute, calculation seldom satisfies the heart.

One useful item to help calculate one's journey is a map, and maps always cause problems in Stevenson's world, most memorably, in *Treasure Island*, where the map carefully sets out the location of the buried treasure, but once Long John Silver and his crew arrive at the spot indicated, the treasure is gone. The calculation is accurate, but only so long as no unexpected circumstance (like Ben Gunn, who removed the treasure) alters what is being calculated. And the map itself – at least the map we are presented with on the frontispiece of the book (carefully drafted by one of the engineers in Stevenson's father's office) – though detailed, including numbers for the depth of the waters around the island, is utterly useless. It lacks the essential numbers most important to any map: the lines of latitude and longitude. They have been deleted since, as Jim tells us, 'there is still treasure [on the island] not yet lifted'.<sup>7</sup>





### Scientific calculations

We might think that scientific calculations would be more reliable, though as we saw in Stevenson's paper to the Royal Society, even scientific numbers have a way of being 'untrustworthy'. And so they are in Stevenson's fiction.

One of the best-known scientists in Victorian fiction, Henry Jekyll, carefully and accurately calculates the formula for his potion. His findings have shown him that the right mixture of chemicals can at last isolate that good part of a person from the frustrating complexities of evil and shameful desires. His calculations do not so much fail, however, as completely reverse the intended outcome – a much more horrible result – since, at the moment of first drinking the potion, Jekyll allows self-centred thoughts to dominate his mind and instead of his angelic self being isolated, out comes the unrestrained Hyde.

There is a worse miscalculation in store. As the ingredients for the mixture begin to run out, Jekyll discovers that no replacement for the salt has any effect. Concerned more with the quantity of ingredients than with the quality, Jekyll had not noticed that, as he later supposes, 'my first supply was impure, and that it was that unknown impurity which lent efficacy to the draught'.<sup>8</sup> No amount of *quantitative* calculation is effective if the actual *quality* of what we calculate is wrong.

And this points out, I think, the real danger of calculation for Stevenson. Numbers are abstract. They measure quantity, never quality. They do not ground us in actual human experience, which is where we find our happiness and where we must live. Science does not speak the 'dialect of the soul', as he put it in his unpublished *Lay Morals*,<sup>9</sup> and, as he says in an early notebook, scientists who 'imagine that their science affords an answer to the problems of existence are deluded'.<sup>10</sup>

And yet Stevenson would not have us neglect scientific knowledge. But how does the dialect of the soul speak about scientific subjects? For an example, we can look at the way Stevenson pre-







sents his own genetic background. Not in itemised family trees or the kind of clinical notes about ancestry that someone like Francis Galton might have used to compile data for a scientific study of heredity<sup>11</sup>, but showing that his ancestors are still alive in him by giving them dramatic life through his imagination. ‘Our conscious years,’ he says, ‘are but a moment in the history of the elements that build us. Are you a bank-clerk, and do you live at Peckham?’ – that is, have you resigned yourself to a safe but boring existence? Studying your heredity can make life worth living, as long as you do it imaginatively, not calculatingly. You may be only a bank-clerk today, but, he says, ‘It was not always so.’ Stevenson gives his own life as an example:

though to-day I am only a man of letters, either tradition errs or I was present when there landed at St. Andrews a French barber-surgeon, to tend the health and the beard of the great Cardinal Beaton; I have shaken a spear in the Debateable Land and shouted the slogan of the Elliots; I was present when a skipper, plying from Dundee, smuggled Jacobites to France after the ‘15; I was in a West India merchant’s office, perhaps next door to Bailie Nicol Jarvie’s, and managed the business of a plantation in St. Kitt’s; I was with my engineer-grandfather [...] when he sailed north about Scotland on the famous cruise that gave us the *Pirate* and the *Lord of the Isles* [by Walter Scott]; I was with him, too, on the Bell Rock, in the fog, when the *Smeaton* had drifted from her moorings, and the Aberdeen men, pick in hand, had seized upon the only boats, and he must stoop and lap sea-water before his tongue could utter audible words; and once more with him when the Bell Rock beacon took a ‘thrawe,’ and his workmen fled into the tower, then nearly finished, and he sat unmoved reading in his Bible – or affecting to read – till one after another slunk back with confusion





of countenance to their engineer. Yes, parts of me have seen life, and met adventures, and sometimes met them well. And away in the still cloudier past, the threads that make me up can be traced by fancy into the bosoms of thousands and millions of ascendants: Picts who rallied round Macbeth and the old (and highly preferable) system of descent by females, fleers from before the legions of Agricola, marchers in Pannonian morasses, star-gazers on Chaldaean plateaus; and, furthest of all, what face is this that fancy can see peering through the disparted branches? What sleeper in green tree-tops, what muncher of nuts, concludes my pedigree? Probably arboreal in his habits . . .<sup>12</sup>

Darwinian descent from an ape, 'probably arboreal in his habits', comes alive in this way, and if the passage does not offer us objective accuracy, at least it speaks the language of our imagination (those suspenseful questions, for instance, building to the climax: 'what face is this that fancy can see ...' etc.) and compensates for the boredom of our present modern existence.

Or Stevenson can bring modern science home on the larger stage, the insignificant place of one human life surrounded by infinitesimal stellar distances. The dialect of the soul here recognises the scientific numbers, but refuses to speak about them in scientific language. Instead it chooses something more human, a much more 'habitable city for the mind of man', perceived through the senses, not the intellect: the language, we might say, of horror fiction:

Of the Kosmos in the last resort, science reports many doubtful things and all of them appalling. There seems no substance to this solid globe on which we stamp: nothing but symbols and ratios. Symbols and ratios carry us and bring us forth and beat us down; gravity that swings the





incommensurable suns and worlds through space, is but a figment varying inversely as the squares of distances; and the suns and worlds themselves, imponderable figures of abstraction,  $\text{NH}_3$ , and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ . Consideration dares not dwell upon this view; that way madness lies; science carries us into zones of speculation, where there is no habitable city for the mind of man.

But take the Kosmos with a grosser faith, as our senses give it us. We behold space sown with rotatory islands, suns and worlds and the shards and wrecks of systems: some, like the sun, still blazing; some rotting, like the earth; others, like the moon, stable in desolation. All of these we take to be made of something we call matter: a thing which no analysis can help us to conceive; to whose incredible properties no familiarity can reconcile our minds. This stuff, when not purified by the lustration of fire, rots uncleanly into something we call life; seized through all its atoms with a pediculous malady; swelling in tumours that become independent, sometimes even (by an abhorrent prodigy) locomotory; one splitting into millions, millions cohering into one, as the malady proceeds through varying stages. This vital putrescence of the dust, used as we are to it, yet strikes us with occasional disgust, and the profusion of worms in a piece of ancient turf, or the air of a marsh darkened with insects, will sometimes check our breathing so that we aspire for cleaner places. But none is clean: the moving sand is infected with lice; the pure spring, where it bursts out of the mountain, is a mere issue of worms; even in the hard rock the crystal is forming.

In two main shapes this eruption covers the countenance of the earth: the animal and the vegetable: one in some degree the inversion of the other: the second rooted to the spot; the first coming detached out of its natal mud, and scurrying abroad with the myriad feet of insects or towering into the heavens on the wings of birds: a thing





so inconceivable that, if it be well considered, the heart stops. To what passes with the anchored vermin, we have little clue, doubtless they have their joys and sorrows, their delights and killing agonies: it appears not how. But of the locomotory, to which we ourselves belong, we can tell more. These share with us a thousand miracles: the miracles of sight, of hearing, of the projection of sound, things that bridge space; the miracles of memory and reason, by which the present is conceived, and when it is gone, its image kept living in the brains of man and brute; the miracle of reproduction, with its imperious desires and staggering consequences. And to put the last touch upon this mountain mass of the revolting and the inconceivable, all these prey upon each other, lives tearing other lives in pieces, cramming them inside themselves, and by that summary process, growing fat: the vegetarian, the whale, perhaps the tree, not less than the lion of the desert; for the vegetarian is only the eater of the dumb.

Meanwhile our rotatory island loaded with predatory life, and more drenched with blood, both animal and vegetable, than ever mutinied ship, scuds through space with unimaginable speed, and turns alternate cheeks to the reverberation of a blazing world, ninety million miles away.<sup>13</sup>

There is the proper use of numbers: ‘ninety million miles away’ – not as precise measurement but as a rhetorical climax to this catalogue of images.

### **Moral calculation**

Stevenson’s objections to calculations appear most strongly when he considers morals, or social ethics. The chief problem with conventional Victorian morality, he insists, is that our behaviour becomes some calculable item that, when added up in our favour, is supposed to get us into heaven – or at least into that part of heaven that means most to people here and now: social respectability. And what is worse, because respectability





becomes the sum of one's conventionally approved deeds, it is easy to calculate it by the more quantifiable means of money. Young people are told to get a well-paying job so that they will be rich and therefore respectable; and therefore show that they are good Christians. This 'indirect and tactical procedure in life' judges 'by remote consequences instead of the immediate face of things'.<sup>14</sup> Here it's not a question of 'such numbers [being] quite untrustworthy' but of being false, and destructive of any chances we may have to live a satisfying life.

Besides, calculating morality is absurd. First of all, to turn human conduct into a quantifiable thing, we have to oversimplify it to such an extent that it becomes meaningless. We lose the spirit of the morality, being left with only the letter, and 'while the spirit is true, the letter is eternally false'.<sup>15</sup> Stevenson illustrates the futility of measuring human conduct with moral rules by comparing it to tracing the outlines of a tree's shadow. Neither human conduct nor the tree's shadow can be measured with any accuracy:

The shadow of a great oak lies abroad upon the ground at noon, perfect, clear, and stable like the earth. But let a man set himself to mark out the boundary with cords and pegs, and were he never so nimble and never so exact, what with the multiplicity of the leaves and the progression of the shadow as it flees before the travelling sun, long ere he has made the circuit the whole figure will have changed. Life may be compared, not to a single tree, but to a great and complicated forest; circumstance is more swiftly changing than a shadow, language much more inexact than the tools of a surveyor; from day to day the trees fall and are renewed; the very essences are fleeting as we look; and the whole world of leaves is swinging tempest-tossed among the winds of time. Look now for your shadows. O man of formulae, is this a place for you? Have you fitted the spirit





to a single case? Alas, in the cycle of the ages when shall such another be proposed for the judgment of man? Now when the sun shines and the winds blow, the wood is filled with an innumerable multitude of shadows, tumultuously tossed and changing; and at every gust the whole carpet leaps and becomes new. Can you or your heart say more?<sup>16</sup>

In *Lay Morals* (from which this image of the shadow of the great oak comes), Stevenson works through the Ten Commandments (a convenient use of numbering there – though if we count them, we will never find *ten* commandments in that list) to show how impossible it is to calculate human conduct by precepts:

*Honour thy father and thy mother.* Yes, but does that mean to obey? and if so, how long and how far? *Thou shalt not kill.* Yet the very intention and purport of the prohibition may be best fulfilled by killing. *Thou shalt not commit adultery.* But some of the ugliest adulteries are committed in the bed of marriage and under the sanction of religion and law. *Thou shalt not bear false witness.* How? by speech or by silence also? or even by a smile? *Thou shalt not steal.* Ah, that indeed! But what is to steal? [...] If you forge a bad knife, you have wasted some of mankind's iron, and then, with unrivalled cynicism, you pocket some of mankind's money for your trouble.<sup>17</sup>

Calculating our behaviour on such codes, then, always leads to absurdity, as also in the fable of 'The Sick Man and the Fireman', which leaves us undecided whether the absurdity is comic or tragic:





***The Sick Man and the Fireman***

There was once a sick man in a burning house, to whom there entered a fireman.

‘Do not save me,’ said the sick man. ‘Save those who are strong.’

‘Will you kindly tell me why?’ inquired the fireman, for he was a civil fellow.

‘Nothing could possibly be fairer,’ said the sick man. ‘The strong should be preferred in all cases, because they are of more service in the world.’

The fireman pondered a while, for he was a man of some philosophy. ‘Granted,’ said he at last, as a part of the roof fell in; ‘but for the sake of conversation, what would you lay down as the proper service of the strong?’

‘Nothing can possibly be easier,’ returned the sick man; ‘the proper service of the strong is to help the weak.’

Again the fireman reflected, for there was nothing hasty about this excellent creature. ‘I could forgive you being sick,’ he said at last, as a portion of the wall fell out, ‘but I cannot bear your being such a fool.’ And with that he heaved up his fireman’s axe, for he was eminently just, and clove the sick man to the bed.<sup>18</sup>

What alternative is there to moral calculations? How, in this case, does morality speak the dialect of the soul? ‘That which is right,’ Stevenson says, ‘[...] is intimately dictated to each man by himself, but can never be rigorously set forth in language, and never, above all, imposed upon another’. No doctrine, no dogma, no set code – for oneself or for others. We are isolated in our individual struggles to find what is right; the language is ‘incommunicable, and for the most part illuminates none but its possessor’. We have words to help share our views, but they are as unreliable as numbers. ‘[...] we have this word *right*, which [...] we all understand, most of us understand differently, and none can express succinctly otherwise’.<sup>19</sup>

Without numbers (or words) or calculating precepts we can





rely on, we are left isolated in our worlds, struggling to understand ourselves and others. Life, according to Stevenson in the generation after Darwin, is a *mess*. To deny this or to impose calculation as though that offers any true order to the mess is to be hypocritical. The Rev. Edward Purcell could not understand Stevenson's 'puzzling enigmatic ethics, whether they be individual, or whether they be a present transitional state of society'.<sup>20</sup> But I think that we come closer to understanding his ethics in this paradoxical non-calculation: *to live honestly is to live in confusion*. Numbers give us false hope. Contending with the confusion is, for Stevenson, where the joy of living lies.

### Literary calculation

But there is one area where there is no excuse for a mess, and where there is a definite need for numbers and calculation. And that is art, or, in Stevenson's case, specifically literature. Words may be as abstract as numbers, and 'we make a travesty of the simplest process of thought when we put it into words,'<sup>21</sup> but carefully composed words need not lead to confusion.

Because literature is artificial, as Stevenson famously argued with Henry James, because literature does not 'compete with life' with its 'welter of impressions' so hard to measure or confine within numbers, therefore literature can accommodate calculation in ways life itself never can. 'The arts, like arithmetic and geometry, turn away their eyes from the gross, coloured and mobile nature at our feet, and regard instead a certain figmentary abstraction.'<sup>22</sup>

Is a writer going to describe a fictional landscape? Then all the details must fit together within the work itself. The writer must take the calculations quite seriously and 'must know his countryside whether real or imaginary, like his hand,' Stevenson insisted:

the distances, the points of the compass, the place of the







sun's rising, the behaviour of the moon, should all be beyond cavil. And how troublesome the *moon* is! I have come to grief over the moon in *Prince Otto*; and, so soon as that was pointed out to me, adopted a precaution which I recommend to other men – I never write now without an almanac. With an almanac, and the map of the country and the plan of every house, either actually plotted on paper or clearly and immediately apprehended in the mind, a man may hope to avoid some of the grossest possible blunders.<sup>23</sup>

Punctuation is another kind of calculation – or at least a device for measuring the pace of a sentence or paragraph. Stevenson was notorious about having printers retain his idiosyncratic punctuation. One of his fiercest outbursts was to the young proof reader at Scribner's:

*To the Reader*

If I receive another proof of this sort, I shall return it at once with the general direction: 'See MS.' I must suppose my system of punctuation to be very bad; but it is mine; and it shall be adhered to with punctual exactness, by every created printer who shall print for me.<sup>24</sup>

And then there are the carefully calculated plans for the works themselves, like the 'draft in skeleton' of the twenty-nine chapters in three sections for the projected novel *The Gold Fever*, which he sent to Scribner's after the success of *Kidnapped*.<sup>25</sup> And yet, alas, here too, the calculations can come to nothing. Literature may be removed from life, but the writer is not. *The Gold Fever*, with its enticing chapters ('The Boys come round', 'Taking sides', 'Breaking sides', 'The trouble begins', 'We draw our stakes', 'The chase') came to nothing, as did many other calculated plans, as Stevenson's interest was drawn to other works, or his illnesses





forced him to put work aside, or the need for money or political action turned him to new projects.

In fact, the human element makes literary calculation as untrustworthy as anything else. In 'A Note on Realism', Stevenson first gives us a very careful enumeration of the need for a writer to cut and prune all words from a draft that do not directly 'serve [...] to complete the composition, to accentuate the scheme of colour, to distinguish the planes of distance, and to strike the note of the selected sentiment', and then he is forced to conclude: 'But this is unattainable.'<sup>26</sup> Our human weakness will always be tempted to include too many details and ruin the careful design.

And yet, as Stevenson pointed out many times, and yet we go on calculating. We count our money, we map out journeys, we apply science in all manner of effective technologies and measure our own and others' moral worth all the time. And of course we write books, and academic articles. We must proceed despite the absurdity of these calculations that surround us, and 'travel hopefully' even though we suspect the numbers will misguide us so that we never arrive where we intend to go. This was Stevenson's answer to the absurdity of numbers, and it answered a need deep within the post-Darwinian world, through to the 1920s. But that's another story.





NOTES

- 1 'On the Thermal Influence of Forests' in *Essays Literary and Critical*, Tusitala 28 (London: Heinemann, 1923), pp. 128-29.
- 2 *The Wrong Box*, Tusitala 11, pp. 1-2.
- 3 *Kidnapped*, ed. by Barry Menikoff (New York: Modern Library, 2001), pp. 35-36.
- 4 *Treasure Island*, Tusitala 2, p. 26.
- 5 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994-95), V, pp. 381-2.
- 6 *Travels with a Donkey*, Tusitala 17, p. 148.
- 7 *Treasure Island*, p. 3.
- 8 *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, ed. by Richard Dury (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 73.
- 9 *Ethical Studies and Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, Tusitala 26, p. 29.
- 10 'Selections from His Notebook' in *Memories and Portraits*, Tusitala 29, p. 175.
- 11 See Galton's *Records of Family Faculties* (London: Macmillan, 1884), a book Stevenson read and recorded his family details in. See Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 66-67.
- 12 *Memories and Portraits*, pp. 57-58.
- 13 *Ethical Studies*, pp. 60-62.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13; p. 17.
- 18 *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Fables* Tusitala 5, p. 82.
- 19 *Ethical Studies*, p. 26.
- 20 Paul Maixner, *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 195.
- 21 'Walt Whitman' in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, Tusitala 27,





p. 60

22 'A Humble Remonstrance' in *Memories and Portraits*, p. 136; p. 135.

23 'My First Book: *Treasure Island*' in *Treasure Island*, xxx-xxxi.

24 *Letters*, VI, p. 51.

25 *Letters*, V, pp. 284-85.

26 'A Note on Realism' in *Essays Literary and Critical*, Tusitala 28, p. 73.





## Going into *St. Ives*: some original sources revealed

*Neil Macara Brown*

A ‘tissue of adventures’, RLS dubbed his unfinished novel, *St. Ives*.<sup>1</sup> The story of an escape of a French prisoner in Britain in 1814, during the Napoleonic Wars, it can indeed be seen as a series of loosely interwoven episodes, but the weak plot structure belies a far greater strength supporting the tale: its veracity rests upon contemporary first-hand accounts, used both to enliven its action and colour its background detail. Imagination alone was never enough for RLS; he needed factual information to make a story ring true. Illumination of his extensive deployment of original historical sources in creating *St. Ives* is attempted here. A general introduction to the books and other material, sought and used by RLS, is followed by a more detailed study of examples taken from these resources and a summary in conclusion.

### Introduction

RLS first mentioned *St. Ives* in January 1893. While suffering influenza, he had begun dictating a new work: ‘The story is to be called *St. Ives*. I give you your choice whether or not it should bear the sub-title “Experiences of a French Prisoner in England”,’ he wrote to his literary confidant, Sidney Colvin (L7, p. 463). By then, ten chapters were already drafted, and the novel looked ‘very likely’ to be ready before any of the others on which he was working; in fact, it would proceed at intervals until October 1894, when, with thirty chapters completed but not all of them revised, it was laid aside for *Weir of Hermiston*. Finally, in early November – when ‘making a great effort to finish *St. Ives* anyhow’ – RLS proposed to send to his friend and lawyer, Charles Baxter, twenty-two chapters of completed copy, somewhat reluctantly accepting the possibility of serial publication before





the novel was completed (L8, p. 389). Publication did not come until 1897; the ending supplied by the critic and popular novelist, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch.<sup>2</sup>

The idea for *St. Ives* first came from reading copies of the *Annual Register*.<sup>3</sup> When outlining 'a fancy list of chaps' for the novel to Colvin in January 1893, RLS admitted that he had 'got onto' *St. Ives*, while 'going over' the *Register* for material for *Weir of Hermiston* (L7, p. 465). Almost two years earlier, in May 1891 – some six months after settling in Samoa, and vexed by the 'piecemeal' arrival of his library – he had described his routine on rising: 'I eat by lamplight reading an old *Annual Register* as a novel' (L7, p. 121). A run of twenty-nine volumes, from 1792 to 1820, filled a shelf at Vailima. This respected, authoritative digest of British and world history, politics and literature, which was begun by its first editor, the Whig politician and philosopher, Edmund Burke, with Robert Dodsley, in 1758, continues successfully to this day.

The volumes for the *Register* for 1811, 1812, and 1813 were much drawn upon by RLS for *St. Ives*, for many of the striking incidents in the story, notably the duel with the scissors and the daring escape of St. Ives and his fellow prisoners from Edinburgh Castle. The volume for 1813, the year of the action in *St. Ives*, was noted 'missing' in the sale catalogue of books from the Vailima library, which were auctioned in 1915.<sup>4</sup> The 1812 volume, now in the Beinecke Library at Yale, has pencil notes by RLS on the inside cover, and contains his marked sections relating to French prisoner escapes.<sup>5</sup> The location of the 1811 volume is unknown.

In May 1891, while writing to Baxter about his books arriving at Vailima, RLS told him he 'fell once more on the *Old Bailey Session Papers*'.<sup>6</sup> He had them for 1778, 1784 and 1786, he said, but asked for other volumes, 'above all, a little later' – emphasising that he wanted one or two during the course of the Peninsular War (L7, p. 128). This material was intended for another unfinished novel, *The Shovels of Newton French*, but later, as shown





below, also enriched part of *St. Ives*.<sup>7</sup> Other source books for the novel itself were requested from Baxter at the end of January 1893: 'I have a great need for *Dr. Syntax's Tours* and *The Dance of Death*', RLS told him (L8, p. 20). These valuable editions, then still safely shelved at his home in Edinburgh, have lively illustrations of contemporary social life and manners – notably portraying scenes on highways and roadside inns – drawn by Thomas Rowlandson from 1813.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, RLS also begged for 'any book on fashions, manners, what you will – but specially fashions' for 1810-20, and particularly 1814, as both *St. Ives* and *Weir of Hermiston* fell in that year. Baxter duly obliged with the Rowlandsons, and said he would send 'later on' two or three volumes of *La Belle Assemblée*, 'a fashionable Society Journal of 1810 to 1820, or thereabouts', containing colour fashion plates for ladies.<sup>9</sup> None of these journal volumes has been found, perhaps having been lost in the post, the fate of *The Dawn of the XIXth Century* – the 'fashion stuff for the period' – that Colvin also sent out to Samoa in early 1893.<sup>10</sup> However, as will be seen, there is some evidence in the text of *St. Ives* suggesting the receipt of *La Belle* at Vailima.

That the *Dawn* book had 'miscarried', RLS told Baxter in April 1894, when *St. Ives* was 'well on its way into the second volume' (L8, pp. 264-5). He was 'very anxious' for it, and also for a cheap edition of *Tom and Jerry* – the much-loved work of Pierce Egan containing period illustrations by that other great contemporary observer of social *mores*, George Cruikshank.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, almost as an afterthought, RLS also sought 'a book on balloon ascensions, particularly in the early part of the century.' The *Aerial Voyages* of Vincent Lunardi was acknowledged enthusiastically in July by RLS, saying that he could not have chosen better himself.<sup>12</sup> This request is interesting in that an account of the ascent of the Italian aeronaut from Edinburgh in 1785 was already available to RLS in his copy of *Kay's Portraits*, thus showing the importance for him of an original rather than a





second-hand source for his needs.<sup>13</sup>

This last request followed one for, 'if it be possible', RLS said, a 'file' of the *Edinburgh Courant* for the years 1811, 1812, 1813 or 1814, preferably for three winter months, which would do 'business' for both *St. Ives* and *Weir of Hermiston*. He wanted this as much for accounts of balloon ascensions as for anything else, he suggested; again interesting, given several aerial events are documented in the 1811-13 volumes of the *Annual Register*. Apparently, RLS was indeed such a stickler for the best possible facts that he needed an original account specific to Edinburgh itself.

Finding a *Courant* file proved impossible, but several undated numbers of the *Caledonian Mercury*, another contemporary Edinburgh newspaper, were in the Vailima library sale (Anderson I, 237).<sup>14</sup> Could the *Mercury* have been sent as substitute for the *Courant*? Both papers frequently covered the same stories and provided the same information. The *Mercury* features in *St. Ives* as a spur to action several times – indeed at one point alongside the solo showing of the *Register*, as if telling the reader something (*St. I*, p. 255). The *Courant* appears only once, in 'The Great North Road', when a copy, left at the inn the previous evening, is set before St. Ives at breakfast; he takes it 'eagerly, hoping to find some word of our escape' (*St. I*, p. 101). This show-and-tell in the story also includes the *Sessions*, dropped in when St. Ives despairs of the staple reading matter of his manservant, Rowley: 'His travelling library consisted of a chapbook life of Wallace and some sixpenny parts of the "Old Bailey Sessions Papers" by Gurney the shorthand writer; and the choice depicts his character to a hair' (*St. I*, p. 194).

Another important source book, but also a very vexatious one for RLS, was *Les Prisonniers de la Cabrera* by Louis Francois Gilles, published in 1892; in which he describes his experiences in 1808 at the notorious Spanish camp on the island of Cabrera, and then at Porchester, near Plymouth, in England.<sup>15</sup> This title,







spotted in the *Saturday Review*, he sought '*quam primum*', from Edward L. Burlingame, his contact at Scribner's the publishers, in October 1893; it having still failed to arrive by late January 1894, he emphasised to Burlingame that it was '*of great importance*' to him (L8, p. 237). When the book finally arrived, he had, in consequence 'the first six or seven chapters of *St. Ives* to recast entirely, he told Baxter in April 1894. 'Who could foresee that they clothed the French prisoners in yellow? But that one fatal fact – and that they shaved them twice a week – damns the whole beginning. If it had been sent in time, it would have spared me a deal of trouble' (L8, p. 265).

Another original French work, which RLS seized upon for a stirring scene, to be revealed below, was '*La guerre d'Espagne*', a memoir of the Peninsular War by Colonel Vigo-Rousillon, who also fought with Napoleon in Egypt. This was published in 1891 in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, a monthly literary and cultural journal, founded by Francois Buloz in 1829, and still published today, though not one to which RLS ever regularly subscribed.<sup>16</sup> He perhaps first noticed '*La Guerre*' mentioned in 1891 in one to which he did subscribe, the *Review of Reviews*.<sup>17</sup>

## Registering *St. Ives*

### 1. *Escape from Edinburgh*

The 'Chronicle' entries in the *Annual Register* for the years 1811, 1812 and 1813 frequently relate the colourful escapades of French prisoners in Britain. That for 10 April 1811, the original for the escape from Edinburgh Castle, in part reads:

This night, about eleven o'clock, forty-nine French prisoners, among whom was a captain, [...] escaped from the south west corner of their prison, Edinburgh Castle. They had cut a hole through the bottom of the parapet wall, below the place commonly called the Devil's Elbow, and let themselves down on a rope. One of the prisoners, losing his hold, fell from a considerable height, and was so





dreadfully bruised that he is not expected to live. [...] The night being dark, the operations of the prisoners were not observable, but the centinel [sic], on hearing some noise, became suspicious of the cause, and firing immediately, gave the alarm to the guard, otherwise it is probable the whole might have effected their escape.

This passage contains many elements of the mass escape in the novel from Edinburgh Castle, where the location is the 'curtain [wall] about the south-west corner, in a place they call the *Devil's Elbow*' (*St. I*, p. 47). Also mentioned is the rope, down which St. Ives says that he and ten others of a larger unspecified number collected, before he himself departed the scene. Finally, comes the 'sound of something falling' and the 'report of a musket' from the Castle battlements raising the alarm (*St. I*, p. 57).

Regarding the aftermath of this escape, the 'Chronicle' for 24 April has another entry, also plundered by RLS:

Some of the French prisoners who lately escaped from Edinburgh Castle have been apprehended near Linlithgow [...]. It appears from their confession, that no sooner were they lodged in the castle, that plans were formed for effecting their escape, and it would seem, carried into execution with the greatest secrecy. They had procured information of the nearest place of embarkation, and being furnished with maps, and that part of the almanack containing the principal roads through the country, they bent their way to Grangemouth, where they were to have gone aboard some foreign vessels lying there.

Thus RLS had St. Ives say: 'I knew their plan: they had a map and an almanack, and designed for Grangemouth, where they were to steal a ship' (*St. I*, p. 55). Neither of these entries in the *Register* mentions a tunnel, 'made out to pierce below the curtain' as in





the novel (*St. I*, p. 47). However, this means was probably suggested by another entry in the 'Chronicle' for 26 August 1813, which describes a similar escape from Perth depot:

On Tuesday morning, a number of prisoners escaped from the depot, through a mine which they had dug to the bottom of the outer wall [...] It is supposed that they had begun to issue from the aperture of this passage about two in the morning; but as they preserved a profound silence, and as the night was very dark, they were not observed by the sentries, till one of them attempting to leap the stream which skirts the north side of the depot, fell into the water with considerable noise. The nearest sentry then fired towards the point from which the sound proceeded, and the adjoining sentries having discharged their muskets in the same direction, an alarm was given and parties of the guards went in pursuit of the fugitives. Ten of them were soon apprehended, but we understand that thirteen are still missing. They seem to have had no plan for proceeding, after finding themselves at liberty.

From these three preceding passages of the 'Chronicle', RLS evidently selected those parts useful for his tale. Furthermore, the last sentence of this passage seemingly suggested the futility of the escape plan hatched by the fellow prisoners of St. Ives, who declares: 'Their whole escape indeed, was the most haphazard thing imaginable; only the impatience of captives and the ignorance of private soldiers would have entertained so misbegotten a device' (*St. I*, pp. 55-6).

## **2. *Duel at the Castle***

The source for the grisly duel with the scissors between St. Ives and Goguelat was found in the 'Chronicle' entry for 14 April in the *Register* for 1813:

A duel was fought between two of the French prisoners





on board the Samson prison- ship, lying in Gillingham Reach, when one of them, in consequence, was killed. Not having any swords, they attached to the end of two sticks a pair of scissors each. The deceased received the mortal wound in the abdomen; his bowels protruded, and yet he continued to parry with his antagonist while his strength would admit. Afterwards an application was made to the surgeon of the ship, who replaced the intestines and sewed up the wound, but he survived but a short time. The transaction took place below, in the prison, unknown to the ship's company.

Comparison of this passage with the duel in *St. Ives* shows the closeness of both portrayals. The scissors were attached to the end of sticks – or 'lashed' to 'wands', as the novel has it (*St. I.*, p. 17). Although Goguelat, while in the care of the doctor, survives longer than his Gillingham counterpart, his wound is also 'mortal', the scissor having 'plunged below the girdle into a mortal part' (*St. I.*, p. 18).<sup>18</sup>

### **3. On the Road**

The *Register* also provided material for the adventures on 'The Great North Road', to which *St. Ives* repaired hurriedly from the Durham alehouse lest an English sentry (whom he had befriended one night, while doing duty with the 'out-pickets' in Castile) recognised him. Having gained the highway, *St. Ives* overtook:

a sordid, silent, and lugubrious procession, such as we see in dreams. Close on a hundred persons marched by torch-light in unbroken silence; in their midst a cart, and in the cart, on an inclined platform, the dead body of a man [...] At the corner of a lane the procession stopped, and, as the torches ranged themselves along the hedgerow-side, I became aware of a grave dug in the midst of the thoroughfare, and a provision of quicklime piled in the ditch.





The cart was backed to the margin, the body slung off the platform and dumped into the grave with an irreverent roughness. A sharpened stake had hitherto served for a pillow. It was now withdrawn, held in its place by several volunteers, and a fellow with a heavy mallet (the sound of which still haunts me at night) drove it home through the bosom of the corpse. The hole was filled with quicklime, and the bystanders, as if relieved of some oppression, broke at once into a sound of whispered speech' (*St. I*, pp. 99-100).

This gruesome account of the burial of a suicide, one 'Johnnie Green' – done at a crossroads according to English law – was taken from the interment of John Williams, a London murderer.<sup>19</sup> This appears in the 'Chronicle' for 1 Jan 1812:

he was placed on a platform, erected six feet above a very high cart, drawn by one horse. The platform was composed of rough deals battened together, raised considerably at the head, which elevated the corpse. [...] The fatal mall was placed upright by the left side of his head, and the ripping-chisel, or crow-bar, about three feet long, on the other side. [When the procession reached the top of Cannon Street, where the New Road crossed]: a large hole being prepared, the cart stopped. After a pause of about ten minutes, the body was thrown into its infamous grave, amidst the acclamations of thousands of spectators. The stake which the law requires to be driven through the corpse had been placed in the procession, under the head of Williams, by way of pillow: and after he was consigned to the earth, it was handed down from the platform, and with the mall was driven through the body. The grave was then filled with quicklime, and the spectators quietly dispersed. During the whole procession all ranks of persons





who were present conducted themselves with a solemnity rarely witnessed in the east part of the town; and until the body was lowering into the earth, hardly a whisper was to be heard in the street.

#### **4. The Calico Cart**

Another notable loan from the *Register* is made in the chapter entitled 'I Follow a Covered Cart', which describes the ingenious device of the escape agent, Burchell Fenn, for concealing runaway French prisoners while transporting them without detection. St. Ives says that it was 'such a cart as I am told calico printers use, mounted on two wheels, and furnished with a seat in front for the driver. The interior was closed with a door, and was of a bigness to contain a good load of calico, or (at a pinch and if it were necessary) four or five persons' (*St. I*, p. 104). A corresponding passage in the 'Chronicle' for 28 February 1812 relates:

Upwards of 1000 French prisoners have escaped from this country during the war, and so many persons have been detected in assisting their escape, that those concerned have had a vehicle made for the conveyance of Frenchmen to avoid suspicion or detection, exactly resembling a covered cart used by calico-printers with strong doors at each end, but with seats in the inside to hold a number of men.

In the story the cart driver refuses to give St. Ives a lift to the safe house operated by Fenn (*St. I*, pp. 105-6). Similarly, the above entry in the *Register* says:

[The escaped prisoner] knew the cart had returned, and overtook it, but the driver would not for a considerable time take him up, as he had only seen him in the night time, till he made him understand that that he was connected with one Webb, the driver's employer





Later, when St. Ives himself sets out on his bruising ‘Travels of the Covered Cart’, through ‘a labyrinth of the most infamous country lanes’, he says: ‘The interior of that engine of torture, the covered cart, was fitted with a bench, on which we took our places’ (*St. I*, pp. 123-4). Also, he tells how, apart from eating ‘boldly at hedgerow alehouses, usually at untimely hours of the day’, they were confined to the cart for most of the daylight hours: ‘We came to our stages at all sorts of odd hours, and they were in all kinds of odd places. [...] The second or third, we alighted on a barren heath about midnight, built a fire to warm us under the shelter of some thorns [...] In the middle of another night we came to a stop by an ancient whitewashed cottage [...] we were had in, and entertained with a dish of hot tea’ (*St. I*, pp. 125-6). Here RLS can plainly be seen filling in details from the ‘Chronicle’ for 28 February:

The cart had been fitted up with a seat to hold a number of Frenchmen. [...] The Frenchmen only got out of the cart at night to avoid observation. They stopped at bye places, and made fires under hedges. At a place [...] a woman connected with Webb, made tea for them.

During this episode, St. Ives enjoys the company of an unnamed ‘Colonel’ and ‘Major’. While they sup in a Bedford alehouse (in a fireside scene out of *Dr. Syntax?*), the ‘Major’, because of his poor English, arouses the suspicions of Thomas Dudgeon, the ‘attorney’s clerk’ who doggedly persists in trying to have them arrested (*St. I*, pp. 131-6). The original passage in the ‘Chronicle’, which suggested this incident at the inn, and perhaps also the actual ranks of his companions themselves, is that for 29 January 1813, which describes the jailing of a young Sussex man for conducting French officers on parole to the coast; he had ‘contrived to get acquainted with a colonel and major’, who paid him 300 guineas, it says. However, when their party arrived





in their post-chaise at a public house near Hastings, they were suspected by an exciseman. He, unsatisfied with the yarn spun that they were German officers returning to their regiment, had them seized by the military. (The exciseman was simply replaced in *St. Ives* by the 'attorney's clerk' for narrative purposes.)

### **Refitting St. Ives – the claret-coloured chaise**

Stories of overturning coaches are almost as common as ones of escaping Frenchmen in the 'Chronicle' of the *Register* for the years 1811-13. Their frequency may to some extent explain the inclusion of the scene where St. Ives, in his own carriage, comes across 'the wreck of a chaise lying on one side in a ditch', in 'The Adventure of the Runaway Couple'.<sup>20</sup> However, the source for the description of the claret-coloured chaise, which St. Ives buys from the postmaster at Aylesbury, lies elsewhere. In the story, this used carriage salesman sees him coming, and puts on the patter:

'Second-'and shay by Lycett of London. Latest style; good as new. Superior fittin's, net on the roof, baggage platform, pistol 'olsters – the most com-plete and the most gen-teel turn-out I ever see! The 'ole for seventy-five pound! It's as good as givin' her away!' (*St. I*, p. 196)

The name of the coachmaker was undoubtedly found by RLS in the *Sessions*. The facts of this particular case are that one John Lycett, coachmaker at Whitechapel, London, hired a four-wheeled chaise on 1 September 1785 to the notorious fraudster Major James George Semple, who said he was 'going round the north' on a tour. A year later, Semple was tried at the Old Bailey for the theft of the equipage, and sentenced to transportation for seven years. When asked at the trial if any particular conversation had passed between them, Lycett declared:







‘Nothing, but he desired the chaise to be fitted up with pistol holsters and a net to the roof; I told him it was not customary to furnish them with pistol holsters [...] he must pay for that.’<sup>21</sup>

Lycett also said that there was ‘a platform’ for baggage, not actually bespoke by Semple, but which he had reduced in size for him to fit his trunk. Like the salesman in *St. Ives*, who didn’t ‘make’ osses’, Lycett did not supply them either, and so Semple had to have horses sent round from his lodgings at the Saracen’s Head Inn, Aldgate (ibid).

New, or improved carriages merit two mentions in the ‘Chronicle’ and its appendix for 1813. Under ‘Patents in 1813’ is noted: ‘Charles Wilks, Esq. for a method of constructing four-wheeled carriages to produce greater facility in turning.’ This new manoeuvrability may have been in mind when RLS had *St. Ives* suddenly change his direction of travel, when he decided to deliver Dorothy into the hands of the local magistrate rather than into the clutches of the temporarily absent Bellamy, who had ridden on ahead:

‘Take the lady there, and at full gallop,’ I cried.  
‘Right, sir! Mind yourself,’ says the postillion.  
And before I could have thought it possible, he had turned the carriage to the rightabout and we were galloping south (*St. I*, p. 214).

### **Re-dressing (and redressing) *St. Ives* – the ‘yellow’ matter**

In the story itself, *St. Ives* describes the ‘ridiculous uniforms’ of the prisoners as a:

jacket, waistcoat, and trousers of a sulphur or mustard yellow, and a shirt of blue-and-white striped cotton. It was conspicuous, it was cheap, it pointed us out to laughter





[...] like a set of lugubrious zanies at a fair (*St. I.*, p. 4).

He thinks that 'some malignant genius had found his masterpiece of irony' in the dress they were 'condemned to wear'. This garish garb had, for his own accuracy, to be substituted by RLS after he had finally received *Cabrera* from Burlingame. Gilles describes the French prisoners at Porchester as dressed in '*une veste a manches, un gilet et un pantaloon de drap jaune, une chemise en toile de cotton raye bleu et blanc.*' They were also shaved '*toutes les semaines*' (L8, pp. 265-6, footnote 6). The yellow clothing, however, should have been familiar to RLS from his reading of the 'Chronicle' of the *Annual Register* for 1812. The entry for 5 February states:

On Saturday morning the curiosity of the inhabitants of Brighton was attracted by the appearance of nearly one hundred men, attired in yellow jackets and trowsers, walking about the streets smoking their pipes, who, after much enquiry, were found to be Spanish and German deserters, and prisoners from the French armies in Spain and Portugal, that had volunteered into the British service.<sup>22</sup>

### Reviewing St. Ives – before Barossa

Reading the *Despatches* of the Duke of Wellington undoubtedly provided RLS with background references for the Peninsular War campaign in which St. Ives fought and was captured.<sup>23</sup> This support material is lightly brushed throughout the novel, only coming to the forefront when the narrative requires. However, as the same facts are also found in the 'General History' section of the *Register*, specific borrowing from the one or the other of these sources cannot be determined. One such taken from the 'Chronicle' for 18 May 1811, however, tells of the capture of '*the French eagle taken by the 87th regiment at the battle of Barossa.*' This loss of the 'eagle' of the 8th of the Line begins the story of the





incident before the battle of Barossa ('Chiclana' to the French), in 1811, related to Ronald Gilchrist by St. Ives in the henhouse at Swanston, after the latter claimed Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Graham of Lynedoch, the British commander, as his kinsman. St. Ives replies:

'Well, I can tell you a story,' said I, a true one too, and about this very combat of Chiclana, or Barossa as you call it. I was in the Eighth of the line; we lost the eagle of the First Battalion, more betoken; but it cost you dear. Well, we had repulsed more charges than I care to count, when your 87<sup>th</sup> Regiment came on at a foot's pace, very steady; in front of them a mounted officer, his hat in his hand, white-haired and talking to the battalions. Our major, Vigo Roussillon, set spurs to his horse and galloped out to sabre him, but seeing him an old man, very handsome, and as composed as if he were in a coffee-house, lost heart and galloped back again. Only, you see, they had been very close together for the moment, and looked each other in the eyes. Soon after the major was wounded, taken prisoner and carried into Cadiz. One fine day they announced to him, the visit of the general, Sir Thomas Graham. "Well, sir," said the general, taking him by the hand, "I think we were face to face upon the field." It was the white-haired officer!' (*St. I*, pp. 65-6)

This knightly derring-do derives from the third part of 'La Guerre d'Espagne' by Colonel Vigo-Roussillon, who described his glancing encounter with Graham thus:

*Je voyais la ligne anglaise, à soixante pas, continuant d'avancer lentement, sans tirer. Il me semblait impossible de lui résister parce que je n'avais plus assez de monde. Sous l'influence d'une sorte de désespoir, je voulous me faire tuer. Je poussai mon cheval, qui était un*





*vigoureux polonais, contre un officier anglais, à cheval, que je crus être le colonel du régiment qui m'était opposé. Je le joignis et j'allais lui passer mon sabre au travers du corps, devant ses soldats, quand je fus retenu par je ne sais quell sentiment de compassion et renonçai à ce meurtre inutile. Cet officier avait des chevaux blancs, un belle figure; il tenait son chapeau à la main et parlait à ses soldats. Son sang-froid, un grand air de calme et de dignité, avient arrêté mon bras.*

[Then, after his wounding and capture soon after]:

*Un heure après, on m'annonça son excellence le général Graham, commandant en chef le corps d'armée anglais, à Cadix.*

*Ma surprise fut extrême, en reconnaissant, sous l'habit de lieutenant-général, ce même officier que j'avais été un moment de tuer à Barossa. Le général, qui remarqua mon émotion, me prit la main en me disant:*

*– Eh bien, monsieur, nous nou sommes vus de pres sur le champ de bataille.*

*– Il est vrai, mon général, mais alors je n'avais pas l'honneur de vous connaître; j'étais même très éloigné de penser que vous étiez le général en chef.*

*Mais quell était votre dessein en vous approchant de moi?*

*Je le lui dis.*(RDM, Derniere partie, pp. 908-9)

### **Re-fashioning St. Ives – presented on a plate**

Fashion details are used sparingly to good effect in the novel. If RLS did indeed eventually have copies of *La Belle Assemblée* to hand, he resisted the temptation to lard them on. Most specific female fashion content (there are also some male asides) comes in the latter parts of the story, notably in the chapters “The





Lawyer's Party' (by RLS), and 'The Assembly Ball' (by Quiller-Couch, whose sources are unknown). The style in vogue around 1800 was the French classical, where muslin cloth clung to the female form like drapery on a statue: 'her garments moulded her with the accuracy of sculpture', St. Ives says of Flora standing on the windy battlements (*St. I*, p. 5). The description of Dorothy Greensleeves in her black lace mittens, whom St. Ives rescues from the 'hawbuck' (bumpkin), Bellamy, as 'dressed in various shades of blue, from her stockings to her saucy cap' (*St. I*, p. 210) might well come from *La Belle Assemblée*:

Over this [jacket and dress] our fair pedestrians throw a sky-blue scarf. Bonnet [...] ornamented with a flower and wreath of sky-blue, and tied [...] with a ribband to correspond. [...] Gloves and sandals of sky-blue kid. (LBA, April 1813)<sup>24</sup>

That RLS was indeed accurate in his portrayal of fashion in 1813, whether he had *La Belle* to hand or not, can be seen in a comparison of the description of Flora in the chapter, 'The Lawyer's Party' with the text of a contemporary fashion plate. Of her St. Ives says: 'she had thrown her pelisse over her bare arms and neck, and the dark fur of the trimming set them off' (*St. I*, p. 264). This garment forms part of the outfit of 'Morning Walking Dress', illustrated in the rival *Ackermann's Repository* for January 1813: 'a robe pelisse [...] trimmed around with spotted ermine'. Perhaps significant, too, in the naming of the heroine, is another *de rigueur* accessory of this morning wear: 'A Flora cap ornamented with ribband and a small flower on the left side.'<sup>25</sup>

### Rescuing St. Ives – up, up and away

As the escape by hot-air balloon and its disaster come late in the novel there is little that can be said of the use of *Aerial Voyages* by RLS beyond his setting the scene for the event through the





mocking tones of 'the cheerful extravagant', Dalmahoy, whom he meets in 'a place of entertainment [...] in a street behind the Register House (*St. I*, p. 231).<sup>26</sup> In referring to Byfield, the aeronaut, Dalmahoy says of his ascensions:

'Lunardi did it, and overdid it. A whimsical, fiddling, vain fellow by all accounts [...] But once was enough. . If Lunardi went up and came down, we prefer to grant the point. We do not want to see the experiment repeated ad nauseam [...] Ah! If they would go up and *not* come down again!'

Indeed, Lunardi made a number of ascents in Scotland, but none so spectacular as his first from Heriot's Hospital Green in Edinburgh:

Brilliant it certainly was, and it is as unquestionable, that although half a century has since elapsed, it has not been surpassed. (An eye-witness informs us that there has been no exhibition nearly so grand as Lunardi's first ascent. All the other ascents since his time have been dosing, sluggish-looking exhibitions, whereas Lunardi went off in the grandest style, precisely resembling a sky-rocket.) (Kay, p. 80 & footnote)

No original sources of information used by Quiller-Couch for his narrative of the soaring escape of St. Ives from Swanston are known, but many accounts of balloon ascensions by James Sadler (1753-1828) of Oxford are found in the 'Chronicle' of the *Register*. Indeed, RLS may well have first found fuel for an exciting ending there. When the 'Incomplete Aeronauts' are descending rapidly in the *Lunardi*, they 'pitch out some ballast' to avoid ditching in the Bristol Channel. A grapnel is employed over the land, but then cut to avoid the unfriendly attentions of a squad





of soldiers. Drifting over the sea, a descent is made near a brig, 'backing her sails', because she had spotted them. Finally, floating on the water, the balloon driven by the wind, drags the car through the spray, and the aeronauts have to grip the hoop and netting, and dig their nails into the oiled silk of the canopy, until they are plucked aboard the brig (*St. I*, pp. 332-5).

A corresponding account in the 'Chronicle' for 1 October 1812, relates the foolhardy attempt of James Sadler to fly from Dublin to Liverpool over the Irish Sea:

The wind now shifting, he was again taken off and lost sight of land; when after hovering around for a long time, he discovered five vessels beating down channel; and in hopes of assistance, he determined on descending with all possible expedition, and precipitated himself into the sea. In this most critical situation, he had the mortification to find the vessels took no notice of him; obliged therefore to reascend [sic], he now through out a quantity of ballast, and quickly regained his situation in the air, to look out for more friendly aid. [...] Two others now appeared in sight and one of them tacking about [...] Night now coming on, he [...] once more descended into the sea; but here the wind acting upon the balloon as it lay on the water, drew the car with so much velocity, that the vessel could not overtake it; and notwithstanding he used his utmost efforts, and latterly tied his clothes to the grappling iron, and sunk them to keep him steady, still the balloon was carried away so fast, that he was under the necessity of expelling the gas: upon that escaping, the car actually sunk, and he had now nothing but the netting to cling to.<sup>27</sup>

Although there are many similarities between the two passages, it cannot be said whether or not Quiller-Couch used any material from the *Register*: he makes no reference to it as a





source in his letters on the subject of *St. Ives* to Sidney Colvin.<sup>28</sup>

### Reporting *St. Ives* – reading the newspapers

Whether or not RLS had any contemporary Edinburgh newspapers for period detail cannot be resolved from references made by him to them in the text of *St. Ives*. The *Courant*, which was unavailable, has, as already noted, a single mention, but only as a prop early on in the novel, and might well have been renamed as the *Mercury* in the event of the whole completed novel being revised. In contrast, the *Mercury* enjoys three mentions, all of them coming in the later chapters, after the return to Edinburgh by *St. Ives*. As also remarked, the *Mercury* and the *Register* both appear together in the chapter, the ‘Events of Monday: The Lawyer’s Party’, when *St. Ives*, visiting Mr. Robbie, the lawyer, is told: “My clerk will show you into the waiting-room and give you the day’s *Caledonian Mercury* and the last [1813] *Register* to amuse yourself with in the interval” (*St. I*, p. 255). This is an obvious nod by RLS to his source, or sources, but that is all; there is no specific reference to hang a source on. However, in the ‘Events of Tuesday: The Toils Closing’, *St. Ives* says:

‘I might compose myself as well as I was able over the *Caledonian Mercury*, with its ill news of the campaign of France and belated documents about the retreat from Russia; and, as I sat there by the fire, I was sometimes all awake with anger and mortification at what I was reading, and sometimes again would be three parts asleep as I dozed over the barren items of home intelligence’ (*St. I*, p. 274).

This passage looks more promising at first, but there is little to identify an actual date for a newspaper, which might confirm that a particular copy was drawn upon by RLS. The retreat from Russia took place in late 1812, and full reports of the disaster befalling







the French army only appeared in newspapers in January 1813. The phrase, 'belated documents', may suggest an even later date, however. The only such report found in the *Mercury* by the present writer is on 10 May 1813, quoting nightmarishly from the 'Circumstantial Account of the Campaign in Russia', described as a work lately published in Paris.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, the accompanying mention of the 'ill news of the campaign of France' is far too vague to allow corroboration with the Russian reference in confirming an actual date. At this point, St. Ives also stumbles across the following mention of his pursuing cousin in the *Mercury*: 'Lately arrived at Dumbreck's Hotel, the Viscount St. Ives' (ibid).<sup>30</sup> Here RLS used the conventional form of these announcements as found in the gazette column of the *Mercury* in the 1810s, but as this style differs little from similar notices printed in his own day, cannot prove conclusively that he drew this format directly from the newspaper itself.

### Summary and conclusion

From the foregoing it can be seen how greatly RLS depended upon these original sources for *St. Ives* both to drive plot action and colour period detail. Indeed, it could be said that he was to some extent over-reliant on their wholesale application; some incidents, like the burial of Johnnie Green and the rescue of Dorothy Greensleeves, although very picturesque in themselves, add little to the working of the tale. Perhaps this 'kind of sham picture' is excusable, though, in what he himself, when noting its episodic nature to Colvin, dismissed as his 'most prosaic book' (L8, p. 310). Many incidents in *St. Ives* are memorable, but the scenes owing their origins to actual accounts of historical events found in the *Register*, *Sessions* and elsewhere, as highlighted above, remain uppermost in the mind of the reader.

Although original sources are far more overt in their borrowing and use in *St. Ives* than in any of his other novels, RLS was, in his almost pathological desire for factual accuracy, simply





continuing a successful search process, which had borne fictional fruit before. When first shaping *The Master of Ballantrae* at Saranac in late 1887, he emphatically told the publisher and librarian, Charles Scribner: '[W]hat I want is *originals*.' (L6, p. 80). He clearly distinguished between these, and a lesser secondary source, at which he might 'look' if nothing else better was available. Pleading for another book, he stressed, '*on which I depend*: I cannot go on without it.' (L6, p. 79). Ever insistent in his wants, he specifically desired works that would enable him 'to touch on colonial life here about 1760.' The range of these must-have works comprised the same breadth of possible, usable first-hand resources – biographies, memoirs and journals – as would be trawled later for *St. Ives*.<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES

Thanks to Richard Dury and Glenda Norquay, who is editing *St. Ives* for the New Edinburgh Edition, for their constructive comments.

Text: *St. Ives. Being the Adventures of a French Prisoner in England*. Tusitala Edition Vol. XV (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 5th imp. 1928). Hereafter, St. I.

- 1 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson* edited by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994-95, V. 8, p. 306). Hereafter, L.
- 2 For serialisation, publication and other details, see Roger G. Swearingen, *The Prose Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson: A Guide* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980, p. 181). Hereafter, Swearingen. 'Q' received little guidance other than a few notes: 'The hero had to escape in a balloon, be taken by an American privateer & get back to France somehow' (communication Glenda Norquay, quoting a 1924 letter by AQ-C).
- 3 *The Annual Register, or A View of the History. Politics, and Literature, for the Year 1811* (London: Printed for W. Otridge and Son, etc., 1812; Do. *Year 1812*, 1813 and *Year 1813*, 1814). Hereafter, *Register*.
- 4 *Autograph Letters, Original Manuscripts, Books, and South*





*Sea Curios from the Library of the Late Robert Louis Stevenson* consigned by the present owner Mrs Salisbury Field of Santa Barbara, Calif.: Parts I, 1914 and Part II, 1915 (New York: Anderson Auction Company). Hereafter, Anderson; the *Register* copies were Anderson II, 3.

- 5 Beinecke 1851.
- 6 *The Old Bailey Sessions Papers* of London Assizes by Joseph Gurney (1744-1815), assistant and successor of his father, Thomas Gurney (1705-70), shorthand-writers at the Old Bailey. Hereafter, Sessions; present whereabouts of RLS's copies unknown.
- 7 For *The Shovels of Newton French*, a story spanning three centuries, which from May 1891 was subtitled *including Memories of Henry Shovel, a Private in the Peninsular War*. See Swearingen, pp.157-8; 'Adventures of Henry Shovel' in *Weir of Hermiston and Some Unfinished Stories* (Tusitala XVI).
- 8 [William Combe, letterpress], *The Tour of Dr. Syntax in Search of the Picturesque; Consolation; A Wife* (London: R. Ackermann, 1823); and *The English Dance of Death, from the Designs of Thomas Rowlandson, with Metrical Illustrations, by the author of 'Dr. Syntax'* (London: R. Ackermann's Depository of Arts, 2 v. 1815-16). RLS's editions, acknowledged [16 April 1893], are untraced; he was seemingly unaware of Rowlandson's 'Drawings for Tour in a Post-Chaise', 1784, first published by Joseph Grego in *Graphic* Summer Number (1891).
- 9 *La Belle Assemblée, or Bell's Court and Fashion Magazine Addressed Particularly to the Ladies*. First Series, 7 v. (London, 1806-10); Second Series 30 v. (1810-24); Third Series 15 v. (1825-32). Hereafter, LBA. The 'annuals which lay dispersed upon the tables, and of which the young beaux displayed the illustrations to the ladies' at 'The Lawyer's Party' could have perhaps included copies of LBA (*St. I*, 258).
- 10 John Ashton, *The Dawn of the XIXth Century: A Social Sketch of the Times ... With Illustrations, etc.* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1886). Ashton warns against a too literal interpretation of the fashion plates in LBA: '[T]hey were then, much as now, intended to be looked as indications of fashion, more than the fashion itself.' For 'accuracy of detail' he prefers the prints of the 'pictorial satirist', who even if he did exaggerate, drew with some expression from 'actual costume'.
- 11 *Tom and Jerry. Life in London* (London: J. C. Hotten, n.d.); first





- published in 1821, entitled *Life in London, or the Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn and his Elegant Friend, Corinthian Tom*. Anderson II, 225; present whereabouts unknown.
- 12 *An Account of Five Aerial Voyages in Scotland by Vincent Lunardi, Esq.* (London, 1785), Anderson II, 293, was purchased by the University of St. Andrews in 2012; *Mr. Lunardi's Account of his Ascension and Aerial Voyage from New Fort, Liverpool*, [London, 1785?], Anderson II, 293, whereabouts unknown, was also sent through Baxter.
- 13 *A Series of Original Portraits and Character Etchings by the Late John Kay, Miniature Painter, Edinburgh; with Biographical Sketches and Anecdotes* (Edinburgh: Hugh Paton, 4 v. 1842) was Anderson II, 173. For Lunardi, text and illustration, see V. 1, pp. 79-85. Hereafter, Kay.
- 14 *The Caledonian Mercury*, 1720-1867; issued thrice weekly on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Hereafter, *Mercury*. *The Edinburgh Evening Courant* was issued 1718-1871.
- 15 Louis Francois Gilles, *Les prisonniers de la Cabrera: memoires d'un conscript de 1808* (Paris: Victor Havard, 1892). Hereafter, *Cabrera*; not in Anderson – as a library loan?
- 16 'La guerre d'Espagne: Fragmens[sic] des memoires militaires du Colonel Vigo-Rousillon', *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Paris, Dulaud et cie, LXI annee, troisieme periode, Vol. 106, 1er Aout, 1891, i.e. July/August 1891). Hereafter, RDM; RLS's copy is Beinecke 1995+S1. His only other use from RDM was in 'An Autumn Effect' (1875), where he quoted from M. Andre Theuriet, 'L'Automne dans les bois' (1st Oct. 1874), which he saw on a friend's table (Tusitala 30, footnote p. 67).
- 17 *Review of Reviews* 'The Spanish War. Colonel Vigo Roussillon' (London: Vol. 4, July 1891, p. 203), On 21 May 1891, RLS told the editor of the *Times* he subscribed to this and certain other journals, most of them lost in the post recently (L7, p. 129).
- 18 Goguelat was possibly inspired by Tardif, a prisoner at Porchester, who imagining himself the butt of another's satirical verses, stoked up his resentment until maddened by vengeance, rushed him, both disembowelling him and stabbing him in the back. He 'ironically remarked': *'I have sent you before me upon your journey, that you may procure me a lodging.'* – echoed more favourably in *St. Ives* when the hero visits the dying Goguelat, who reveals his nobler side,





bidding his slayer compose himself: “You have given me the key of the fields, comrade,” said he. “Sans rancune!” (‘Chronicle’, 1 March 1813)

- 19 ‘Johnnie Green’ is likely taken from John Green [b.1790], ‘Late of the 68th Durham Light Infantry’, the author of *The Vicissitudes of a Soldier’s Life, or a Series of Occurrences from 1806 to 1815; containing A Concise Account of The War in the Peninsula* (Louth, 1827). RLS’s copy contains marginal notes by both him and his father, Thomas Stevenson (Anderson I, 247). John Williams is mentioned in the story itself when St. Ives attempts to gain entry to the covered cart: ‘I should be safe in there if I was the monster Williams himself’ (*St. I*, p. 106). Williams was the – very possibly wrongly accused – multiple murderer in the two notorious ‘Ratcliff Highway Murders’ committed at Wapping, London, who hanged himself in his cell.
- 20 An entry for 27th July 1813 describes the overturning of the Bath mail, when asleep at the time was a ‘young lady’, who escaped without injury and continued in another coach, coming upon the scene shortly afterwards; possibly the original of Dorothy Greensleeves, ‘the most entrancing little creature conceivable’, whom St. Ives conveys from the scene in his own chaise. Although there is no evidence, the fact that they were runaways to Gretna Green could have come from George Borrow’s *Lavengro*, in which he assisted a postillion whose chaise had been upset when the horses were frightened during a thunderstorm; he said he thought the passengers must be a runaway young couple: “Ay, ay,” said the postillion, “to Gretna Green, though that I can’t say I drove ye, though I have driven many a pair” (Ch. 36). Interestingly, Borrow also recollects the French prisoner depot at Norman Cross, and that at Edinburgh Castle, where his father was garrisoned as a captain in the Norfolk Militia.
- 21 *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey: London’s Central Criminal Court, 1674-1913* – online source: [Trial of] James George Semple, Theft > grand larceny, 30th August 1786 (reference number: t17860830-11). See also *The Northern Hero* (London: 1786); *Memoirs of the Northern Impostor; or Prince of Swindlers* (1786); and *The Life of Major J. G. Semple Lisle* (London, 1799).
- 22 The grotesque yellow dressing-gowns and matching caps of prisoners at Penicuik, near Edinburgh were remarked by William





Chambers in 'Some Early Recollections', *Chambers' Journal*, Fourth Series, No.600, 26 June 1875, 402 (Ian MacDougall, *The Prisoners at Penicuik*, 1989, p. 25), and William Cowan, *Reminiscences* (Penicuik, 1878), which also notes the practice of scissor blades being fastened to sticks as swords. The similarity of the title of William and Robert Chambers, 'The Story of a French Prisoner of War in England', in *Chambers' Miscellany*, V. XIII, 1846, No. 116, 1-32, with that of the sub-title of *St. Ives*, led the novelist Neil Munro to assume that RLS read the story in his youth ('The Man and his Work' in *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Bookman Extra Number* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913, p. 185).

- 23 *The Despatches of Field Marshal The Duke of Wellington: During his Various Campaigns in India, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, The Low Countries and France, 1799-1818*. Compiled from Official and Authentic Documents by Lt. Col. Gurwood, (London: John Murray, 14 v. 1834-39). Hereafter, *Despatches. Supplementary Despatches and Memoranda*, edited by his son, The Duke of Wellington, (London: John Murray, 10 v. 1858-72. Anderson I, 700 & 701 resp.; the whereabouts of the first are unknown; Vs. 14 & 15 of the latter are Beinecke 2604 / Ip St48 Zz871W. See also *The General Orders of the Duke of Wellington in Portugal, Spain, and France*, [etc., 1809-18] by Lt. Col. Gurwood (London, 1837), with RLS's marginal notes and marked passages. Anderson II, 598; Beinecke Ip St48 Zz837W. The *Despatches* are reckoned RLS's source for the *True Blooded Yankee*, the notorious American Privateer, intended to rescue St. Ives after the ditching in the sea of the *Lunardi*. As British Ambassador in Paris in 1814, Wellington advised the French authorities of its fitting out and manning at Brest in Brittany (*Despatches* XII, 143; letter 8 October 1814, as quoted L7, p. 465, footnote 13). Finding no evidence of privateers sailing British waters, 'Q' unimaginatively substituted a Falmouth packet, the *Lady Nepean*.

An odd piece of Peninsular War history, told in the story at the Durham alehouse, concerns 'cannibal orgies in Galicia, in which no less a person than General Caffarelli had taken part' (*St. I*, p. 95). This refers to the ambush and wholesale slaughter, by Spanish insurgents under Mina, of a convoy of invalids and travellers, who, with prisoners, had been despatched from Vittoria by General Caffarelli, governor of the Vascondages in northern Spain: '[All] were massacred without mercy, and with a refinement of cruelty which would scarcely have been practised among cannibals', remarked





Madame Junot, who met Cafarelli in Vittoria (*Memoirs of the Duchess D'Abrantes [Madame Junot]* (London: Richard Bentley, 1835, V. 7, pp. 127-30).

- 24 Entitled 'Afternoon Promenade Dress, June 1813'.
- 25 Online @ *Candice Hern romance novelist*. A monthly Fashion Budget', culled from either *LBA* or *Ackermann* also appeared in the pages of the *Mercury*.
- 26 The street is 'Register' Street, then as now having several taverns close by. 'Along the cool, sequestered vale of Register Street', intones Dalmahoy in misquoting Thomas Gray's 'Elegy' (*St. I*, p. 232) – perhaps RLS again hinting at his sources.  
  
Byfield stays in 'Walker and Poole's Hotel' in Princes Street, where Lunardi himself stayed in its earlier form of 'Walker's Hotel' (*Williamson's Directory for the City of Edinburgh*, 1784-85, has 'Alexander Walker hotel, 4 Princes Street').
- 27 Sadler was only saved from drowning after he asked for the ship to have its bowsprit run through the balloon to expel the remaining gas, which 'Q' would surely have used to advantage during completion if he had known of it.
- 28 Communication from Glenda Norquay regarding the content of 'Letters of Quiller Couch to Colvin', 1897 (Vol. 126), M. L. Parrish Collection, Princeton Library.
- 29 In part: 'The atmosphere, which had hitherto been clear and brilliant, was filled with black vapours; - the winds blew with violence, and sent forth hideous noises from the deep forests; drifts of snow, sweeping before the storm, blinded the soldiers, and covered the whole country which now presented one uniform surface, where no road was distinguishable. Nights the most frightful were still disturbed by the roar of cannon, which echoed through these vast solitudes. Not a single moment of repose could be reckoned upon; the reiterated attacks of the Russians, and the hurrahs of the Cossacks, compelled the soldiers to run to their arms every moment, and to pass the night upon the snow, where they were found frozen next morning' (p. 2).
- 30 Dumbreck's Hotel, the most fashionable in the New Town, occupied much of the east side of St. Andrews Square flanking the present Royal Bank of Scotland building from 1790-1825. Names of important hotel guests appeared regularly in the *Mercury*.





- 31 For the record, material for *The Master* wanted or used by RLS included *Memoirs of the Chevalier Johnstone* (1870-1); Charles Johnson, *A Genuine Account of the Voyages and Plunders of the Most Notorious Pirates* (1814); Edward Eggleston, 'A History of Life in the Thirteen Colonies' series, *Century Magazine* (1882-5); *Memoirs of Count Lally* [in India, etc.](1766); Henry Bouquet, *An Historical Account of the Expedition against the Ohio Indians in the Year 1764* (1766); Alexander Henry, *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories 1760-76* (1809); and an unnamed book on Hindu Conjuring. The secondary source at which he might 'look' was James Fenimore Cooper, *The Water Witch* (1830). For full details of these titles see RLS Library Database at RLS Website.







## ‘Hunted gallowsward with jeers’: legal disillusionment and the diasporic impulse in Stevenson’s fiction

*Christy Danelle Di Frances*

In November 1871, Robert Louis Stevenson commenced a course of law studies at the University of Edinburgh as a compromise between pursuing his writerly ambitions and following the more conventional family tradition of lighthouse engineering. The result was a frequently tempestuous educational experience which concluded with Stevenson’s completion of his studies and call to the Scottish Bar on 16 July 1875.<sup>1</sup> In a letter penned during the months leading up to his final examination, he lamented, ‘I have been reading such lots of law, and it seems to take away the power of writing from me. From morning to night, so often as I have a spare moment, I am in the embraces of a law book: barren embraces. [...] My principal characteristics are cold, poverty and Scots Law: three very bad things. Oo, how the rain falls!’<sup>2</sup> It is not difficult to imagine how, for an aspiring author enthusiastic to write ‘the romance of man,’ subjects associated with legal studies would make for very dull reading indeed.<sup>3</sup> Rather than being too easily assigned to the realm of youthful boredom, however, this allusion to the Scottish legal system as ‘bad’ warrants further exploration in light of the predominantly negative connotations which surround jurisprudence in much of Stevenson’s work. Although, at one point he refers to ‘the rusty blunderbuss of Scots criminal justice, which usually hurts nobody but jurymen,’<sup>4</sup> in reality his fictive portrayals reveal this legal apparatus to be far from benign.

Although he would never actually practice as an advocate, Stevenson’s thorough education in Scots law ensured that he was well-acquainted with what Ian Duncan refers to as those particularly





Scottish legal and educational systems, their national distinctiveness preserved by the articles of Union, [which] had supplied Lowland Scotland with a strong foundation of civic institutions that supported a liberal, professional culture of intellectual work and literary production, independent (to a limited but effective degree) from both the state and market, although enmeshed in regional patronage networks.<sup>5</sup>

Stevenson was keenly aware of the significant place occupied by Scottish jurisprudence within his homeland's cultural history – particularly its unique contribution to the quest for autonomy under English rule, a motif which also interested Walter Scott, as such texts as *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) demonstrate. Indeed, Roslyn Jolly contends that Stevenson 'thought of his legal education not only in terms of professional qualifications but more broadly as the foundation for certain kinds of literary work.' That is, he was far less interested in law 'as a subject of study in itself than as a tool for mapping the boundaries and contours of modernity.'<sup>6</sup> Writing half a century after Scott, during the waning years of colonialism, Stevenson engages with the multifaceted interactions between law, politics, and justice in a far less optimistic manner than that adopted by his celebrated literary predecessor.<sup>7</sup>

Recent years have produced an array of thoughtful criticism regarding Stevenson's relationship to and engagement with existent legal systems.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, there is still a need for scholarship in terms of contextualising his frequent narrative portrayals of crime and punishment, courts and criminals, judges and lawyers. This article suggests that much of Stevenson's best fiction grapples with that robust yet unsympathetic version of law that is so prevalent in Scottish cultural history. From a critical perspective, the author's reaction to the harshly authoritative structures which he so often inscribes onto legal frameworks has





often been associated with his adversity to radical Calvinism.<sup>9</sup> Acknowledging the validity of such a correlation, this article builds upon it by considering ways in which Stevenson's work portrays disillusionment with legality on a personal (and thus microcosmic) level as a means of engaging with broader patterns of societal disenchantment that formed an historic impetus for diaspora, as both Highland and Lowland Scots sought cognitive and ethical recalibration through the physical process of temporary or permanent emigration. It explores how, in Stevenson's work, malfunctions in Scottish jurisprudence function as a contributing factor to the diasporic impulse which propelled many Scots towards the shores of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and other far-flung destinations.<sup>10</sup>

Stevenson's fictive presentation of justice as being frequently elusive within the historic socio-political structures of his homeland can be considered at least mildly subversive when contextualized within imperial ideology. After all, the *Oxford English Dictionary* includes the following definition for *justice*: the 'administration of law, or the forms and processes attending it; judicial proceedings.'<sup>11</sup> Such a classification illustrates that pervasive, if somewhat stereotypical, sensibility which affirms the theoretical unification between formal jurisprudence – whether Roman, Scots, or English – and the practical achievement of justice.<sup>12</sup> Yet Stevenson consistently problematises such a conceptualisation by establishing a schism between legal proceedings and the practical enactment of just behaviour. And, in his narratives, we find this polarity to be especially prevalent within the topographical boundaries of English imperial jurisdiction. In this context, he deliberately extracts justice from its judicial trappings and presents it as being often incompatible with the cultural frameworks of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland, which can be considered subject to the quasi-colonial jurisdiction of English rule in the aftermath of the 1707 Act of Union. It should be noted here that, despite being intrinsically





unique from English law, it seems impossible, from an ideological perspective, for the Scottish legal system to have remained wholly isolated from the political agenda of Scotland's southern neighbour. In other words, civic efforts towards social justice in Scotland could not remain invulnerable to that historical reality which Katie Trumpener so adeptly refers to as 'the cultural subjugation of Wales, Ireland, and Scotland' by England.<sup>13</sup>

### Narratives of disillusionment

Both the Hanoverian-controlled Campbell court which convicts James Stewart (also known as James of the Glens / *Seumas a'Ghlinne*) in *Kidnapped* (1886) and *Catriona* (1893) as well as the Lord Justice-Clerk in *Weir of Hermiston* (1896) invite interpretation as embodiments of corrupt or punitive judicial practices that drive innocent parties away from 'home' – whether such journeys are enacted through literal transportation out of Scotland or a symbolic exile from a specific area within the nation. Conversely, in characters located on the ideological and geographical fringes of formalised legal jurisdiction – such as the Highland chief Cluny Macpherson in *Kidnapped* and Kirstie Elliot of the borders in *Weir of Hermiston* – we encounter fascinating manifestations of an alternative legislative framework characterised and defined by organic communal structures. Yet Cluny and Kirstie are representative of exactly the type of people who emigrated from Scotland, whether by choice or through politically – or economically – imposed exile. In order to better understand the causes and processes of disillusionment with contemporary legal practice, which Stevenson employs to interrogate broader social issues of Scottish cultural history, this article considers David Balfour's reaction to legal processes following the Appin Murder of 1752, an event which serves as a catalyst for narrative action in both *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*. In a more limited fashion, it will also engage with related conceptualisations of justice in *Weir of Hermiston*.





In *Kidnapped*, David Balfour's predominantly positive attitude towards English power is essential to contrasting visions of Scotland represented through the largely oppositional characters of David and Alan Breck Stewart. While Alan is a Highlander with strong Jacobite loyalties, David represents the conventional – even stereotypical – Lowland Scot: studious, thrifty, and doggedly loyal to the Hanoverian government of King George. Robert Kiely asserts that David 'is willing to bend the law in order to help Alan, but he does so against his better judgment and never really doubts that the British law imposed on Scotland is authoritative and just.'<sup>14</sup> Yet close readings of both *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* reveal that David's mindset towards the established legal system changes drastically over the course of his adventures, as does his understanding of justice as being more readily achievable outwith the formal codifications of Scottish jurisprudence, which is portrayed as heavily influenced by an English political agenda.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, the impending shift in David's outlook is foreshadowed by events that occur at the story's onset, suggesting his gradual disillusionment. He first describes Captain Hoseason as 'a tall, dark, sober-looking man [...], he wore a thick seajacket, buttoned to the neck, and a tall hairy cap drawn down over his ears; yet I never saw any man, not even a judge upon the bench, look cooler, or more studious and self-possessed, than this ship-captain.'<sup>16</sup> But if Hoseason truly resembles 'a judge upon the bench,' then he is a certainly an unscrupulous one, easily bribed by the gold of the highest bidder. Stevenson's rather sly designation of the man's brig as *The Covenant* seems an ironic gesture within the larger narrative context.<sup>17</sup> While Hoseason is not a cruel man, he repeatedly turns a blind eye to the brutality of his mate, Mr. Shuan, who eventually murders the ship's cabin boy in a fit of drunken rage. Such behaviour from the 'judge upon the bench' can easily be read as symbolic of dubious legal operations in Scotland post-1707, when Scots governmental officials proved either unable or unwilling to counter the frequently unjust treat-





ment of their countrymen (particularly the Highlanders) which was often advocated by prevailing English powers.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, during his journeys beyond the Highland line in *Kidnapped*, David comments on the way in which those wearing any clothing resembling a kilt were 'were condemned and punished, for the law was harshly applied, in hopes to break up the clan spirit.' (*Kidnapped*, p. 160.) Although not necessarily an enterprise of which Lowland-dominated jurisprudence wholly approved, it was certainly one allowed to occur.

The procession of disillusionment begun in *Kidnapped* accelerates in *Catriona*, which can be read as a chronological destabilisation of David's confidence in Scottish legality and, by extension, in the ability of Scotland to achieve a truly just government underneath the umbrella of English control. In the second chapter of the novel, David goes to visit Charles Stewart, close kinsman to the doomed James Stewart. But Charles is a far cry from the rugged Highland clansman that his familial connections would imply. In both appearance and public identification, he embodies a Lowland Edinburgh gentleman, by vocation a 'Writer,' eighteenth-century terminology for a member of the legal profession.<sup>19</sup> Charles's attempt to distance himself from the socio-political troubles plaguing the Highlands is notable. He confides in David:

'for my private part I have no particular desire to harm King George; and as for King James, God bless him! he does very well for me across the water. I'm a lawyer, ye see: fond of my books and my bottle, a good plea, a well-drawn deed, a crack in the Parliament House with other lawyer bodies, and perhaps a turn at the golf on a Saturday at e'en. Where do ye come in with your Hieland plaids and claymores?'

'Well,' said I, 'it's a fact ye have little of the wild Highlandman.'





‘Little?’ quoth he. ‘Nothing, man! And yet I’m Hieland born, and when the clan pipes, who but me has to dance? The clan and the name, that goes by all. It’s just what you said yourself; my father learned it to me, and a bonny trade I have of it.’<sup>20</sup>

Charles is torn between a strong sense of familial duty and a more pragmatic urge to pacify the established legal powers which view the Highlands with an ever-suspicious eye and are quick to dispense retribution for any perceived ideological insurrection. His positioning within the legal profession is especially significant because his middling stance encapsulates the compromised state of the Scottish court, which bends to both internal and external pressures in its civil dealings.

When David reveals his intentions to stand witness for James Stewart during the impending trial at Inverary, Charles shocks the young protagonist with an insider’s opinion of exactly how unjust the court will be in dealing with James. Fully realising the hopelessness of his kinsmen’s situation, Charles makes an alarming prediction:

‘My man,’ said he, ‘you’ll never be allowed to give such evidence.’

‘We’ll have to see about that,’ said I; ‘I’m stiff-necked when I like.’

‘Ye muckle ass!’ cried Stewart, ‘it’s James they want; James has got to hang Alan too, if they could catch him but James whatever! Go near the Advocate with any such business, and you’ll see! he’ll find a way to muzzle ye.’

‘I think better of the Advocate than that,’ said I.

‘The Advocate be damned!’ cries he. ‘It’s the Campbells, man! You’ll have the whole clanjamfry of them on your back; and so will the Advocate too, poor body! It’s extraordinary ye cannot see where ye stand! If there’s no fair way





to stop your gab, there's a foul one gaping. They can put ye in the dock, do ye no' see that?' he cried, and stabbed me with one finger in the leg.

'Ay,' said I, 'I was told that same no further back than this morning by another lawyer.' (*Catriona*, pp. 32-3.)

The other lawyer to whom David refers is, of course, Mr. Rankeillor from *Kidnapped*, a Lowlander who just as astutely perceives the danger of involvement with Scotland's warring political factions and earlier cautioned David that 'to be tried for your life before a Highland jury, on a Highland quarrel, and with a Highland judge upon the bench, would be a brief transition to the gallows.' (*Kidnapped*, p. 337.) Where Charles's advice sheds light on the *external* problems affecting questions of whether justice can be obtained through formal avenues in Scotland, Rankeillor's warning flags up the *internal* troubles instigated by feuding amongst the clans. Together, these ongoing power skirmishes negatively informed the socio-historical situation in eighteenth-century Scotland.<sup>21</sup>

In reference to the often-disastrous point of convergence between Scotland's domestic and external conflicts, Barry Menikoff describes how 'the Campbells, aligned as they were with the king, enjoyed the power of the state, a power derived from the language of the law as embodied in the acts of parliament. [...] And the legal system was in the employ of the Hanoverian government through its Scots ally in Inverness, the clan Campbell and its chief, the Duke of Argyll.' Thus, Menikoff continues, 'what comes to be said and dramatized in great detail in the second volume of David Balfour's epic, is that the law is not a grammar of justice but a system of power, and it resides in the hands of the strongest.'<sup>22</sup> The historical Archibald Campbell, third duke of Argyll (1682–1761), was English-born but educated at the University of Glasgow before studying civil law in Europe. He used his position as acting Lord Justice-Clerk to participate







in James Stewart's trial. It was hardly a sterling moment in Argyll's career and one that is noted in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* as having gained him 'a degree of infamy' due to 'proceedings [which] can be described as close to judicial murder rather than legal justice.'<sup>23</sup> With loyalties divided between England and Scotland, operating in conjunction with a seemingly voracious appetite for political gain, Stevenson's version of Argyll demonstrates the worst of Scotland's historical troubles.

In *Catriona*, however, the twin social debacles of clan feuding and English governmental control coalesce not in Argyll – who remains a liminal character throughout the text – but rather in the person of the Lord Advocate Prestongrange, whom Stevenson likewise bases on a historical figure: William Grant, Lord Prestongrange (1700/01-1764). The son of a staunchly pro-Unionist Scottish judge, Prestongrange received his appointment as Lord Advocate in 1746, just after the ill-fated Jacobite Rising led by 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' (Charles Edward Stuart). Douglas S. Mack calls him that 'complex, in some ways decent and kindly but devious and worldly man who is the mainspring and representative of the post-Culloden British/Hanoverian government in Scotland.'<sup>24</sup> Claiming to be a resolute upholder of Scots law, Prestongrange initially warns David to take care that he avoids 'words which glance upon the purity of justice. Justice, in this country, and in my poor hands, is no respecter of persons.' (*Catriona*, pp. 54-5.) Yet this claim unravels as the Lord Advocate's conversation reveals a tenacious resolution not to let David stand witness in the Appin murder trial, since doing so would carry the potential of clearing James Stewart of the crime. If James were to go free, then the vengeance of both England and the Campbells would go unsatisfied – an outcome that Prestongrange holds to be both politically and socially unviable. He thus informs David:





‘your testimony will not be called by me, and I desire you to withhold it altogether.’

‘You are at the head of justice in this country,’ I cried, ‘and you propose to me a crime!’

‘I am a man nursing with both hands the interests of this country,’ he replied, ‘and I press on you a political necessity. Patriotism is not always moral in the formal sense.’<sup>25</sup>

Stevenson constructs this scene so that readers will identify with his protagonist’s shock at the Lord Advocate’s statement, since Prestongrange clearly places political necessity – particularly the need to placate English governmental powers and their agents in Scotland – before a personal or communal responsibility to pursue justice through legislative channels. His attempts at rationalisation ring hollow, despite a rather suspect appeal to the supposed higher good of civil stability: ‘I regard in this matter my political duty first and my judicial duty only second.’ (*Catriona*, p. 61.) Notwithstanding his use of high-minded language, he emerges as a disturbing portrait of bureaucratic willingness to favour political expediency over justice. Thus, when Charles Stewart calls David ‘a sounder Scots lawyer than Prestongrange,’ (p. 119) he is more than simply noting the young man’s astute questioning of facts surrounding the murder case: his statement highlights the protagonist’s commitment to achieving social justice irrespective of what the personal cost might be for such a commitment. David’s determination to risk his own neck giving evidence for James Stewart demonstrates a genuine desire to pursue justice as a deliberate course of action. He recalls how ‘it came upon me I was acting for the sake of justice: and I thought that a fine word, and reasoned it out that (since we dwelt in politics, at some discomfort to each one of us) the main thing of all must still be justice, and the death of any innocent man a wound upon the whole community.’ (p. 40). Unlike Prestongrange,





David looks beyond the expediency of the moment and seeks to forestall potential grievances on both personal (James Stewart) and collective (the Highlanders) levels within Scotland.

The tension between the opposing viewpoints represented by Stevenson's protagonist and the Lord Advocate comes to a head with Prestongrange's arrangement to have David held prisoner at the Bass Rock until a verdict has been reached in the Appin Murder trial. After being captured by Neil and his Highland gillies, David recalls how the whole party 'set forth under the guidance of the Lowlander,' a man in Prestongrange's employ known as Black Andie. (*Catriona*, pp 175-6.) This Highland-Lowland conglomeration of kidnappers – all of whom essentially function as lackeys to an (ideologically) English-owned government official – serves as a menacing reflection of David's original abduction in *Kidnapped*. Both crimes, after all, are essentially committed for the procurement of personal gain, whether economic or political. It also signifies a wide-scale evasion of justice which is encapsulated by Matthew Wickman's observation that, essentially, 'all of Scotland seems to be conspiring against David, Hanoverians as well as Jacobites (much as the pursuers and defenders had unwittingly joined forces to ratify the viability of circumstantial evidence and, with it, the image of Highland retrogression in the Stewart Trial).'<sup>26</sup> Stevenson employs David's story as indicative of the larger social problems surrounding the Appin Murder trial, which Charles Stewart calls 'not a case, ye see, [but...] a conspiracy.' (*Catriona*, p. 120.)

When David warns Black Andie about having 'a high responsibility in this affair' since he understands 'what the law is and the risks of those that break it,' the man responds: "I am no' just exactly what ye would ca' an extremist for the law," says he, "at the best of times; but in this business I act with a good warranty." (p. 179.) So not only does the legal system fail to protect innocent parties, it also brazenly defends the guilty ones. Nevertheless, Black Andie emerges a less reprehensible character than many





of those previously encountered in *Catriona*, since for him politically imposed law is of less importance than an inherent or divinely ordained sense of justice. David is thus able to successfully appeal to the man's ethical code, however strangely oriented this may seem to be. He asks Black Andie whether being

'apprehended by some ragged John-Hielandman on August 30th, carried to a rickle of old stones that is now neither fort nor gaol (whatever it once was) but just the gamekeeper's lodge of the Bass Rock, and set free again, September 23rd, as secretly as I was first arrested does that sound like law to you? or does it sound like justice? or does it not sound honestly like a piece of some low dirty intrigue, of which the very folk that meddle with it are ashamed?' (*Catriona*, p. 188.)

Black Andie responds by agreeing to manipulate (without breaking outright) the orders given to him by Prestongrange so that David can travel to Inverary before the conclusion of James Stewart's trial.

David arrives during the Sunday sermon, which Stevenson uses to highlight the powerful interplay between law and language. For purposes that seem as much ideological as practical, Gaelic is readily displaced for the benefit of the visiting legal officials.

The sermon was in English on account of the assize. The judges were present with their armed attendants, the halberts glittered in a corner by the door, and the seats were thronged beyond custom with the array of lawyers. The text was in Romans 5th and 13th the minister a skilled hand; and the whole of that able churchful from Argyle, and my Lords Elchies and Kilkerran, down to the halbert-men that came in their attendance was sunk with gathered





brows in a profound critical attention. (*Catriona*, p. 218.)

On the surface, the minister's words seem clearly designed to gratify the Hanoverian/ Campbell legal agenda through the choice of Romans 13, in which St. Paul admonishes against the act of murder and warns that those who, 'resisteth the power [of earthly government], resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation,' since such rulers, having been 'ordained by God' do not pose 'a terror to good works, but to the evil.'<sup>27</sup> In this context, such a message seems to affirm the thematic agenda of Prestongrange and his company.<sup>28</sup> Yet we can also read subversion in the preaching of Romans 5, a text which declares that 'judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift [of salvation by grace] is of many offences unto justification.'<sup>29</sup> This allusion to Jesus' sacrificial death (one man for all people) maps well onto the impending possibility of James Stewart's conviction, establishing him as a Christ-like chronotype of an innocent man suffering unjustly to bring widespread liberation – or perhaps simply to return to a tentative equilibrium of peace in the eighteenth-century Highlands.<sup>30</sup>

When David finally meets with James Stewart's counsel, the result proves disappointing. He recalls how 'this was the first time I had had my say out, or the matter at all handled, among lawyers; and the consequence was very dispiriting to the others and (I must own) disappointing to myself.' (*Catriona*, p. 223.) The defence is powerless to find any use for David's testimony beyond merely attempting to exploit it to undermine the current state of Campbell political power through egotistical manoeuvring. Even Charles Stewart comes out badly, an 'apparently civilized lawyer [who] turns out to be a Highlander who is atavistic and flawed.'<sup>31</sup> Mack therefore concludes that the 'David Balfour books take it for granted that conquered native people remains close to savagery. To that extent, Stevenson remains trapped in the assumptions of the period.'<sup>32</sup> In fact, however, for Stevenson





‘savagery’ is wholly unrelated to an individual’s geographical or cognitive proximity to the cultural structures of Imperialism (or any other social frameworks). Rather, it is intrinsic to all human beings, and often seems abetted rather than hindered through the bureaucratic processes of ‘civilised’ people – that is, people groups with vaster networks of codified and politicised laws. Certainly this is a predominant motif in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and can be partially attributed to Stevenson’s Calvinistic upbringing within the orthodox theological climate of nineteenth-century Edinburgh. But it also results from his keen perceptions concerning human nature.

The climax of David’s disillusionment with the Scottish legal system’s failure to provide justice comes with the news of James Stewart’s hanging at Ballachulish ferry on the 8th of November 1752. David recalls:

James was hanged, and here was I, dwelling in the house of Prestongrange, and grateful to him for his fatherly attention. [...] He had been hanged by fraud and violence, and the world wagged along, and there was not a pennyweight of difference; and the villains of that horrid plot were decent, kind, respectable fathers of families, who went to kirk and took the sacrament! (*Catriona*, pp. 278–9.)

His soliloquy emanates disillusionment with the hypocrisy of governmental elite in Edinburgh, although this motif has not always been detected by scholars.<sup>33</sup> Yet David’s disgust with the evasion of justice surrounding the Appin Murder trial is insistently (if tersely) conveyed. ‘James was as fairly murdered as though the Duke had got a fowling-piece and stalked him. So much of course I knew; but others knew not so much.’ (*Catriona*, p. 240.) His desire is to publicise the legal corruption which he has witnessed, and he seems a far cry from the naïve teenager who, just a few weeks earlier, expressed shock at meeting the duplicitous Simon





Fraser, forfeited Master of Lovat: 'I could not conceive what he should be doing in Grant's house; I could not conceive that he had been called to the bar, had eaten all his principles, and was now currying favour with the Government even to the extent of acting Advocate-Depute in the Appin murder.' (*Catriona*, p. 78.) David's former incredulity towards unjust behaviour on the part of governmental officials has been replaced by jaded acceptance, and part of the lesson learnt is that, within the legal context of eighteenth-century Scotland, a truthful testimony is undesired and – all too often – goes unheeded.

So there was the final upshot of my politics! Innocent men have perished before James, and are like to keep on perishing (in spite of all our wisdom) till the end of time. And till the end of time young folk (who are not yet used with the duplicity of life and men) will struggle as I did, and make heroical resolves, and take long risks; and the course of events will push them upon the one side and go on like a marching army. (*Catriona*, p. 278.)

This realisation marks a significant moment in the protagonist's *bildungsroman*; as Wickman points out, 'coming of age, David learns sobering lessons about the bureaucratic nature of justice, its sway in Scottish society, and its instrumentalizing power over the private needs of human subjects.'<sup>34</sup>

### The diasporic impulse

Following the Appin Murder, David recalls how, for 'two months I remained a guest in Prestongrange's family, where I bettered my acquaintance with the bench, the bar, and the flower of Edinburgh company.' (*Catriona*, p. 267.) The ironical nature of this statement demonstrates how his faith in Scottish jurisprudence has vanished, replaced instead by a growing sense of mistrust. This is abundantly evident in his complaint to





Prestongrange that 'these young advocates [...] fawn upon your lordship and are even at the pains to fawn on me. And I have seen it in the old ones also. They are all for by-ends, the whole clan of them!' (p. 250.) Unsurprisingly, relief occurs all round when David sails for Leyden to commence his formal legal studies abroad. This fictional account of diaspora reflects a distinct historical reality, since European universities (particularly those at Utrecht and Leyden) were a favourite destination of Scottish students and scholars.<sup>35</sup> For David, then, cognitive disappointment in governmental justice can be viewed as translating into a physical impulse for crossing national borders. But are similar notions of movement as an escape from established social and ideological constraints evident throughout Stevenson's other writings? By identifying comparable concerns across his *oeuvre*, we can explore how he presents ideas of emigration and internal migration as possible, if not ideal, antidotes to counteract the failures of social justice within Scotland.

Stevenson's exploration of legal disillusionment and its connection to the diasporic impulse is further evident in his unfinished novel *Weir of Hermiston*, where the idea is embodied in the character of Adam Weir, Lord Hermiston, the imposing Justice-Clerk who 'did not try to be loved, he did not care to be; it is probable the very thought of it was a stranger to his mind. He was an admired lawyer, a highly unpopular judge; and he looked down upon those who were his inferiors in either distinction, who were lawyers of less grasp or judges not so much detested.' (*Weir*, p. 237.)<sup>36</sup> Rather than embodying the corruption of justice as a legislative process, Lord Hermiston instead symbolises the distortion of relational justice through ruthless treatment of his fellow human beings – whether these individuals are innocent or guilty of any real crime. Hermiston is certainly one of Stevenson's most brilliantly-conceived and complex characters, yet his failure to uphold justice becomes clear when juxtaposed against real-life Scottish Justice-Clerk John Inglis, Lord Glencorse (1810-1891),







whom Stevenson referred to as ‘the greatest man in Scotland, our Justice-General and the only born lawyer I ever heard.’<sup>37</sup> These are words of high praise, and the sentiment behind them is illuminated by even the roughest sketch of Inglis’s life. A cultured and humane man, Inglis was known for his successful acquittal of a woman accused of murder on circumstantial evidence in a landmark 1857 trial, as well as for a reputation ‘founded on his defence of the independence of Scottish jurisprudence, notably against its encroachment by the English court of chancery.’<sup>38</sup> Stevenson’s admiration for him reflects a shared interest in the achievement of justice on both personal and national levels, and Inglis can be considered as almost a direct antithesis to the corrupt jury of *Catriona* and Judge Hermiston’s harsh behaviour in *Weir of Hermiston*.

In the latter novel, Lord Hermiston’s only son, Archie Weir, experiences a sense of profound disillusionment in his father’s character during the trial and subsequent execution of Duncan Jopp, a petty criminal callously condemned by the Justice-Clerk.

Over against him, my Lord Hermiston occupied the bench in the red robes of criminal jurisdiction, his face framed in the white wig. Honest all through, he did not affect the virtue of impartiality; this was no case for refinement; there was a man to be hanged, he would have said, and he was hanging him. Nor was it possible to see his lordship, and acquit him of gusto in the task. It was plain he gloried in the exercise of his trained faculties, in the clear sight which pierced at once into the joint of fact, in the rude, unvarnished jibes with which he demolished every figment of defence. He took his ease and jested, unbending in that solemn place with some of the freedom of the tavern, and the rag of man with the flannel round his neck was hunted gallowsward with jeers. (*Weir*, p. 247.)





Lord Hermiston's treatment of the defendant is a thoroughly pitiless one – and it proves horrific enough to cause Archie's public denouncement of his father at the scene of the hanging with a counter-accusation that declares the judge to be a 'God-defying murder' in a voice described as 'stentorian'.<sup>39</sup> This act of verbal insurrection involves an ideological distancing which can be construed in terms of a subconscious migratory impulse, and it eventually results in Archie's physical exile as well. There is certainly an echo here of the situation experienced by some real life diasporic Scots, since, as Marjory Harper points out, 'economic imperative was not the only catalyst for exporting the unwanted; in addition, judicial decree [...] also played a part in ensuring that a small proportion of emigrants did not leave voluntarily'.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, we have only to look beyond Stevenson's Scottish novels to see how the author portrays issues of injustice as universal ones that far outstrip the political specificities at work north of the English border. In *The Ebb-Tide*, ruthless British anti-hero William Attwater envisions himself in a terrifyingly omnipotent role, referring to himself as 'a judge in Israel, the bearer of the sword and scourge'.<sup>41</sup> But in fact Attwater has set himself up as the sole prosecutor of justice within his South Sea island domain, thus mimicking the role of Justice-Clerk in Scotland. Attwater even goes so far as to impose capital punishment upon any whose actions he deems unlawful according to his own system of civil and theological codifications. It is hardly surprising, then, that his actions should engender a similar response from, Robert Herrick, a weaker character who bears remarkable parallels to Archie Weir in *Weir of Hermiston*. "It was a murder," he screamed. "A coldhearted, bloody-minded murder! You monstrous being! Murderer and hypocrite! Murderer and hypocrite! Murderer and hypocrite!" he repeated, and his tongue stumbled among the words.<sup>42</sup> Jolly relates the behaviour of *The Ebb-Tide*'s characters to broader legal concerns by observing how, 'we look in vain for the opposing values of law and civilization' and





goes on to comment on how Attwater's 'colony and his business are illegal, his system of "justice" is cruel and erroneous.'<sup>43</sup> Yet such thoroughly pessimistic scenarios are not always the case in Stevenson's fiction. In 'The Beach of Falesá,' for example, the villainous Case is eventually defeated by protagonist John Wiltshire, but – significantly – this occurs outwith the established frameworks of Imperial justice.

In *Weir of Hermiston*, Stevenson neither excuses the Lord Justice-Clerk's behaviour nor dismisses it as part and parcel of the man's formidable presence. Rather, the author complexifies Adam Weir's character and actions through the construction of an alter-ego in the person of Kirstie Elliot. Early in the novel, Kirstie is described as 'a woman in a thousand, clean, capable, notable; once a moorland Helen, and still comely as a blood horse and healthy as the hill wind. High in flesh and voice and colour, she ran the house with her whole intemperate soul, in a bustle, not without buffets.' (*Weir*, p. 223.) Kirstie has been born into what Stevenson consistently portrays as an apathetic era that relegates her to the role of housekeeper at the Weir Estate. Her lowly position in society beyond the urban realm reflects interesting parallels with the historical situations of many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century working-class women who migrated within Scotland or emigrated in search of work as domestic servants.<sup>44</sup> Yet Kirstie emanates an Amazon-like power. 'By the lines of a rich and vigorous maternity, she seemed destined to be the bride of heroes and the mother of their children; and behold, by the iniquity of fate, she had passed through her youth alone, and drew near to the confines of age, a childless woman.' (p. 285.) Indeed, throughout *Weir of Hermiston*, Kirstie is portrayed in language that recalls great women of classical mythology and biblical narrative, such as Helen of Troy, Deborah (the only female judge of Israel), and Jael, who drove a tent stake through the head of Sisera, Captain of the Canaanite army, after he had fled from battle.<sup>45</sup>





Despite the similarities of temperament and personality evident between Adam Weir and Kirstie Eliott, vast differences exist in their personas, which emerge as inseparable from their respective physical and cognitive locations. Lord Hermiston has eschewed his country estate for life in Edinburgh, a centre of British political and judicial power, leaving us to ponder the extent to which this influence renders him 'awful. The Bench, the Bar, and the most experienced and reluctant witness, bowed to his authority.' (*Weir*, p. 220.) Stevenson's placement of Hermiston within the setting of a principle English-dominated Scottish metropolis is an interesting one, and seems essential to the formation of the Justice-Clerk's legal harshness. Conversely, whether by choice or necessity, Kirstie resides in the border country – a geographical hinterland symbolically beyond the reach of Imperial administrative power. In her family, the Elliotts, we can read the Lowland equivalent of the Highland clan system, composed of individuals whom Mack calls 'representatives of a subaltern Scotland whose roots lie in the old oral culture of the ballads.'<sup>46</sup> Yet, while Kirstie presents us with a character whose epic nature displaces her from the banalities of contemporary life, her sense of justice surpasses that of Lord Hermiston since she lacks his cruel temperament. Indeed, while the death of Jeannie Weir produces almost no emotional reaction from the woman's husband, Kirstie exudes a 'pouring tide of lamentation.' (p. 235.) We can thus read in her character Stevenson's depiction of purer (if elusive) form of justice remote from governmental control, and Archie's migration from Edinburgh to the borderland which comprises Kirstie's world represents a microcosm of diaspora engendered by a lack of truly just legal operations within this centre of known 'civilisation.'

So Stevenson's writings present an alternative vision to the disillusionment which he frequently relates to codifications of justice in Scotland. In *Kidnapped*, such a possibility is embodied in Cluny McPherson, the Highland chief whose Jacobite leanings





have driven him into hiding, where –

though he was thus sequestered, and like the other landed gentlemen of Scotland, stripped by the late Act of Parliament of legal powers, he still exercised a patriarchal justice in his clan. Disputes were brought to him in his hiding-hole to be decided; and the men of his country, who would have snapped their fingers at the Court of Session, laid aside revenge and paid down money at the bare word of this forfeited and hunted outlaw. When he was angered, which was often enough, he gave his commands and breathed threats of punishment like any king; and his gillies trembled and crouched away from him like children before a hasty father. With each of them, as he entered, he ceremoniously shook hands, both parties touching their bonnets at the same time in a military manner. Altogether, I had a fair chance to see some of the inner workings of a Highland clan; and this with a proscribed, fugitive chief; his country conquered; the troops riding upon all sides in quest of him, sometimes within a mile of where he lay; and when the least of the ragged fellows whom he rated and threatened, could have made a fortune by betraying him. (*Kidnapped*, pp. 251-2.)

David recounts how, when ‘the coast was at that time clear, you might almost say he [Cluny] held court openly.’ (p. 257.) Like Kirstie, Cluny operates on the fringes of society or, to put it another way, on the borders of the diasporic world. Interestingly, there seems to be a great deal of justice in his dealings with those who come beneath his clandestine jurisdiction. After he has fairly won money from Alan in a game of cards, he insists on returning it:

‘Hoot-toot! hoot-toot!’ said Cluny. ‘It was all daffing;





it's all nonsense. Of course you'll have your money back again, and the double of it, if ye'll make so free with me. It would be a singular thing for me to keep it. It's not to be supposed that I would be any hindrance to gentlemen in your situation; that would be a singular thing!' cries he, and began to pull gold out of his pocket with a mighty red face. (*Kidnapped*, p. 258.)

This response is followed by indignant protestation by David, who inadvertently manages to insult his host through a somewhat blundering attempt to salvage his pride. He recounts:

I am sure if ever Cluny hated any man it was David Balfour. He looked me all over with a warlike eye, and I saw the challenge at his lips. But either my youth disarmed him or perhaps *his own sense of justice*. Certainly it was a mortifying matter for all concerned, and not least Cluny; the more credit that he took it as he did. 'Mr. Balfour,' said he, 'I think you are too nice and covenanting, but for all that you have the spirit of a very pretty gentleman. Upon my honest word, ye may take this money it's what I would tell my son and here's my hand along with it!' (*Ibid.*, italics mine.)

Unlike the court overseeing James Stewart's trial, Cluny's sense of justice supersedes social and political demarcations – extending even to a Lowland Whig. Such behaviour stands in stark contrast to that of formal legal codifications throughout the novel, whatever Lord Prestongrange may say about himself and his allies being 'Highlanders civilized,' in contrast to what he terms 'the great mass of our clans and families' who 'have still savage virtues and defects' (*Catriona*, p. 62.) Prestongrange equates 'savageness' with the state of residing (both geographically and ideologically) outwith the formal legal system.<sup>47</sup> This,





essentially, is what doomed James of the Glens, since –

the state would never exonerate Stewart as a Highlander, since the Highlands themselves were under condemnation in the wake of the Jacobite Rebellion; only as a British citizen could Stewart hope for an impartial verdict. And yet, Brown [from the defence counsel] contended, the state denied such citizenship to Stewart in every phase of the trial process, from his arrest and imprisonment to the stacking of the jury with Campbells and the nature of the prosecuting evidence.<sup>48</sup>

Such discrimination has obvious ramifications, and the corresponding perception that justice is better sought beyond the reaches of Scottish jurisprudence begets a fictive urge for diaspora that clearly mirrors the socio-historical climate of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland.

Without too much trouble we can find ideological parallels in the historical Highlands, where by the mid-nineteenth century some estates dealt with the severe economic distress through what T. M. Devine refers to as ‘dispersal of the people by mass eviction and emigration’ allowed because ‘managers had almost literally the power of life or death over crofters, who held land on an annual tenure, and cottars, who had no legal tenurial rights at all.’<sup>49</sup> Such realities demonstrate how the failure of Scottish jurisprudence would contribute to ongoing social issues, even if not so dramatically manifested as in the Appin Murder trial. History bears witness to the fact that, in Stevenson’s own day, numerous Scots continued to experience the unhappy ramifications of social injustice, and such ‘discontented restlessness was easily converted into emigration. Many emigrants referred in their letters to the disillusionment they had felt as their prospects of independence were eroded and their expectations of equal treatment were overturned.’<sup>50</sup> The lack of political equality





which translated so readily into emigration is certainly evident in Stevenson's fiction as he explores the processes and outcomes related to wide-scale disillusionment with justice in historical Scotland.

## NOTES

- 1 Stevenson passed his final examination on Wednesday, 14 July 1875. Earlier that week he wrote the following in a note requesting a needed 'duplicate certificate' from University of Edinburgh Professor James Lorimer: 'Wednesday is the day of my sore trial.' [12 July 1875]. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994-1995), 2, p. 150.
- 2 [29-30 June 1875]. *Letters*, 2, pp. 145-155.
- 3 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits, The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Second Vailima edn, 9 (New York & London: Scribner's / Heinemann in association with Chatto & Windus; Cassell & Co, and Longmans, Green & Co, 1921-1923), p. 223.
- 4 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston*, *Works*, p. 291, hereafter cited as *Weir* in text.
- 5 Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 24.
- 6 Roslyn Jolly, 'Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry Maine, and the Anthropology of Comparative Law,' *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), 556-580, (pp. 560, 562). Also see this article for Jolly's description of how Scots law is strongly informed by Roman law.
- 7 Hence, Donald Mackenzie refers to the David Balfour saga as 'a *bildungsroman* whose protagonist, unlike [Scott's characters] Waverley or Darsie Latimer, is to be disenchanted not of romance illusions but of faith in the mundane public world,' see Donald Mackenzie, 'Stevenson after Scott: the case of *Catriona*', *Journal of Stevenson Studies* vol 8 (2011), p. 80. It should be noted that Mackenzie is here referring particularly to *Catriona*. For more on the differences of perspective between Scott and Stevenson, see Alison Lumsden, 'Stevenson, Scott and Scottish History,' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Penny Fielding







- (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 70-85.
- 8 For some recent critical works that deal, either directly or peripherally, with Stevenson and the law, see Roslyn Jolly, 'Anthropology of Comparative Law'; Nicola Lacey, 'Psychologising Jekyll, Demonising Hyde: The Strange Case of Criminal Responsibility,' *Criminal Law and Philosophy*, 4 (2010), 109-133; Matthew Wickman, *The Ruins of Experience: Scotland's 'Romantick' Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); and Barry Menikoff, *Narrating Scotland: The Imagination of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Columbia, S. C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2005).
  - 9 Certainly, such a link is suggested by Stevenson himself: 'I have been reading Roman Law and Calvin this morning.' [04 May 1874]. *Letters*, 2, p. 3. In extrapolating the association between legal authority and radical Calvinism, Stevenson perpetuates the tradition of such seminal Scottish texts as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824).
  - 10 Of course, multitudinous reasons exist for the historical Scottish diaspora, and it is important to maintain a balanced approach when considering the historical Clearances. Marjory Harper explains: 'Despite the demonization of Highland emigration by polemicists who have depicted it as an uninterrupted tragedy of savage clearance perpetrated by capricious landlords on an unwilling tenantry, the emigrants were characterized by variety rather than uniformity of background, motives and experiences. They responded to opportunities as well as threats, and disillusionment and destitution were frequently eclipsed by the anticipation of betterment,' Marjory Harper, *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (London: Profile, 2003), p. 70. See also T. M. Devine's excellent study: *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's Global Diaspora, 1750-2010* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Books, 2011).
  - 11 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 18 March 2013. This definition for *justice* is listed under the subheading of 'Judicial administration of law or equity.'
  - 12 Thanks to his solid legal education, Stevenson was well acquainted with the difference between these different legal systems. In one letter he jokes about a 'DOCUMENT which I trust will prove sufficient in law. It seems to me very attractive in its eclecticism; Scots, English and Roman law phrases are all indifferently





- introduced.' *Letters*, 7, p. 130.
- 13 Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 7.
- 14 Robert Kiely, "A Mine of Suggestion": Remapping *Kidnapped*,' *Rivista Di Studi Vittoriani*, 20 (2007), 67-80 (p. 74). Kiely reinforces his point by citing the following example: 'It is consistent with David's character that when he finally reaches the Lowlands, he does not "take the law into his own hands" and rush to the family castle to duel with or have a shoot-out with his usurping, miserly uncle Ebenezer. Instead, David Balfour goes to a lawyer.' (p. 75).
- 15 Douglas S. Mack points out that Stevenson 'sets the main events of his narrative in the early 1750s, and this allows him to focus on the situation of quasi-Imperial conquest that existed in the Highlands after the Hanoverian victory at Culloden in 1746.' Douglas S. Mack, *Scottish Fiction and the British Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 175.
- 16 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped*, *Works*, p. 63, hereafter cited in text.
- 17 Kiely notes how *The Covenant* is 'a misleading label for a ship if ever there was one,' p. 70.
- 18 Mack points out how, 'In the David Balfour books [...] it is repeatedly made clear that the British government is exploiting the conquered Highlands in an unprincipled way,' p. 179.
- 19 The *OED* includes the following as a definition for *writer*: 'a scribe, clerk, or law-writer.' 11 March 2013.
- 20 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Catriona*, *Works*, pp. 34-35, hereafter cited in text.
- 21 As Wickman puts it, 'Deigning to put an end to lawlessness in the Highlands, the pursuers nonetheless circumvented the law at several turns; feigning to abrogate clan society, they drew heavily upon clan spirit in attaining their ends,' p. 34.
- 22 Menikoff, p. 137.
- 23 Alexander Murdoch, 'Campbell, Archibald, third duke of Argyll (1682-1761),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com [03 April 2013]





- 24 Mack, p. 179. For more on Prestongrange and his father, see Colin Kidd, Clare Jackson, 'Grant, Sir Francis, first baronet, Lord Cullen (1658x63–1726)' and David Moody, 'Grant, William, Lord Prestongrange (1700/01–1764),' *ODNB*, [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com) [23 April 2013]
- 25 *Catriona*, p. 61, henceforth in text.
- 26 Wickman, p. 61.
- 27 Romans 13:1-3, 9 (KJV).
- 28 David records how Prestongrange, 'sat well forward, like an eager horseman in the saddle, his lips moving with relish, his eyes glued on the minister: the doctrine was clearly to his mind.' *Catriona*, p. 218.
- 29 Romans 5.16 (KJV).
- 30 This theme is made more all the more apparent in a broader consideration of the biblical passage: 'For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.' Romans 5:17-18 (KJV). Stevenson alludes to this idea in a letter to his mother which notes 'how Christ delivered us from the law.' 26 Dec 1880. *Letters*, 3, p. 150.
- 31 Mack, p. 178.
- 32 Mack, p. 179.
- 33 For example, Mack asserts that, in *Catriona*, 'David's loyalty to Whig values and principles remains rock-solid throughout, and this allows his integrity to provide an eloquent contrast to [...] a Whig regime that is manifestly failing to live up to its own declared principles,' p. 180.
- 34 Wickman, 58.
- 35 Harper, p. 14. Harper refers here specifically to the seventeenth century, although this tradition of emigration certainly did not end there.
- 36 Paul Binding flags up 'the equivocal nature of the law and its practitioners' as 'a theme which runs centrally through the novel.' Paul Binding, 'Notes' in *Weir of Hermiston and Other Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 299-313 (303).





- 37 [4 July 1875]. *Letters*, 2, p. 147.
- 38 Gordon F. Millar, 'Inglis, John, Lord Glencorse (1810–1891),' *ODNB*, [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com) [03 April 2013].
- 39 *Weir of Hermiston*, p. 251. Interestingly, this moment in *Weir of Hermiston* functions as a subversion of a similar scene in another text involving a Scottish protagonist: Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748). '[The auxiliary] bawled out 'Murder! Thieves!' – with the voice of a stentor.' Ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé. Oxford World's Classics edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17.
- 40 Harper, pp. 32–33.
- 41 Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Ebb-Tide, Works*, p. 133.
- 42 *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 157.
- 43 Roslyn Jolly, 'The Ebb-Tide and The Coral Island,' *Scottish Studies Review*, 7 (2006), 79–91 (pp. 83, 84).
- 44 Devine, p. 89, p. 165; Harper, p. 273.
- 45 See Judges 4 for the biblical account of Deborah and Jael.
- 46 Mack, p. 185.
- 47 Here Stevenson can be seen as re-navigating Scott's literary preoccupations, since, in Scott's Highlands, regional 'Manners encode a long afterlife of feudal relations of obligation and deference, decayed from political and legal bonds into residual modes of custom and sentiment – released, in other words, from politics into nature.' Duncan, p. 140.
- 48 Wickman, p. 39.
- 49 Devine, p. 114, 123.
- 50 Harper, p. 63. Harper refers here specifically to nineteenth-century farmers, although labourers certainly faced similar circumstances.





## Charting the foreigner at home: contemporary newspaper records of Robert Louis Stevenson in Samoa, New Zealand and Australia 1890-1894

Catherine Mathews

'I suppose,' said our representative, 'that you will utilise your experience in the South Seas in your next work of fiction. By-the-by, did you visit Treasure Island?'

Mr. Stevenson smiled humourously. 'Treasure Island,' he said, 'is not in the Pacific. In fact, I only wish myself that I knew where it was. When I wrote the book I was careful to give no indication as to its whereabouts, for fear that there might be an undue rush towards it. However, it is generally supposed to be in the West Indies. But to be serious. My next work of fiction will be called *'The Wrecker'* and will deal with the career of a wreck in the Pacific.'

'Can a wreck have a career?'

'Certainly, this one has. The scene is laid on the South Pacific Coast, where the vessel is lost, and the wreck is subsequently sold at auction at San Francisco [...] Eventually, of course, they discover the reason for the great value placed on her.'

'How?'

'Well, that's just where it is', said Mr. Stevenson. 'Wild horses wouldn't drag any more out of me at present.'

Robert Louis Stevenson quoted in the  
*Sydney Morning Herald* daily newspaper,  
Friday 14 February 1890 (p. 4) in the article entitled  
*A Modern Novelist. Interview with Mr. R. L. Stevenson.*<sup>1</sup>

Robert Louis Stevenson, a European foreigner when he made his home in Samoa, was reported in a number of newspaper publications in Samoa, New Zealand and Australia in the period from late 1889 when first he arrived in Apia, during the few years to his death in December 1894, and continuing well into the twentieth century. His Scottish heritage notwithstanding (and perhaps strengthened during his time amongst indigenous groups in the





Pacific), Stevenson's strong attachment to Samoa and to other parts of the Pacific region is noteworthy. Whether considering his writings or events in his life, it might be said Samoa particularly was his home, however much a similar home might be given him in Scotland and however much a foreigner he was to the Pacific. Additionally, by interviews with and writing to newspapers, he employed his famed reputation to advance views he held on issues significant to the region, including colonialism in Samoa, the effect upon indigenous people of European settlement, the effect of missionary settlements, on forced labour in the Pacific, of assistance given to those living on Molokai and the reputation of Father Damien, and events in Hawaii. His views in a number of respects were perceived as 'authoritative', in part a reflection of his fame and of his skill as a writer, but also because he described events he had seen first-hand. His experiences extend to those for which he had taken steps both strenuous and dangerous to himself, and those which contemporaries considered to be foolhardy. Perhaps in an endeavour to secure greater effect, Stevenson began to talk about these issues, as a campaigner rather than as an author, by printing private pamphlets, by letters for publication to influential newspapers, and by interviews to journalists. Thus it is that the colonial newspapers of Samoa, New Zealand and Australia give a vivid contemporary record of Stevenson himself and allow a number of his views and writings to be studied in their contemporary context.

### **Read more about him**

As an office boy in Sydney, for instance, he met (and adored) Robert Louis Stevenson, although his first impression was something of a shock: "There, huddled up on a couch with a shawl round "her" (for so it seemed to me) was a small, feeble-looking, pale, long-haired person with piercing black eyes holding out a thin hand and saying: "Well, what did you think I'd be like?"





See the *Sydney Morning Herald* Sydney daily newspaper, Saturday 2 May 1953, p. 10 under the heading '*An Unrepentant Wanderer*', being a review of a then recently published autobiography by G. F. Young entitled '*Under the Coolibah Tree*', published by Melrose, London.

By just such newspaper articles, sometimes delayed, sometimes inaccurate, sometimes unfavourable and sometimes all too enthusiastic, reports of Robert Louis Stevenson may be found in Samoan, Australian and New Zealand newspapers during the final part of his life<sup>2</sup>. These records include interviews he gave, his comments on literary and political topics (especially concerning colonialism and travel), and reflections on his life and activities. The newspapers also record some disapproval of Stevenson, not least for the sharp tone of his '*Open Letter to the Reverend Dr. Hyde of Honolulu*' and his involvement in the political affairs of Samoa. With more than a dozen lengthy interviews of Stevenson in the period 1890 to 1893, as well as hundreds of articles in which he is named, along with contemporary observations of him and memories recalled at a later date, colonial newspaper records provide a different perspective for further academic study.

### The shipping columns

The R.M.S. Zealandia brings no news of importance from Samoa. Tamasesse's party have consented to the re-instatement of Malietoa and all is quiet. Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, the novelist, has arrived in Apia.

– See the *Argus* Melbourne, Australia, daily newspaper, Monday 6 January 1890, p. 6 under the heading 'New Zealand (From Our Correspondent) Auckland, Sunday.'

The report is likely a relay to the Melbourne paper of a report from Auckland, New Zealand newspaper / press association. The original report in New Zealand is likely the relay of report received from the mail boat arriving in Auckland from Samoa. Stevenson first arrived in Apia, Samoa on Saturday, 7 December 1889 by the vessel *Equator*, having travelled to Hawaii and the Gilbert Islands, and through a number of regions of the Pacific Ocean since his departure from San Francisco on Thursday,





28 June 1888 aboard the vessel *Casco*. With members of his extended family, over time Stevenson made Samoa his residence until his death on Monday, 3 December 1894, at Vailima.

The names of each of the various sailing and steam vessels by which Stevenson travelled appear throughout the 'Shipping' columns in a number of newspapers<sup>3</sup>, and provide a helpful source of information confirming his travels. Stevenson first arrived in Sydney<sup>4</sup>, Australia on Friday, 13 February 1890, travelling with his wife Fanny from Samoa on the vessel *Lubeck*. Fanny and Stevenson there met Lloyd Osbourne, who had arrived in Sydney from Samoa on Thursday, 16 January 1890 also by the *Lubeck*<sup>5</sup>, and Belle Strong, who had been in Sydney for some months. Stevenson visited New Zealand on travels between Samoa and Australia, first stopping in Auckland on 18 April 1890 whilst travelling on the vessel *Janet Nicholl*<sup>6</sup> and again in February 1893, travelling on the *S. S. Mariposa*<sup>7</sup>.

### Meet the press

I began my literary career when 22 years of age, but for many years found it impossible to earn a living with my pen. For some time I engaged in journalistic work, but was not altogether a success; in fact, I am not adapted for that special class of work – I am too unequal; and then I found it a great strain to work at the high pressure which is obligatory on a newspaper man.

Robert Louis Stevenson quoted in the *Launceston Examiner* newspaper, Saturday 22 February 1890 (p. 3) in the article entitled '*Robert Louis Stevenson. A Novelist's Tour in the Pacific.*' Indicative of colonial newspaper publishing, this article was a reprint of the Melbourne *Daily Telegraph* [article] from Sydney, under date February 13 [1890].

It seems self-evident Stevenson's reputation and fame accorded him a presence in colonial newspapers. In part due to the distance from Europe and North America, visitors to New Zealand and Australia were favoured for their information and views<sup>8</sup>. Although having small populations, generally New Zealand and







Australia had a literate public enthusiastic for newspaper publications<sup>9</sup>. The 'Father Damien' letter published in the *Australian Star* newspaper in May 1890 was said many years later to have 'appeared upon the front page of every issue of the 'Australian Star', on the day of its publication, the circulation of the paper covering some 45,000.'<sup>10</sup> This estimate of an increase in sales is very likely an exaggerated description, but it is indicative of the newspaper trade and the benefit to the proprietors and editors by an increase to circulation from articles, advertisements and interviews, whether exclusive, controversial, informative or entertaining, with prominent visitors such as Stevenson.

A member of the *Star* staff called on Mr. Stevenson at the Hotel Metropole, and was most courteously received by that gentleman, with whom he had an agreeable and interesting conversation about things in general and Mr. Stevenson in particular. Mr. Stevenson appears to be in good health, and said, in response to an inquiry, that he had not been better for a long time past. He was charmed with the voyage over from Samoa, and, in opening the interview, said: 'I want to say all the civil things possible about the *Lubeck*. The ship was delightful, everybody was particularly attentive and agreeable, and the table was only too good for peace of mind'.

Robert Louis Stevenson quoted in the *Brisbane Courier* newspaper, Tuesday 18 February 1890 (p. 2) in the article entitled *A Famous Novelist. An Interview with R. L. Stevenson. His Cruise in the South Seas*.

The benefit of newspaper reports was not limited to the proprietors and the readers. Newspaper coverage afforded Stevenson a vehicle of expression, a means to further his reputation and to improve sales of his works. Contact with journalists appears to have been cultivated by him, or at least on his behalf<sup>11</sup>. Upon his first arrival in Sydney in February 1890, within a day Stevenson gave interviews to a number of journalists<sup>12</sup>. His arrival had been preceded a month earlier by similar contact with newspapers by Lloyd Osbourne, which resulted in announcements of Stevenson's then intended arrival<sup>13</sup>, and more of Mr. Osbourne<sup>14</sup>. Stevenson





undertook similar interviews with journalists during his ongoing visits to New Zealand and Australia in 1891 and 1893.

### The foreigner

Some of these islands which I visited I like better than any other places I ever saw or even dreamt of. Tahiti is just about the nearest approach to Paradise that we can get in this century, both the place and people are magnificent. The Marquesas Islands are marvellous. The people are cannibals, but, as they eat each other and have no liking for white man as a table dainty, that did not frighten us, and I found them charming.

Robert Louis Stevenson quoted in the *Brisbane Courier* newspaper, Tuesday 18 February 1890 (p. 2) as above.

‘And talking of Stevenson again,’ said Cook, ‘there never was a bigger greenhorn struck the islands than the author of *The Wrecker*. When he first came to Tahiti he hunted all around for a dry dock, and was badly put out when informed that there was no such thing short of Australia. ‘What am I going to do?’ he asked. ‘The *Casco* wants scraping badly. I suppose I’ll have to beach her to have it done.’ ‘Not a bit of it,’ we told him. ‘Give a dozen Kanakas a plug of tobacco and set them to work with the promise of another plug apiece when the scraping is done.’ But how are they going to get at her while she’s in the water?’ asked the perplexed author. ‘Leave that to me,’ I told him, and he did so. He was a good deal surprised to see those Kanakas dive under the *Casco*’s bottom and scrape her clean in less time than it would have taken to dry dock the schooner, had there been such a convenience at hand.

Stevenson watched them all day long. He seemed fairly enchanted with their spryness in the water, and when the sharks began to gather about them he cried out to bring them all on board in a boat. But the natives never heeded him. They feared the man-eating sharks no more in the water than on deck. An able bodied Kanaka, you know, can outswim a shark any day. When the big fish got too near one of the native scrapers he would get a kick or a punch behind the fins, and that would settle that shark, so far as that native was concerned. If one of the sharks got too persistent in his attentions on the scraping Kanaka, then the native would stop his work long enough to jab his scraping tool into the shark’s





belly a few times. But this the natives were loth to do, for it interfered with their work, the blood from the wounded shark discolouring the water and making it opaque, so they could not see the hull of the schooner.

Stevenson was simply amazed at all this, and instead of giving each Kanaka another plug of tobacco he paid them 3 dol. apiece for their day's work. There were a dozen drunken Kanakas in town that night.

The best joke on Stevenson that I can remember now occurred in the Marquesas Archipelago. At that time the author had a crew of six Kanakas. One night in the schooner *Poe*, which means pearl, I spoke [sic] the *Casco*, 13 miles off the reef. She was in distress, so I went aboard to see what was the matter. There I found Stevenson and his captain alone – not another soul aboard. 'What's the matter?' says I. 'Where's your crew? You can't get in alone.' 'Of course we can't,' said Stevenson, 'and that's just the trouble. The crew has deserted us, every man Jack of them. An hour ago they scampered off over the deck rail and are now swimming home or drowned.'

'Never you fear that they'll drown,' I said. 'A 13 mile swim for a kanaka is only a pleasure trip. There's only one way to drown a native, and that's to hold his head under water.' Then Stevenson told us how the crew came to desert him. One of them had been aloft to lower the gaff topsail and make fast the block. The Kanaka obeyed orders, and went well till a squall struck the *Casco* a little later, one of those tropical storms that do a heap of damage while they last, but quickly blew over.

When the squall struck the *Casco* the gaff topsail blew off, showing that the Kanaka had fastened it carelessly. In the excitement the captain lost his temper, and gave the offending native a cuff. Instantly those six natives went below and packed up their scant belongings. They came on deck stripped, with their clothes tied on their heads. In another instant the *Casco's* crew was in the water, swimming for shore, 13 miles away. Just at that place, too, the sea is infested with sharks, some of them 15 feet long. But not one of the six met with a mishap, and three days later, when I came back that way, I carried them home to Tahiti. Well, the end of it was that I had to lend the *Casco* three of my natives. This made me awfully short-handed, and you bet Stevenson had to pay for it. But without this help Stevenson would have been wrecked sure. No two men could have taken a schooner over those reefs.' Chicago Inter Ocean.

Walter Cook quoted in the *West Australian* newspaper,  
Monday 23 January 1893 (p. 6) in the article entitled  
*Some South Sea Reminiscences. (Not By Robert Louis Stevenson).*





Stevenson's fame afforded easy descriptions of him by journalists and newspaper editors, variously as a novelist<sup>15</sup>, an 'English novelist'<sup>16</sup>, a 'Modern Novelist'<sup>17</sup>, a 'Famous Novelist'<sup>18</sup>, a 'Dreaming Novelist'<sup>19</sup>, a 'well-known novelist'<sup>20</sup>, when being criticised for his involvement in Samoan politics an 'Eminent Novelist'<sup>21</sup>, when reported to be dying a 'Well Known Author'<sup>22</sup> or a 'distinguished Novelist and Essayist'<sup>23</sup> and, after his death, the report he was prominently barefoot in interviews with journalists in Samoa<sup>24</sup>.

In addition to his reputation, Stevenson's personal experiences were a very welcome basis for newspaper publication. He expressed views on himself as a 'Scotsman'<sup>25</sup>, on his writings<sup>26</sup> and those of others<sup>27</sup>, his method of writing<sup>28</sup>, his health<sup>29</sup>, his family<sup>30</sup>, his dreams<sup>31</sup> and, remarkably, subsequent colonial events which reflected his earlier works<sup>32</sup>. He also attracted comments on the commercial nature of his writings, in a New Zealand illustrated newspaper report of a range of items beneath the heading *'The Fretful Porcupine, A Quill for Everyone'*, in which it was noted:

Another Australian bank has gone. People on the other side [Australia] will begin to think there is no bank so safe as the dilapidated stocking under the hearth stone after all. Robert Louis Stevenson, who not so long ago had a tough struggle to make both ends meet, now turns up his nasal organ at anything less than £20 for a story about as long as a column of the OBSERVER.<sup>33</sup>

The New Zealand *Tuapeka Times*, an Otago regional bi-weekly newspaper, also bravely printed an article, or more likely re-printed, entitled 'Are Scotsmen Void of Humour?', in which it was noted:

The most cursory or superficial study of British literature will show that a very fair proportion of the humorous works of the past has been the product of Scottish brains, and the writer has yet to learn that Ramsay, Ferguson, Burns, Scott, Hogg,





and Wilson were deficient in native wit [...] for no one will surely venture to say that Robert Louis Stevenson, Andrew Lang, J. M. Barrie, and Robert Buchanan – to mention no others – are mere sentimental dullards, incapable of humour and unable to appreciate or perpetuate a joke.<sup>34</sup>

Stevenson's views on literary matters may be familiar from other sources, yet the manner of his oral expressions from journalist's interviews, transposed to written record in newspaper articles, if nothing else reflects Stevenson's ease of verbal communications and his engaged conversational style. These include long interviews he gave, such as the following from the 1890 article partly entitled '*Idealism and Realism in Literature*':

'And look at our recent literature. Look above all at the literature of the realists, and see through how many weary pages they pursue this vain task of weaving ropes of sand. Hence arose the habit of nearsightedness, of taking an inventory of details, of commemorating knots in wood and buttons upon waistcoats. So soon as that habit was formed, by a fatal consequence human passion grew to be neglected.'

Oh, but Mr. Stevenson, there you accuse the realists of the very fault they find with you?

'Precisely. Now we have the matter in a nutshell at last'

[...]

And still, Mr. Stevenson, why should either or both of the causes you have adduced give the people a lower view of human nature?

'I am like a Highland skipper of whom I once asked the meaning of a Gaelic name, and who replied, seemingly in physical agony, "A canna say it, but a feel it in ma brist." Any way that I can put it in words would sound something far harsher than I mean, but the truth is that what Scott called "the big bow-wow of literature", the appeal, that is, to large, frank, and almost universal sentiments, is comparatively easy.'

[...]

Then you claim that idealism carries the writer on to a higher plane of thought than realism?

'I will deal perfectly frankly with you. I do not know what idealism means and I do not know what realism means. I try to represent what seems to me conspicuous and representable in the world in which I live. I try to do so, so as on the





whole to give pleasure or to awaken interest. I see the defects, I see the inherent untruths, I see what seems to me the wanton unpleasantnesses of the methods of the other school, I suppose they see all these things in mine [...] I believe the question to be wholly technical and it is because I think my view of the resources and defects of literature as an art to be the more correct that I hold the literature of the so-called idealists to be the more moral. As thus: – All we can do is to present a whole view, so far as that is possible, of our and man's experience in this world. The more elements and the more important elements that we can get expressed, the more true and more moral is our literature. Well, in the idealist's summary practice – looking always at the characters and the passion, getting over the ground, despising detail, and appealing to the strong and common sentiments directly – I contend that we get in more of men and more of life. While the realist, with his nervous shrinking from commonplace sentiments, with his studious devotion to material facts, to verbal ingenuities, and to unexpected disclosures of man's stupidity and depravity and life's unpleasantnesses, expresses less, and that less important of both.'

With this the interview closed.

Robert Louis Stevenson quoted in the *Argus* newspaper, Saturday 13 September 1890 (p. 4) in the article entitled

*Idealism and Realism in Literature. A Talk with Robert Louis Stevenson.*

## The campaigner

Stevenson's recorded views however were not only on literature, human behaviour and travel, but included his sometimes strongly-expressed opinions on matters controversial, such as forced labour, politics in Samoa, events in Hawaii, the reputation of Father Damien and the influence of Europeans, including missionaries and settlers, upon the indigenous people of the Pacific.

### THE LEPER SETTLEMENT – NOBLE SISTERS.

'No; I did not see Father Damien. He died about a fortnight before we reached Molokai. I went to the settlement and spent a week there. For ghastly interest I never was in such a place. It would be as horrible as a nightmare were it not for the nobility and beauty of the work being done by the Catholic





Sisters.'

[...]

'When I was there I cannot say that I felt altogether comfortable; I had some horrid feelings about my meals. I lived in the guest-house, and took my meals with the doctor, but spent most of the day at the Sisters' Home, where I could see how the lepers were treated and everything. It was a most ghastly sight, and one which I do not wish to see again, but its horror is relieved by the thought of those glorious women who have given up their lives to the poor unfortunates and have entered the place to spend their lives there.'

THE SAMOAN QUESTION.

When this subject was broached Mr. Stevenson seemed somewhat doubtful about the advisableness of speaking. It was, as he said, difficult to say enough and not too much in an interview.

'I have collected a lot of information on the subject, so much that I am thinking of publishing it as a separate volume,' he said. 'There is a great difficulty. The consuls have always been at loggerheads, and it seems just probable that the commissioners will be the same. The natives themselves are heartily sick of being ordered about. The most unfortunate circumstance in the recent trouble was the defeat of the Germans, because I am inclined to think, though it may be a groundless fear, that it will make the natives more difficult to drive in the future. From all I can see the natives only desire not to get into trouble, but if the Powers get at loggerheads, the unfortunate Samoans will be drawn into the quarrel. The whole history of consular interference in Samoa is a sickening chapter. No, it is hardly that, they are waiting to divide the spoil, though that may come in as a consideration. There is no doubt about it that the German firm has sunk a considerable sum of money there, more than is worth sinking in any island in the South Seas, in my opinion, and to recover this they attempted to force the consul to do a great deal. There is a lot of jealousy, too, between English and American merchants, and this caused a bitterness, but the worst element was the endeavour of the different consuls to play first fiddle. I think the natives are most favourable to the English people, and that you will find to be the case in all the islands where the LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY has sent its workers. There the English are always immensely popular. I have met





some of them in my travels, and they were splendid men, worthy the respect of everybody.'

Robert Louis Stevenson quoted in the  
*Brisbane Courier* newspaper, Tuesday 18 February 1890 (p. 2)  
in the article entitled *A Famous Novelist. An Interview  
with R. L. Stevenson. His Cruise in the South Seas*  
(published before the Father Damien Open Letter).

In this week's issue of the *Presbyterian* there appears an interview with Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson on the labour traffic. Mr. Stevenson says: – 'I have the greatest difficulty in being satisfied with any possible supervision of the labour traffic by the Queensland Government for this reason. A ship arrives with a Government agent on board in the Western Pacific Islands. It is impossible that he should know any language out of eighty. How can he tell whether these people come of their free own or under the club and cooking oven? He never can.'

[...]

Mr. Stevenson has no faith in the beneficial influence of the whites on the islanders, and claims, on the contrary, that the more whites the worse the effect. He concludes the interview thus: – 'When the traffic is renewed you say the integrity, high character, and firmness of the Prime Minister, Sir Samuel Griffith, were held on every hand to be a sufficient guarantee that abuses would not occur, but now Sir Samuel has retired from politics, and that sole guarantee is gone. You are touching there on a point which makes the misery of my life. In every race to-day and particularly in our own, there is a tendency to neglect inherited responsibilities. It is a very fine thing to be conscientious, but I refuse to be conscientious across my father's last will and testament. We inherit obligations, we inherit wrongs which are complicated with rights on the part of others. And we have to refuse the whole – aye, the whole, down to our boots – or else accept, in the old civil law phrase, the *universitas*. Now, what I have put here as an inheritance from father to son applies equally well in the inheritance of one Ministry from another, and who thinks of it? This man is greedy, the next is what they call conscientious. Both cry with the same voice "Down with the pledge of the past." I am only too much afraid it will be so with Sir Samuel. If it is not England and Europe had better go to study in the school of Queensland. What do I mean by the greedy man and the so-called conscientious man? In the case of Ulster, you seem to me to have both. The whole story







of Ireland is sickening to read, but our fathers pledge us to the Ulster men rightly or wrongly, and here we have agreed on the one side – I need not put a name on the greed – and conscientiousness on the other, because I believe Mr. Gladstone to be a thoroughly conscientious man after the pattern of Robespierre.’

Robert Louis Stevenson quoted in the *Argus* newspaper,  
Friday 24 March 1893 (p. 6) in the article entitled  
*The South Sea Labour traffic. Views of Mr. R. L. Stevenson.*

In expressing his views, Stevenson was not always welcome. Following his death, in 1897 in Sydney at ‘*An Evening with R. L. Stevenson*’ Mr. H. O. Craddock, M.A. delivered an ‘eloquent tribute’ to Stevenson as a lecture before the ‘Pitt Street Literary Society’, who additionally heard from:

One of the audience [...] Mr. William Cooper, formally of Samoa, where he filled the position of a magistrate. He got up and addressed the meeting, and said he was personally acquainted with Stevenson, and was associated with him and others in a journalistic enterprise. As a rule it was best to say nothing but good of the dead; still if people desired to have an accurate estimate of Stevenson’s work and somewhat Bohemian life, some very plain things would have to be spoken. He did not believe Stevenson’s work would be permanent, as he was an overrated man, first coming into prominence by an accident and kept there by the most systematic advertising methods that were ever adopted by a modern novelist. His grave today lay a shapeless mound with some rough stone slabs laid over it, native fashion, the work of natives. Stevenson had no influence over the natives, and the Berlin Treaty, by which Samoa was now governed, was drawn up and signed the year before he set foot on the island. At the same time, he had great pleasure in reading Stevenson’s works. He had many good qualities, but he believed that Stevenson met his death through the superhuman efforts he was making to maintain a literary reputation which had been created by adventitious circumstances. The best criticism and the fairest estimate he had seen of Stevenson was written by David Christie Murray.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally the New Zealand newspapers in part reprinted articles from the London *St. James’ Gazette*, giving voice to criti-





cism of Stevenson then likely of benefit to both newspaper circulation and the perhaps prevailing Colonial Office views about him 'meddling', including the following:

To interfere in the politics of a community which is under arbitrary government is always risky, as Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson is beginning to discover, says the *St. James Gazette*. The author of 'Treasure Island' had not long settled down in Samoa before he began, in beautiful English, to make things hot for its German administrators. Their replies were brief and rather contemptuous; but Mr. Stevenson has pegged away, usually at considerable length, until they are apparently beginning to get tired. The local newspaper which is understood to belong to the Government, is calling out for Mr. Stevenson's arrest as 'a person who meddles with everything'.<sup>36</sup>

As a relative newcomer to the region, Stevenson was a foreigner in a place he made his home in Samoa. Yet the views he expressed on issues of significance to the region are views which are informed. More relevantly, Stevenson's views in a number of respects were, or were perceived as, authoritative in part due to his fame, his writing and skill in expressing his views, and for his personalised accounts of a number of events.

Whilst he held interest in the leper colony in Molokai, it can be said to be one of several interests he had in the politics and society of Hawaii.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless Stevenson undertook extraordinary steps dangerous to his health and safety to visit and stay on Molokai. The dangers included not only the relatively low risk of contracting Hansen's Disease, but the danger to his often poor health generally by isolation and removal from his family, the danger to his safety from the harshness of the journey and, perhaps with greater recklessness, securing the bureaucratic requirements for his visit and his return (the paperwork necessary for his visit to Molokai having been obtained, apparently there was no paperwork giving permission for him to leave Molokai, but he addressed administrative matters with appropriate effect by





leaping onto the boat for the return to Honolulu.) With the publication of the Father Damien Open Letter, dated 25 February 1890 and written in Sydney, the physical danger extended to Stevenson's reputation, both personal and professional, and to legal liability in a defamation claim if brought against him for the contumelious disregard to the standing and reputation of Rev. Dr. Hyde.<sup>38</sup>

Stevenson's personal affinity to indigenous people of the Pacific appears evident from his travels not least after he left San Francisco, but Stevenson's concerns about forced labour appear more fully expressed after he has travelled from April 1890 on the *Janet Nicholl* with a number of South Pacific islanders returning home, late by many years, from work in Australia. His interest led him to raising his concerns in meetings with political leaders in Australia, in meetings with Church groups and in newspaper articles.<sup>39</sup>

His views about foreign interests in Samoa seem evident from his initial stay in early 1890, but evolved to more direct participation in the politics of Samoa, in part through his personal involvement with the Samoan people, the traders, the missionaries and the wide range of officialdom.<sup>40</sup> He gave extensive information about himself and his life in Samoa published (by his friend John Tighe Ryan) in 1894 in the Sydney illustrated periodical *The Antipodean*, including a photograph / illustrated photograph of Stevenson (attributed to FALK, Sydney 1893) with his handwritten note 'Truly yours, Robert Louis Stevenson.' reproduced on the frontispiece, and the publication of Stevenson's poem 'To My Old Familiars', together with hand-drawn illustrations (by artist unknown).<sup>41</sup>

By inclination perhaps a man wanting to assist others he perceived to be in unfortunate circumstances or those who might benefit from a change of circumstances, Stevenson's legal training might have afforded him some greater understanding of the specialised language of those in authority with whom such issues





might be raised. Yet he does not appear to have employed the law or his legal training in a manner to effect change. His best armoury came from his writing, and the effectiveness by which he could have his views published and disseminated with an eye to influence and lead to political change, including by 'better informing' the public. For this, newspaper publication was an effective method and one Stevenson appears to have evolved for different issues, with better effect.

As an example, Stevenson's publication of the '*Open Letter to the Reverend Dr. Hyde of Honolulu*' first as a pamphlet in Sydney then variously in newspapers and periodicals in the United Kingdom, Hawaii and Australia<sup>42</sup>, was published with stark disregard for the law<sup>43</sup>. The Open Letter carried the very serious risk to Stevenson of legal claims against him in defamation, at a time when defamation claims in Australia (and England)<sup>44</sup> were many, were very expensive and the outcome of which generally had marked effect upon the reputation of the publisher of the material complained of (in this instance, to the reputation, livelihood and assets of Stevenson). Aware of the legal consequences of 'publishing a libel', having obtained at least some legal advice on the risks to him and having consulted with his family, Stevenson nonetheless proceeded to publish the Open Letter, an extraordinary piece of writing, but a very definite libel of Rev. Dr. Hyde to which Stevenson exposed himself (and the publishers of the pamphlet) to litigation he was very unlikely to successfully defend. Additionally, in publishing the Open Letter Stevenson entered into a wide-ranging debate between strongly fortified views of the Protestant Church in its criticism of the Catholic Church, and the Catholic Church's replies. His views, however well expressed, exposed him to being commandeered in debates on 'religious' issues for which any writer could barely afford to become engaged, for reasons of time alone in addition to their literary reputation.

Stevenson's efforts on behalf of Father Damien were success-

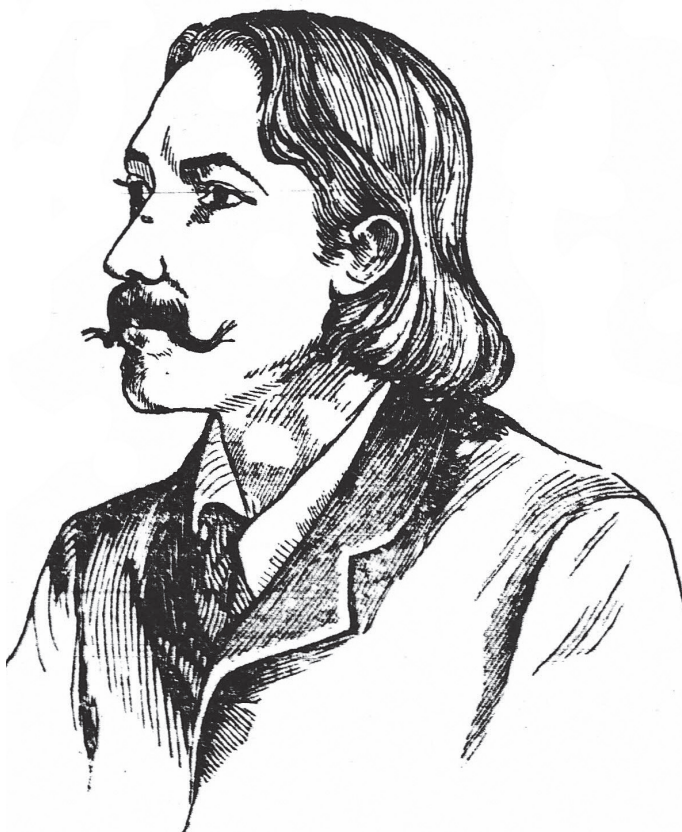




ful by highlighting the plight of those on Molokai and generally diffusing the criticism which had arisen from Rev. Dr. Hyde and Rev. Gage. But Stevenson came to regret the tone of the Open Letter and, it might be suggested, the effectiveness of the publication of a pamphlet in addressing other issues on which he continued to campaign. His methods of communication evolved to more effective publications, including personal addresses, interviews with journalists and, particularly for European circulation, letters for publication to prominent newspapers in particular *The Times* of London. On occasion when he is reported to be writing to newspapers in the United States, for Samoan issues this appears to be limited to corrected views attributed to him which were unfounded.<sup>45</sup> Although one of his letters to *The Times* on issues concerning Samoa predates the Father Damien Open letter, Stevenson's continued publication of letters to *The Times* might be seen as the most effective means available to him for publication of his views, intended to effect change.

Stevenson's methods in securing information first-hand are to be applauded, despite the risks to his health. His efforts to ensure that issues were raised and views were expressed are to be admired, despite the risks to his reputation. That he made use of newspaper publication for his own ends, and is to be found as a subject himself in so many contemporary colonial newspaper records, provides us with further insights into the reception of the man and his work, and further perspectives on his life and times.





R. L. STEVENSON.

Sketch portrait of Robert Louis Stevenson by Lloyd Osbourne, *Australian Star*, daily newspaper (Sydney Australia), Saturday 24 May 1890, p. 5. This was part of the article entitled 'In Defence of the Dead', the Father Damian Open Letter.





## NOTES

(Internet searches as at November 2010)

- 1 The interviewer was Mme. Agnes Rose-Soley, a Scot born in 1847 who came to Australia for her health, lived for a number of years in Samoa in the late 1890s, and in addition to working as a female journalist, published a number of poems and novels including 'Manoupa' (London: Digby, Long, and Co., 1897). She died in Sydney on 19 March 1938, but in 1934 (at the age of about 87) had spoken with Dr. George Mackaness for his compilation of material given as the second annual *Sir Walter Scott Memorial Lecture* entitled '*Robert Louis Stevenson: Associations with Australia*', delivered in Canberra, Australia on 21 September 1934, [see *The Canberra Times* daily newspaper, Saturday 22 September 1934, pp. 4, 5]. Mackaness' lecture and research was subsequently published as a book: see '*Robert Louis Stevenson: His Associations with Australia*' by George Mackaness, privately printed by the author, 9 May 1935 by D. S. Ford, Sydney, Australia and reprinted as the Australian Historical Monographs, vol I, published 1976 by Review Publications Pty Ltd, Dubbo, Australia.
- 2 Nineteenth century Samoan newspapers are not readily available electronically, but reprinted articles from there are found in nineteenth century New Zealand and Australian newspapers, a number of which are available electronically, such as through the *Papers Past* website, the New Zealand government website of electronic copies of newspapers published from about 1839 to 1945 – see <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast> . Electronic copies of Australian newspapers from about 1803 to 1954 may be found through the website of the Australian National Library at Trove <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper?q=>. The electronic records presently available are not a complete set of colonial newspapers and manual searching of library collections is helpful to locate additional articles concerning Stevenson. Stevenson refers to Samoan newspapers in his letter dated 13 July 1890 (whilst aboard the SS Janet Nicoll), to Edward L. Burlingame, as follows (found in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, edited by Bradforth A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1995, Letter 2233):  
  
‘The paper of which I must really send you a copy – if yours were





really a live magazine you would have an exchange with the editor, I assure you it has of late contained a great deal of matter about one of your contributors – rejoices in the name of *Samoa Times*, and *South Sea Advertiser*. The advertisements in the *Advertiser* are permanent, being simply subsidies for its existence. A dashing warfare of newspaper correspondence goes on between the various residents, who are rather fond of recurring to one another's antecedents.'

The Samoa Public Library (also known as the Nelson Memorial Public Library) in Apia, Samoa, is said to have a Samoan newspaper collection. The library is operated by the Samoan Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (website located at [http://mesc.gov.ws/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=101&Itemid=93](http://mesc.gov.ws/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=101&Itemid=93)) (Download 14 November 2010). Some information about the Samoa Public Library and other libraries of Samoa (such as the library of the National University of Samoa and the University of the South Pacific, Alafua Campus Samoa) is found at <http://www.las.org.ws/AboutUs/LibraryHistory/tabid/4390/language/en-NZ/Default.aspx> (Download 14 November 2010). The *Samoan Observer* newspaper has been published in Samoan and English, from 1979. A search of 'Robert Louis Stevenson' makes many references to the local Secondary School named in his honour and some other articles of interest. Other Samoan newspapers include the following, for which a web page does not appear available: *Samoa Times*; *Le Samoa*; *Savali*; and *Talamua Magazine*.

It would be interesting to undertake further study of the Samoan-language and English-language newspapers of Samoa contemporary to the period, for any reports of Stevenson, his activities and his views whilst in Samoa.

- 3 See for example *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney daily newspaper, Friday 14 February 1890, p. 6 in which the following is recorded: 'Lubeck (s) 1079 tons, Captain R. Nierich, from Apia February 4. Passengers – Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson, Mr. Carl Treskow, Mr. Francis Parker, Mr. [space] Kenzie, Mr. Christopher Turk, Ah Foo. Frederick Betz and Co., agents'. The newspaper shipping report is likely a reprint of a report of the Sydney Shipping Agent for the *Lubeck*, the firm Fred. Betz and Co. Similarly see *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper, Thursday 10 April 1890, p. 11 in which the following is recorded: 'Passengers Booked [...] Per R.M.S. Austral (Orient line), Captain J. F. Ruthven, to leave for London on April 19 [...] Mr.







Osborne [sic], [...] Mr. and Mrs. R. Stevenson'. Stevenson and his family did not travel to London on this vessel. A further Shipping report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Friday 11 April 1890, p. 4 in which the following is recorded 'Clearances – April 10 [...] Janet Nicoll (s) 779 tons, Captain E. Henry, for the South Sea Islands. Passengers – Mr. and Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, and Mr. J. Buckland'.

- 4 In referring to the difficulties of lost mail, Stevenson announced 'Sydney is a jawhole', [also known as a cesspool, or sewer entrance or drain opening]: see letter Booth and Mehew [Letter 2303] from Stevenson to Charles Baxter, dated late February 1891, *S. S. Lubeck at sea*. Those familiar with inter-colonial rivalries might be bemused to know a reader of a newspaper in Launceston, Tasmania in February 1890 would know of Stevenson's wish 'very much to see Melbourne' (unfortunately, he never did), from an interview of Stevenson conducted by a journalist in Sydney, as the correspondent for a Melbourne daily newspaper: see *The Launceston Examiner*, Saturday, 22 February 1890, p. 3, in the article entitled *Robert Louis Stevenson. A Novelist's Tour in the Pacific*, being a reprint of 'a special reporter of the Melbourne *Daily Telegraph* [writing] from Sydney, under date February 13'.
- 5 See *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper, Friday 17 January 1890, p. 4 in which the following is recorded: 'Lubeck (s) 1079 tons, Captain R. Nierich, from Tonga and Apia 7th instant. Passengers – Mr. and Mrs. Roberts and family, Mr. Staerker, Mr. Osborne [sic], 3 in the second class and 5 in the third class. Fred. Betz and Co., agents'.
- 6 See entry 'April 18th, 1890 – At Auckland in time for dinner' in *The Cruise of the Janet Nichol – Mrs Robert Louis Stevenson's Diary of a South Sea Cruise*, Fanny Stevenson, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 2. See also *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand daily newspaper, Saturday 19 April 1890, p. 2 in which the following is recorded: 'Shipping [...] By Telegraph [...] Auckland, 18th April. Arrived *Janet Nicholl*, from Sydney'.
- 7 See *The Otago Daily Times (Otago region, Dunedin daily newspaper)*, Tuesday 21 March 1893, p. 6 which is an interview by Stevenson on topics that include travels to New Zealand and Australia on the *Mariposa*.
- 8 References to many writers who visited the colonies can be found in Australian and New Zealand newspapers, including Mark Twain





(see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Monday 16 September 1895 at p. 5), on a lecture tour to secure income after disastrous investments, Rudyard Kipling (see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 23 October 1891 at p. 5) and Anthony Trollope (see *The Argus*, Saturday 5 August 1871 at p. 4). On his extensive lecture tour in the southern hemisphere, Mark Twain referred to Australia and New Zealand as 'junior Englands' and, having spent a few days in Sydney in 1895, described it as follows in *Following the Equator* (1897) [Extracted in *The Wayward Tourist: Mark Twain's Adventures in Australia, with an Introduction by Don Watson*, Melbourne University Press, 2006, pp. xxix and 21-25]:

'Sydney has a population of 400,000. When a stranger from America steps ashore there, the first thing that strikes him is that the place is eight or nine times as large as he was expecting it to be; and the next thing that strikes him is that it is an English city with American trimmings [...] The Australians did not seem to me to differ noticeable from Americans, either in dress, carriage, ways, pronunciation, inflections, or general appearance. There were fleeting and subtle suggestions of their English origin, but these were not pronounced enough, as a rule, to catch one's attention. The people have easy and cordial manners from the beginning – from the moment that the introduction is completed. This is America. To put it in another way, it is English friendliness with the English shyness and self-consciousness left out [...] I have made passing mention, a moment ago, of the naïve Australian's custom of speaking of England as 'home'. It was always pretty to hear it, and often it was said in an unconsciously caressing way that made it touching; in a way which transmuted a sentiment into an embodiment, and made one seem to see Australasia as a young girl stroking mother England's old gray hair [...] In the Australasian home the table-talk is vivacious and unembarrassed; it is without stiffness or restraint. This does not remind one of England so much as it does of America. But Australasia is strictly democratic, and reserves and restraints are things that are bread by differences of rank.'

Twain's writing might be seen as a helpful description of Australia and Sydney a few years after Stevenson and his family first visited in 1890, notwithstanding it is written from the perspective of a visiting American author.

- 9 Colonial newspapers generally were commercial enterprises as much as a facility for dissemination of information (and, to a much





lesser degree than community or language-specific newspapers such as those in Samoa and Hawaii, as a forum for the exchange of information). The New Zealand and Australian newspapers should be viewed with the knowledge they were published for sale, composited and edited perhaps with strong political or religious or prevailing cultural views and, from time to time, reflected acute financial distress of their proprietors, and rivalries amongst those owners, amongst editors and for masthead reputation.

Following its principal European settlement in 1788, Australia saw its first significant newspaper published from 1803 (the *Sydney Gazette*) and its foremost broadsheet, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, from 1831 (initially as the *Sydney Herald*). To the present day, the *Sydney Morning Herald* remains an important publication and is the oldest continuously published newspaper in Australia: see Karskens, 'The *Sydney Gazette* and Early Sydney: Exploring the 'Lived' Town' in *The Australian Press: A Bicentennial Retrospect: Papers presented at a symposium to mark the 200th anniversary of the publication of Australia's first newspaper, the Sydney Gazette and the New South Wales Advertiser* (Edited by Victor Isaacs and Rod Kirkpatrick), Australian Newspaper History Group, 2003, at pp. 34-50 and notably her commentary (at p. 46) from reading the first decade of the *Sydney Gazette* that 'the fundamental observation we can make here is that Sydney was born as a consumer society, but that there were still pre-industrial patterns of consumption – a culture in flux. Trade - [...] was what allowed this town to put down roots and grow so quickly. No wonder, as Sandy Blair has pointed out, people scanned the pages of the *Gazette* eagerly for shipping news, tides, prices and goods' [Sandy Blair, *Newspapers and their readers in Eastern Australia: The Sydney Gazette and its contemporaries*, Ph.D. thesis, University of New South Wales, 1990, p. 2].

The earliest newspaper published in New Zealand (from 1839) was the *New Zealand Gazette*, and numerous daily and community newspapers were published throughout New Zealand during the late nineteenth century, in part now collected electronically at the Papers Past website (see <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast>) and as part of the Alexander Turnbull Library, part of the National Library of New Zealand, in Wellington.

The format of the late nineteenth century newspapers was fairly uniform, with many small type advertisements set out on the first





and second pages, with government and shipping notices following, and news of the day rarely appearing before about the fourth page. The news also tended to be grouped without headings, many subjects printed together in unbroken columns of type. Compared to early twenty-first century newspapers, the presentation of information as 'news' was without consideration by sub-editors, headings, type size or illustrations, which were more expensive to print. With some exceptions, generally news was distinguished only by the source of the report (such as 'Cable News'), rather than any description of the information itself.

As noted by Isaacs and Kirkpatrick in their own publication *Two Hundred Years of Sydney Newspapers: A Short History* (2003, Rural Press Ltd, North Richmond, NSW, Australia), 'Until the 1870s, Australians received their news from the rest of the world at the speed of sailing ships. There was great competition between newspapers to be first on board arriving ships to obtain overseas papers on board. These were quickly scanned and extensive extracts rushed into print – with news from Europe (in particular Britain) and American that was four months old [...] In 1869 the Suez Canal opened shortening the distance, steam replaced wind power on some ships also shortening voyage time, and most importantly of all, from 1872 a telegraph line connected Australia and Europe.'

With changes in technology, from 1872 'Australia became connected by overland telegraph and submarine cable to the outside world and messages [...] could be sent between Australia and Europe in a matter of hours instead of the customary six to eight weeks for the steam-powered vessels that bought the English mail': see the very informative 'Serial fiction in Australian colonial newspapers' by Elizabeth Morrison, p. 310, in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. by John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), part of the Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture. As Morrison goes on to explain, as a result of other technological developments, the speed of printing improved dramatically, allowing for additional features such as more fiction. In 1871, the circulation of the Melbourne *Age* newspaper rose to 16,000 copies daily, to 20,000 in 1873 and by 1880 was 41,000 daily. At the end of 1889 when Stevenson first travelled to Samoa and then Australia, circulation of the *Age* rose to 100,000 daily (see Morrison, *ibid.*).





Later important to Stevenson, Irish-born S.S. McClure in 1884 in New York by his own account ‘invented the newspaper syndication service’ (see Morrison, *ibid.* p. 313) but with ‘virtually no capital, McClure’s was slow to take off – it was able to survive by supplying an author’s copy free to one paper in return for sets of proofs to sell to others’ (see Morrison, *ibid.* p. 314). McClure met Stevenson in 1887 and republished *The Black Arrow*, which had previously been serialised in newspapers published in England (see Morrison, *ibid.*

Relevantly, literature publications and literary content were very common in colonial newspapers, including original works and commentary or criticism. Additionally, information about authors (amongst actors, playwrights, historians and others) was published, much of which came as reprints of original reports in European (principally London) newspapers and periodicals, or those published in the United States of America: see Webby ‘“More Than Just the News” The Literary Content of Early Australian Newspapers’, in *The Australian Press: A Bicentennial Retrospect*, pp. 51 – 62 and in particular the following (at p. 52) ‘At a time when illustrations could not yet be reproduced cheaply and easily, the satirical poem fulfilled the same function as today’s political cartoon. As papers grew in size they also began to serialise fiction. At first, pirated copies of novels by popular English or American authors, such as Fenimore Cooper and Dickens, but then some local works, which became more plentiful as the [nineteenth] century progressed’.

Stevenson’s and Osbourne’s *The Ebb-Tide* was published in serial form in the Brisbane Courier newspaper, by twenty parts published from Saturday 24 March 1894 to Tuesday 8 May 1894, sometimes with an added ‘Synopsis of Preceding Instalments’.

Generally, English authors were favoured for colonial newspaper serialisation of fiction, with Trollope published from 1867 with *Phineas Finn* and George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* in 1872 (see Morrison, *ibid.* p. 311), followed by Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* in 1891, appearing simultaneously with its English serialisation (see Morrison, *ibid.* p. 312). Sources of serialisation by this time arrived both from England and the United States, with mail across the Pacific from San Francisco often more reliable and speedy than from England via India (see Morrison, *ibid.* p. 313).

The opportunity provided by newspapers for publication of local authors in colonial locations was important, recognised now as a





source of both indigenous and colonial fiction and poetry. By the middle of the nineteenth century, both in the United Kingdom and the colonies of New Zealand and Australia, the newspaper serialisation of novels (subsequently issued in book form ‘usually as a three-volume set priced at thirty-one shillings and sixpence’) was increasingly common, towards a period after 1860 when ‘fiction [was] becoming the property of the newspaperman’ (see Morrison, *ibid.* p. 307). Even at the end of the nineteenth century ‘there were few Australian book publishers and their output was small [...] the newspaper press, by contrast, was large, vigorous, and thriving, partaking in the great expansion of the world press that began in the 1870s and [...] playing a vital role in the development of political, social, and cultural institutions’ (see Morrison, *ibid.* p. 308).

Particularly for local authors in the colonies, payment for fiction was relatively small, even for newspaper serialisation of fiction. The well-known (and currently still very popular) Australian poet and author Henry Lawson in 1899 ‘complained bitterly of his exploitation as a writer, and of the impossibility of earning a living from literary work’, see Debra Adelaide ‘How Did Authors Make a Living?’ in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, ed. by Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), p. 83, in which Lawson estimated his earnings over twelve years as £700, for at least two widely popular and successful books *In the Days When the World was Wide* and *While the Bill Boils*. Lawson gave his ‘now-famous advice on the futility of writing: “My advice to any young Australian writer whose talents have been recognised, would be to go steerage, stow away, swim, and seek London, Yankeeland, or Timbuctoo – rather than stay in Australia till his genius turn to gall, or beer. Or failing this – and still in the interests of human nature and literature – to study elementary anatomy, especially as it applies to the cranium, and then shoot himself carefully with the aid of a looking-glass”’ (from Lawson’s ‘*Pursuing Literature*’ in *Australia* published in the *Bulletin*’s Red Page, 21 January 1899, quoted by Adelaide in Lyons and Arnold, *ibid.*). In 1893, Lawson wrote ‘sketchers for the *New Zealand Mail* newspaper for a mere five shillings a column; in New Zealand [...] reprinted material was never paid for and in general writers were ill treated, perhaps, worse than in Australia’ (Adelaide in Lyons and Arnold, *ibid.* p. 84).

Yet it was acknowledged that in proportion to its population





'Australia bought verse "more liberally" than any country in the world' (Adelaide in Lyons and Arnold, *ibid.*), and with an educated population in New Zealand and Australia, reading of fiction was immensely popular at the end of the nineteenth century, including from fiction published in newspapers. See also the extracts of Lawson's writings (1899) on '*Pursuing Literature*' in Australia and related publications in *The Writer in Australia: A Collection of Literary Documents 1856 to 1964*, ed. with commentaries by John Barnes, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1969.

- 10 See *The Canberra Times* daily newspaper, Saturday 22 September 1934, p. 4, 5. The 'Father Damien' letter was published in the *Australian Star* daily newspaper on 24 May 1890, on p. 5, with the accompanying sketch of Stevenson by Lloyd Osbourne. According to R. B. Walker in *The Newspaper Press in New South Wales 1803-1920* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976), 'Within six months of the disappearance of the *Globe* [June 1887], a new evening penny paper, the *Australian Star* had arisen. Faction politics was now yielding place to party politics and the function of the *Star* was to uphold the protectionist cause against the four free trade dailies: a descant or dissonant of their melody. Under its first editor W.H. Traill, former owner of the *Bulletin* and a sturdy democrat, the *Star* seems to have prospered. In June 1888 it claimed a circulation of 20,000 and after one year's operation declared that it had gained a sound business footing.' [footnote 47, *Australian Star* 30 June and 1 December 1888].
- 11 The financing of the Stevenson's Pacific voyages from San Francisco (commencing in 1888) was in part derived from the agreement made with S. S. McClure for Stevenson to publish letters of his journeys - See for example Booth and Mehew [Letter 2206], Stevenson letter to Edward L. Burlingame, February 1890, *S. S. Lubeck between Apia and Sydney*, concerning publication in the magazine *Scribners*, and Booth and Mehew [Letter 2224], Stevenson letter to S. S. McClure c. 8 April 1890, Sydney, concerning publication of 'Letters', also known as *Travels*. Notwithstanding difficulties which arose for him about the content and form of the 'Letters', Stevenson wrote many observations of the Pacific region, in the form of letters or chapters, intended for newspaper or magazine publication.
- 12 Upon Stevenson's arrival in Sydney on 13 February 1890 - See Booth and Mehew, Note 2 to [Letter 2209] Stevenson letter to Captain William Castle 15 February 1890, Union Club, Sydney, by the *Lubeck*





from Samoa he 'gave interviews to journalists that evening at the Hotel Metropole'.

- 13 By electronic search the earliest reference to Stevenson's intended visit to Sydney remarkably is found in the *Barrier Miner* newspaper, published in Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia in its edition Thursday 16 January 1890, p. 3 in which it is reported: 'Visit of a Novelist, Sydney, Thursday (afternoon). News received by the Samoan steamer to-day states that Robert Louis Stevenson, the well-known novelist, has been touring the South Seas for over a year, and will arrive in Sydney in about a month. He intends writing a book on the South Sea Islands, and will spend several months in Australia.' This report appears an edited version of the similar report found in the Melbourne daily *Argus* newspaper of Friday 17 January 1890, p. 5, which reported the following: 'Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson. Early Visit to Australia. [By Special Wire.] (From Our Correspondent.) Sydney, Thursday. Mr. Lloyd Osborne [sic], who has been travelling in the South Seas with Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, the novelist, arrived from Samoa to-day, by the steamer Lubeck. He states that Mr. Stevenson will come on to Sydney next month, and spend a considerable time in these colonies before returning to England early in the spring. Mr. Stevenson, who has been travelling for the benefit of his health, is now better than he has been for many years past. He is at present in Samoa, being accompanied by Mr. Joseph Strong, the artist'. Again remarkably, the *Barrier Miner* newspaper of Tuesday 21 January 1890, p. 2 reports the rivalry of colonial newspapers arising out of this report concerning Stevenson, as follows: 'Stray Notes. "The Haste To Get" News. There is something excruciatingly funny in the efforts of the two evening papers of Melbourne [...] to get ahead of one another. In their race after news they chronicle things which are to happen in a month's time or so, if ever at all [...] The *Standard* under the heading "On the Sydney Side", publishes daily [...] closely printed matter received "by telegraph". In this column and a-half one usually encounters about a column and a quarter of what a person of average intelligence who had never seen Sydney or New South Wales could write. [...] On Thursday last, Mr. Stephenson [sic], the English novelist, was expected to arrive in Sydney. Accordingly, in this column of the *Standard*, "by telegraph from Sydney", the information is given that Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, who arrived here to-day, is' – and then about a quarter of a column of description of the new arrival. Unfortunately, however, for the *Standard*, it impugns







its own veracity, for in that self-same column near the top, this announcement is made: 'Mr. Stevenson, the novelist, has not arrived to-day, as was expected, but will be here in a month's time. Now ye *Herald* people the *Standard* laughed heartily at you when you stole some bogus telegrams which the *Age* had concocted specially for you, now is your opportunity.'

- 14 See *The Australian Star*, Sydney daily evening daily newspaper, Thursday 16 January 1890, p. 4, under the heading 'Robert Louis Stevenson. Cruising in the South Seas. Coming to Sydney', in which it is noted "he will here join Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, who wrote with him an excellent story, 'The Wrong Box', and Mr. Joseph Strong, the artist, both of whom for some months past been travelling with him through the Pacific Islands [...] [Stevenson's] health has been much improved by the cruise, and Mr. Osbourne, who arrived by the Lubeck this morning, informed our representative that he is better now than he has been for 10 years past.'
- 15 See for example *Argus*, Melbourne Australia daily newspaper, Monday 6 January 1890, p. 6 and *The Mercury*, Launceston, Tasmania newspaper, Thursday 23 January 1890, p. 3.
- 16 See *The Star*, Canterbury region, Christchurch, New Zealand evening daily newspaper, Tuesday 7 January 1890, p. 2.
- 17 See *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney Australia daily newspaper, Friday 14 February 1890, p. 4.
- 18 See *The Brisbane Courier*, Brisbane Australia daily newspaper, Tuesday 18 February 1890, p. 2.
- 19 See *The Illustrated Sydney News*, Sydney Australia periodical, Thursday 6 March 1890, p. 11.
- 20 See for example *The Argus*, Melbourne Australia newspaper, Tuesday 20 January 1891, p. 5.
- 21 See *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney Australia daily newspaper, Saturday 14 November 1891, p. 9.
- 22 See *The Brisbane Courier*, Brisbane Australia daily newspaper, Tuesday 24 January 1893, p. 5.
- 23 See *The Argus*, Melbourne Australia daily newspaper, Monday 23 January 1893, p. 5.
- 24 See *The Mercury*, Hobart Australia daily newspaper, Wednesday 30 January 1895, p. 2.





- 25 See *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper, Wednesday 15 March 1893 (p. 3) in the article entitled *Mr. R. L. Stevenson and the Presbyterian Church*, a report of Stevenson's address to the luncheon of the Sydney Presbyterian Assembly on 14 March 1893, which includes the following:

'It occurred to me that I had a very good right to appear here. In the first place, I am a Scotsman – (cheers) – but upon that I will not dwell. (Cheers and laughter). In the second place, I am an old and, I hope I may be allowed to say, a very good Presbyterian, the proof of which, I may say, is that I have sat out a sermon of an hour and 30 minutes (Laughter). It was delivered in the parish church of Leith, and by a remarkable coincidence the parish church is still standing in support of my statement. (Laughter) It was delivered by one of the most delightful old gentlemen I ever knew in my life. In the third place, I am a grandson of the manse, and a great grandson of the manse. (Applause) My grandfather was minister of a parish close to Edinburgh. He was a nice old gentleman. (Laughter) As for my great grandfather, he had been placed in an historical position by Robert Burns. Dr Smith, of Galston, was my great grandfather. (Applause) [...]

I have referred to the minister and his sermon of an hour and a half. I believe that of yore our fathers were able to stand this manly and athletic exercise, but I think that for us and for the ladies it would be best to avoid the excesses of our fathers, and, therefore, I will not weary you (Cheers, and cries of 'No,' 'Go on'.)

- 26 See *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper, Wednesday 1 March 1893 (p. 5) in the article entitled *Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson. His Samoan Experiences. (By Our Special Reporter)*, which includes the following:

'Meanwhile, in spite of the active interest which he takes in the local politics of his little lazy isle, Mr. Stevenson has not neglected the duty which he owes to the world as a producer of fiction. He has, as he says, a number of stories on the stocks. The romance of the South Pacific, of which we had a taste in *'The Wreckers'* is to be continued in a new novel called *'The Schooner Farrallhone'*. 'There is every sort of crime in it,' added Mr. Stevenson, 'only it is a moral story, because everything which the villains attempt fails.' Of course he was not going to betray his plot, it would be unfair to ask any novelist to anticipate the interest of his story but I learned that the materials





out of which the new volume is composed have been drawn from comparatively untouched fields, abounding in the vivid buccaneering adventure which Mr. Stevenson loves so well to paint.'

- 27 See *The Argus* newspaper, Saturday 6 May 1893 (p. 4) in the article entitled 'Mr. R. L. Stevenson on Reading and Literature. An Interview,' Wellington, [New Zealand] April 11, which includes the following:

'The topic especially dealt with was the course of reading likely to be most, beneficial to the young literary aspirant. Mr. Stevenson was informed that in New Zealand there were a large number of young students earnest delvers after the great treasures of English literature, and some of them anxious to try what they themselves could do with their pens.

[...]

'You have asked me rather suddenly for a course of study,' said Mr. Stevenson, as soon as we had settled ourselves in a snug corner of the steamer's social hall. 'Still,' he continued, 'I think I have an answer I can make. If a young man wishes to learn to write English he should read everything, but I qualify that by excluding the whole of the present century in a body. People will read all that is worth reading out of that for their own fun. If they read the 17th century and the 18th century, if they read Shakespeare and Thomas Brown, and Jeremy Taylor, and Dryden's prose and Samuel Johnson, and I suppose Addison – though I never read him myself – and if they will just go generally and browse about in all the authors of those two centuries they will get the finest course of literature there is. Those are the two extremes. What we have tried to do in this century is to find a middle road between the two extremes, mostly and usually by being more slovenly.'

- 28 See *The Argus* newspaper, Saturday 6 May 1893, p. 4, in the article entitled 'Mr. R. L. Stevenson on Reading and Literature. An Interview, Wellington, [New Zealand] April 11', which includes the following:

'I have only one feather in my cap,' continued Mr. Stevenson, reflectively, after a slight pause, 'and that is, I am not a sloven. I am in my dress,' he continued with a smile, glancing at his easy-fitting smoking jacket and slippers, 'but that is another matter. I mean in my style, and too many of us are slovens just now.'

[...]





Here the conversation turned for a short time to a young New Zealand author, Mr. Marriott Watson, lately appointed assistant editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. This led Mr. Stevenson to remark that he did not believe that journalism was any good as a literary training. 'It cannot be', he said 'because you have to write your article hastily and finish it in half an hour. Now it sometimes takes me months to write a single chapter.' 'Do you write and re write it?' 'Oh, yes, many times. I don't like it, of course, but I have to do it.'

- 29 See *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper, Wednesday 1 March 1893 (p. 5) in the article entitled 'Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson. His Samoan Experiences. (By Our Special Reporter)', which includes the following:

'The literary world was recently startled by a report that Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson was dying at Samoa. London, on receiving this news from some mystical American source, cabled it to Sydney, and thus we learned the sorrowful tidings. It was, we felt, too early for Mr. Stevenson to go out. There was yet time for him to write another '*Treasure Island*', or to travel once more with his donkey in the Pyrenees. The truth of the whole story may be gathered from the fact that Mr. Stevenson arrived in Sydney yesterday. When I met him on the deck of the *Mariposa*, as she tied up to the wharf in Woolloomooloo Bay, I noticed that his physique had vastly improved since his last visit to Sydney, when, it will be remembered, he lay for weeks ill at one of the clubs. To-day he is well set up, has the glow of health on his countenance, and altogether bears testimony to the beneficent effects of the Samoan climate. So much for the American yarn, which had its origin, as Mr. Stevenson explains, in the casual visit of a globe-trotter, who, looking upon Mr. Stevenson as one of the natural curios of Samoa, paid him a visit. The inquisitive traveller learned only that the novelist was suffering from influenza, and was unable to receive callers. On this slender basis the report of Mr. Stevenson's dangerous illness was founded, and fortunately there is no need longer to contradict the ground-less rumour.'

- 30 See *The Argus*, 6 May 1893 (p. 4) in 'Mr. R. L. Stevenson on Reading and Literature. An Interview', which includes the following:

'A remarkable conjunction, especially interesting to reader of Mr. R. L. Stevenson's latest novel *David Balfour*, was to be witnessed on board the last San Francisco mail steamer when she took her departure from Auckland. The hero of the tale, who also figures in





*Kidnapped*, was a real historical personage, being, in fact, the great-great-grandfather of the novelist. What is remarkable is that there were two other of David's great-great-grandchildren on board the steamer at the same time. One, Mr. Graham Balfour, was on a tour round the world, and was accompanying his cousin, the novelist, to Samoa to spend a few weeks with him in is [sic] island home. The other, Mr. L. H. B. Wilson, a prominent official in the New Zealand Marine department, had come up from Wellington on purpose to meet his relative, the distinguished novelist. It was odd that they should have thus foregathered at this end of the world, so far away from the scene of David's exploits. The present writer, who was passing through Auckland on a holiday visit, had an introduction to the interesting trio, and the still greater pleasure of a chat with Mr. Stevenson on literary subjects.'

- 31 See *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper, Monday 18 September 1893 (p. 8) in the article entitled 'Robert Louis Stevenson's Dreams. A Remarkable Letter', being a reproduction of Stevenson's letter to 'Mr. Myers of the Society for Psychical Research' and which includes the following (noting Stevenson may not have intended this for newspaper publication, but the newspaper editors were likely delighted to have printed it):

'Vailonia [sic] Plantation, Upolu, Samoan Islands, July 14, 1892.

Experience A. During an illness at Nice I lay awake a whole night in extreme pain. From the beginning of the evening one part of my mind became possessed of a notion so grotesque and shapeless that it may best be described as a form of words. I thought the pain was, or was connected with, a wisp or coil of some sort; I knew not of what it consisted, nor yet where it was, and cared not; only I thought if the two ends were brought together the pain would cease. Now all the time, with another part of my mind, which I venture to think was myself, I was fully alive to the absurdity of this idea, knew it to be a mark of impaired sanity, and was engaged with my other self in a perpetual conflict. Myself had nothing more at heart than to keep from my wife, who was nursing me, any hint of this ridiculous hallucination; the other was bound that she should be told of it and ordered to effect the cure. I believe it must have been well on in the morning before the fever (or the other fellow) triumphed, and I called my wife to my bedside, seized her savagely by the wrist, and, looking on her with a face of fury, cried, 'Why do you not put the two ends together and put me out of pain?'





- 32 See *The Argus* newspaper, Saturday 6 May 1893 (p. 4) in *Mr. R. L. Stevenson on Reading and Literature. An Interview*:

‘In conclusion, the interviewer asked Mr. Stevenson if he had noticed the loss of memory case in Melbourne, and, if so, whether he did not find it interesting as an illustration in real life of the existence of the double personality dealt with in the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*? ‘Yes,’ said Mr. Stevenson, ‘it is certainly a very extraordinary affair.’ ‘Had you heard of any actual case of double personality before you wrote your book?’ ‘Never,’ replied the author. ‘After the book was published I heard of the case of “Louis V”, the man in the hospital at Rochefort. Mr. Myers sent it to me.’ ‘Was it not an extraordinary coincidence that you should have anticipated in a work of fiction, at least so far as your own knowledge was concerned, the discoveries of science in regard to the existence of double personality?’ ‘I don’t know that it is altogether established yet by scientific men. They are only on the threshold of the subject. My profound conviction is that there are many consciousnesses in a man. I have no doubt about it – I can feel them working in many directions.’

- 33 See *The Observer*, an Auckland, New Zealand illustrated weekly, 22 April 1893, p. 5. A little over a year later, the New Zealand *Otago Witness* newspaper (5 July 1894, p. 41) in the article entitled ‘The Wages of Genius East and West’ noted descriptively the ‘wages’ of a number of writers, with Twain ‘1000 dol – £200 – for any article of two or three pages he chooses to offer to magazines like *The Century*, and every thousand words of a story by Bret Harte is as good currency as a £20 note [...] The serial rights of a three-volume novel by writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and J. M. Barrie are worth not less than £1000 [...] Zola is said to make £12,000 a year. For his bookrights, in France he is understood to receive 6d. a copy, which would give him £4500 for “*La Debacle*”, and £4150 for “*Nana*” in his way.’

- 34 See *The Tuapeka Times*, an Otago bi-weekly, 18 July 1894, p. 4.

- 35 See *The Otago Witness*, an Otago region, Dunedin, New Zealand weekly illustrated newspaper, 26 August 1897, p.55, reporting on events in Sydney, Australia.

- 36 See the *Nelson Evening Mail*, Saturday 25 February 1893 (p. 2).

- 37 This paper does not address Stevenson’s interests in Hawaii, including his visits there in 1889 and in November 1893, reports of which appear in various colonial newspapers such as *The Brisbane*





*Courier*, Friday 10 November 1893 (p. 5), *The Argus*, Friday 10 November 1893 (p. 5), the *Otago Witness*, *Thursday* 16 November 1893 (p. 35) which says that 'Robert Louis Stevenson's visit to Hawaii is said to have a deep political significance', notwithstanding he said his visit was not for political affairs and *The Mercury*, Monday 20 November 1893 (p. 3) about his return to Samoa and the views of Baron Cedercrantz [Cedarkrantz] that Stevenson had been appointed British Consul in Apia. Comparable to the Samoan-language newspapers, it would be interesting to undertake further study of the Hawaiian- language and English-language newspapers of Hawaii contemporary to the period, for any reports of Stevenson, his activities and his views whilst in Hawaii.

- 38 Many studies of Stevenson's stay on Molokai and the Father Damien Open Letter are available, including Harold Winifred Kent's *Dr. Hyde and Mr. Stevenson* (Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland, Vermont, USA, 1973). From the various colonial newspaper collections, additional information is available, including contextual matters which might be briefly summarised as follows:

- i.) Sydney, Australia at the end of the nineteenth century and for some period before had a significant Catholic population, the majority comprised of Irish convicts and settlers and their descendants, generally described as belonging to lower socio-economic groups, less literate and seeking to attain greater political power and labour associations through trade unions.
- ii.) By comparison, Sydney's more dominant Protestant groups belonged to higher socio-economic groups, were well-represented in politics, law, education and the professions and dominated mainstream newspaper publications in addition to specialist religious newspaper periodicals and newspapers (see R. B. Walker, *ibid.* at p. 148 in the Chapter entitled 'Hermes Psychopompus: Newspapers with a Religious or Denominational Allegiance', including the following 'A submissive and respectful attitude towards the clergy – an attitude almost unthinkable among Protestant editors – characterised Catholic newspapers. In May 1890 the Sydney printers O'Hara and Johnson approached Cardinal Moran to secure his approval for the projected *Southern Cross*, the leading article, they assured His Eminence, would be contributed by the pen of an able cleric (at p. 158) [...] Thus in the colony, the religious newspaper, as distinct from the periodical or magazine, came to be exclusively Catholic [...] although their socio-economic and literary





levels were lower than those of Protestants, there was still a sufficient market to support two weekly papers. No other denomination could match this, nor did they try, for the “secular” Press better reflected their views and values.’ (p. 160).

iii.) On Saturday 26 January 1890, the prominent Catholic Cathedral St. Mary’s in Sydney was consecrated, an event reported throughout the newspapers. On Monday 24 February 1890, Catholic Cardinal Moran of Sydney gave a lecture at the ‘Roman Catholic Bible Hall’ in Sydney ‘with a subject which attracted a large audience – “The Life and Labours of Father Damien, the Apostle of the Lepers”. A large number of Roman Catholic clergymen were present’, see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday 25 February 1890 (p. 5). Cardinal Moran’s public assertions about Father Damien continued into the twentieth century: see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Monday 19 January 1903 (p. 5).

iv.) It is said (in a 1928 newspaper report) that ‘One morning, whilst he was sitting in the Union Club, R.L.S. picked up a religious journal, when his eye caught Dr. Hyde’s letter fiercely attacking the work of Father Damien, the famous martyr of the leper station at Molokai. Stevenson, whose ardent belief in Father Damien is considered by many to have runaway with his commonsense, sat down in a boiling rage and wrote in a single morning his famous reply. This was printed in the *Australian Star* and later twenty-five copies were printed at the Ben Franklin Printing Company. The reply is regarded as one of the finest pieces of spirited writing and one of the best examples of righteous indignation ever written, and because of the limited number of copies printed, it is a rare relict of R. L. S. One copy, believed to be the only one in Australia, is now in the Mitchell Library’: see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 11 August 1928 (p. 11).

v.) A further account (in a 1933 newspaper report) is as follows: ‘It is not generally known that the famous Damien letter was written in the Union Club. The late Dr. Robert Scott-Skirving [sic] met Stevenson one day, and asked him what he was doing with himself. “Well”, said he, “I propose to devote myself to writing a libel, but it will be a justified and righteous one.” The night before, over the dinner table, reference had been made to Father Damien and the Molokai lepers. Someone asked Stevenson if he had seen a newspaper letter written by Dr. Hyde, a minister whom Stevenson had met in Honolulu, casting grave aspersions on the moral







character of Damien, the priest of Molokai. He was shown the paper – a denominational one – read the letter, and leaped to his feet in furious anger. He declared that he must reply at once – must smash the traducer of a dead man for whom he had conceived an ardent admiration. So the famous defence was written in his room at the club. It was the work of a single morning, and stands now almost exactly as it was in the first, hastily written draft. Hastily composed, it was as hastily dispatched, so that it was delivered to the London, New York, and Australian papers as nearly as possible on the same day. By and by, when coolness and reflection induced a saner, better-balanced judgement, Stevenson himself regretted its violence. He confessed it was “barbarously harsh”, and that he might have defended Damien equally well without inflicting pain on others’: see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 23 September 1933 (p. 11). Dr. Scot Skirving subsequently had his own recollections of Stevenson (in Edinburgh and Sydney) published a week later in the same paper, reports of his death and the spelling of his name both somewhat exaggerated: see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 30 September 1933 (p. 9).

vi.) A further account appeared late in 1933, when a letter to the Editor included the following: “Regarding the Ben Franklin Printing Co. Several clippings from the ‘Australasian’, inserted in the pamphlet, disclose that the (unnamed) proprietor of this firm was a member of the Cercle Francais – a society for musical and literary men, whose headquarters were in Wynyard-square, and of whom Stevenson had been a guest [...] the identity of the man who so bravely printed this matchless piece of invective, knowing, as he assuredly must have known, that he was courting prosecution for libel. It is a fact that Stevenson himself felt certain the letter would be his ruination, and that for months after it appeared he was in a fever of anxiety lest Dr. Hyde should take action. But, as we now know, Dr. Hyde decided not to do that”: see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Wednesday 27 December 1933 (p. 3).

vii.) A further account appeared early in 1934, when a letter to the Editor from the former managing editor of the Sydney newspaper which published the Open Letter, recalled the following: ‘I was managing editor of the “*Australian Star*” newspaper at the time of the publication in that paper of Robert Louis Stevenson’s open letter to Dr. Hyde in vindication of the life work and personal character of Father Damien. I was personally acquainted with Stevenson. Before





the letter was written, I had an interview with him, and in the course of conversation, he expressed his intention of replying to Dr. Hyde's attack. Stevenson's chief anxiety appeared to be the space he would require and the possibility of editorial amendment and emendation of his expressed thoughts. I satisfied him upon both points. That was on a Thursday. The following afternoon (Friday) he gave me his MS., and the following day the open letter was published for the first time in the "*Australian Star*". [...] After the publication of the letter in the "*Australian Star*" several city gentlemen [...] suggested to me the publication of the letter in pamphlet form for the purpose of supplying the mission of which Father Damien was a member with copies of the document in a form more compact and convenient and permanent than a copy of a newspaper. To this, with Stevenson's approval, I consented, and the gentlemen above named had the work carried out and bore the expense. [...] At Stevenson's request, I forwarded proof sheets of the letter to the London "*Times*" and the Edinburgh "*Scotsman*", accompanied by a personal note from Stevenson. In conclusion, I may say that neither Stevenson nor I ever gave the question of libel or no libel arising from the publication of the letter a passing thought': see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday 2 January 1934 (p. 3). The first copy of the Open letter which can be found in the *Australian Star* is that of Saturday 24 May 1890 (p. 5), well after the date of the Open Letter and the date of publication of the pamphlet and the date of publication of the Open letter in the United Kingdom and in Hawaii.

viii.) A further report in 1939 records the following: 'on the evening of February 24 dined with some friends, and the conversation drifted along until it caught on the name of Father Damien. One of those present asked the author if he had seen an article in a Sydney journal referring rather critically to the dead priest's work. Interested, Stevenson said he had not, and was shown a copy of the Sydney "Presbyterian" dated October 26, 1889. The following letter from Dr. Hyde of Honolulu, addressed to Rev. H. B. Gage, was published on one of its pages [...] Those who watched R. L. S. read, saw his growing agitation until, finally, his face pale with anger, he brushed back his chair as he leaped to his feet. He must reply at once, he declared. He must smash the traducer of the dead man for whom he had conceived an ardent admiration: and so the following morning saw him hard at work in his room composing a reply to Dr. Hyde's letter': see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 30 December 1939 (p. 7).





- 39 The forced labour issue was raised by Stevenson in the March 1893 edition of the Australian religious newspaper the [Sydney] *Presbyterian*, reprints of which were published in the *Argus* newspaper of Friday 24 March 1893 (p. 6). Subsequently, letters to the editor of the *Argus* continued publication on the issue of forced labour, although with no further direct contributions by Stevenson. The editorial and commentary in the *Presbyterian* was more fervent, with particular attention to matters reflecting upon the missionaries: see the more readily available consolidation of religious newspapers, including the *Presbyterian* in the weekly newspaper *The Southern Cross* Friday 10 March 1893 (p. 183), *The Southern Cross* Friday 24 March 1893 (pp. 223, 230 and 231) and *The Southern Cross* Friday 31 March 1893 (pp. 243 and 255). Noteworthy is that on his leaving Sydney in April 1890 by the *Janet Nicholl*, Stevenson travelled by a vessel which broke a union embargo on shipping in Sydney and did so by employing crew who were only Pacific islanders. Upon her arrival in Auckland, newspaper reports of the 'strike-break' by the *Janet Nicholl* were prominent, and continued over a period of time: see *A Century of Journalism: The Sydney Morning Herald and its Record of Australian Life 1831-1931* (1931, John Fairfax & Sons Limited, Sydney) for reports of the strike (pp. 329 and 330), and for example *The Sydney Morning Herald* Thursday 10 April 1890 (p. 8), *The Sydney Morning Herald* Monday 14 April 1890 (p. 8), *The Sydney Morning Herald* Tuesday 29 April 1890 (p. 5).
- 40 There are many records of Stevenson's views about Samoa and her political circumstances found in colonial newspapers, from when he first arrived in Sydney in February 1890, during times he was in Samoa, New Zealand or Australia through to 1894: see for example, *The Argus*, Friday 14 February 1890 (p. 7), *The Southern Cross* Friday 6 June 1890 (p. 443), the *Brisbane Courier*, Wednesday 11 February 1891 (p. 6), the *Sydney Morning Herald* Friday 13 November 1891 (p. 4), *The Argus*, Wednesday 18 November 1891 (p. 7), *The Argus*, Friday 11 December 1891 (pp. 4, 5), the *Brisbane Courier*, Monday 4 January 1892 (p. 7), the *Sydney Morning Herald* Friday 10 February 1893 (p. 6), the *Australian Star*, Saturday 4 March 1893 (page not identified), and the *Brisbane Courier*, Thursday 24 May 1894 (p. 2).
- 41 See *The Antipodean* (Australian periodical described as 'An Illustrated Annual'), 1894, at the frontispiece for the photograph of Stevenson, at pp. 14, 15 for his poem *To My Old Familiars* and at pp.





- 66-73 for the article by John Tighe Ryan entitled 'A Gossip About Robert Louis Stevenson', with several photographs and hand drawn illustrations.
- 42 It appears first published in an Australian newspaper about three months after the first publication (in Sydney, as a pamphlet), by the *Australian Star*, a Sydney afternoon daily newspaper, on Saturday 24 May 1890, p. 5, under the heading 'In Defence of the Dead'.
- 43 As expressed by Harry Jay Moors in referring to the Sewall's letter 'Stevenson [...] had a great aversion to the law in all its branches and aspects', see *With Stevenson in Samoa*, H. J. Moors, (London: Collins Clear Type Press, c. 1905), p. 144. Moors went on to remark 'His aversion towards the law was a life-long trait in Stevenson's character – and this in the face of the fact that he had qualified for the bar in Edinburgh. [...] The strange part about it was that he was always courting the dangers of law' (Moors, Id., p. 146, 147).
- 44 Sydney, New South Wales where the Father Damien Open letter was first published in 1890 was at that time subject to the Slander & Libel Act or Injuries to Character Act, 1847 (NSW) (the 'NSW Libel Act'), itself based upon the United Kingdom's 1843 Libel Act, but with more of the provisions recommended in the 1843 UK House Of Lords Select Committee Report on Defamation, including 'abolishing the distinction between slander and libel, making all actions for defamation actionable without proof of loss; providing a defence of unlikelihood of harm; introducing a defence of truth to prosecutions and civil actions for defamation where the publications was for the public benefit; and allowing a newspaper to mitigate damage', see *Defamation Law in Australia*, Patrick George (Australia: LexisNexis Butterworths, 2006), p. 54, as well as Paul Mitchell's article 'The Foundations of Australian Defamation Law' [2006] Syd. Law. Rev. 22 (2006) 28 (3) Sydney Law Review 477. The NSW Libel Act had modified but not wholly replaced the common law and prior to the publication of the Father Damien Open Letter, was subsequently amended in 1849, 1874 and 1886 (George, *ibid*, citing the Acts of the Parliament 13 Victoria c. 16, 37 Victoria c. 11 and 50 Victoria c. 26). Notwithstanding differences in the law of the United Kingdom and the law of New South Wales at the time, when Stevenson was in Sydney and had recently published the Father Damien Open Letter in pamphlet form (but not yet in newspaper circulation), the newspapers in Sydney reported the resolution of the somewhat celebrated defamation proceedings in London brought by the Irish





politician Charles Stewart Parnell against *The Times* newspaper, following the forged allegations made against Parnell published in *The Times* suggesting his complicity in the May 1882 murders of the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Lord Frederick Cavendish and the Permanent Under Secretary Thomas Henry Burke. The outcome of the London court proceedings included that ‘the TIMES sullenly and suddenly withdrew from the field and handed over £5000 and all the costs to Mr. Parnell [...] Not only have the foul and infamous charges made against the Irish leader crumbled to dust at the touch of investigation, [...] Mr. Parnell could press for many times £5000 did he wish to crush the foe at his feet. He has disdained to put his heel on the head of the serpent which hissed at him and spat poison from its fangs at him for so long. But the fangs are extracted. The rattles are removed from the hideous snake. The TIMES is as dead as Julius Caesar [...] If Mr. Parnell had only achieved this one good work – the deed of driving the TIMES to suicide – he had deserved well of his country [...] The TIMES thought to kill Mr. Parnell. Mr. Parnell has caused the death of the TIMES’: see *The Australian Star* newspaper, Monday 24 March 1890, under the heading ‘The Surrender of The “Times”’, a reprint of an article from the London Freeman’s Journal of February 8, 1890. The Times survived the outcome of the proceedings, to be employed with good effect by Stevenson in other matters such as the politics of Samoa. Additionally, the *Times* expressed the view Stevenson’s subsequent death in December 1894 “will be felt as a personal bereavement throughout the English-speaking world”: see *The Brisbane Courier*, Wednesday 19 December 1894 (p. 5). However, the seriousness of “celebrated” defamation trials is indicated by the Parnell case, and heightened Stevenson’s own vulnerability to civil defamation proceedings against him. At the time, many defamation cases in Sydney brought under the NSW Libel Act are reported in the colonial newspapers. Even where not authoritative reports of Court proceedings (as might be found somewhat ironically printed in the *Times*), again newspaper reports of Court events are indicative of proceedings and the risk of defamation claims. In Sydney from the *Australian Town and Country Journal* published 1 February 1890 (p. 12) came the report of the District Court proceedings of *McKenney and Another v. Gordon and Gotch*, in which a twelve year old girl, through her father as her legal representative, successfully brought proceedings in defamation against the publication of a paper entitled the *Parthenon*





which had accused her of cheating in a children's word competition. Verdict was entered in her favour, she was awarded damages against the publishers of one farthing and legal costs 'on the lower scale' on the basis the publishers published 'untrue statements [about her], and that it did wrongfully attempt to take away the character of this little girl'. Frankly many lawyers in Sydney and elsewhere might have looked for professional instruction in any matter arising from the publication of the Father Damien Open Letter, with the potential plaintiff a Protestant Minister, the potential defendant a celebrated published writer, self-expressed as a follower of the Protestant faith, the publication made in Sydney and internationally, the initial publication private letter republished by another Protestant minister resident outside of Australia, the subject of the matter complained of including issues of significant concern to the Catholic Church and Sydney's Cardinal Moran, members of the judiciary likely representatives of or strongly associated with the Presbyterian Church and / or the Protestant faith and / or the Catholic Church in Sydney, and the private publishers and some of the newspapers already exposed as potential defendants for publication of part or all of the Open Letter. One comment suggests the *Sydney Morning Herald* when first approached refused to publish the Open Letter for the risk of legal proceedings, but there is little proof of such a decision (notwithstanding it is a sound one for the newspaper to have made). The risks further extended from civil liability for defamation, to possible prosecution of the publishers for criminal defamation, such as occurred in Sydney at about the time against John Ferguson, the proprietor of the local Sydney *Cumberland Times* newspaper, for allegedly false statements made on April 9 1890 against an ex-Alderman J. T. Jay, of Rookwood. The *Australian Star* newspaper of Saturday, 24 May 1890 records that Ferguson was committed for trial and was to be prosecuted by the Attorney-General.

- 45 See *The Mercury* Hobart, Tasmania, Australia daily newspaper, Tuesday 9 May 1892 (p. 3) in which the following is reported: 'Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, now in Samoa, writes to the *New York Post* on January 4 disclaiming the interview regarding Samoan affairs published in New York last September, and widely quoted by the Press. He says the sentiments expressed on the political situation in Samoa must be the writer's own. They certainly are not his (Mr. Stevenson's)'.





## Romance-ing *Treasure Island*: Robert Louis Stevenson's legacy to Conrad

*Linda Dryden*

Robert Louis Stevenson's friends were devastated by his untimely death in 1894: Henry James spoke of the 'ghastly extinction of the beloved R.L.S.': 'It makes me cold and sick – and with the absolute, almost alarmed sense, of the visible, material, quenching of an indispensable light'.<sup>1</sup> The following year, 1895, was to prove a remarkable one in English literature: Joseph Conrad published *Almayer's Folly*; H. G. Wells charted new territory for the English romance and adventure genre with *The Time Machine*; and Thomas Hardy, despairing of the social prejudices of his Victorian contemporaries abandoned novel writing in favour of poetry after the poor critical reception of *Jude the Obscure*.<sup>2</sup> Within a few years literary modernism would be established and authors would increasingly adopt new forms and content for the novel. This transformation did not occur in a vacuum: writers on the cusp of modernism, like Conrad, were following in the wake of earlier writers who had challenged the conventions and assumptions of Victorian realist fiction and had begun to forge new directions for the English novel.

Stevenson was one such author, and his death at such a pivotal moment in literary history left a gap that was not easily filled. Stevenson wrote in a variety of registers and genres, causing his friend J. M. Barrie to declare in 1888 that 'Mr Stevenson is not to be labeled novelist. He wanders the byways of literature without any fixed address'.<sup>3</sup> Yet within a few years of his death Stevenson's popular reputation became reduced to that of a children's adventure story writer, based largely on *Treasure Island* (1883), *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885), and *Kidnapped* (1886), with *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) standing alone as a one-off, gothic masterpiece. This is





very reductive of Stevenson's achievements as a writer: during his lifetime he had been fêted as an essayist. Both his travel writing, like *In the South Seas* (1896), and his imperial fictions, such as *The Ebb-Tide* (1894), and 'The Beach of Falesá' (1893) were largely ignored in favour of his romances. In a further reflection of the shifting mood of the *fin de siècle*, Stevenson's imperial fiction demonstrates a critical proximity to Conrad's imperial scepticism, notably in *Heart of Darkness* (1899). It is the influence of his popular, highly saleable fiction, like *Treasure Island*, however, that is the focus of this discussion of Conrad, Ford Madox Ford and their collaboration on *Romance* (1903).

Stevenson's place and influence within debates about the novel's direction at the *fin de siècle* tend to get overlooked. Barrie's comment about Stevenson's literary flexibility alerts us to his poetry, travel writing and essays, and also to his modernity and the range of genres in his work. In 1927, J. B. Priestley said that there was 'nothing Victorian about the way in which Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) tells a story'.<sup>4</sup> Recognising the modernity of Stevenson's oeuvre, more recent critics like Alan Sandison, and Richard Ambrosini, place his work in the context of literary modernism; and scholars like Hugh Epstein, Robert Hampson, and Cedric Watts have brought Stevenson's influence on Conrad into sharper focus.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the standing of romance in general has undergone a revision, and it is a genre that is now receiving serious critical attention.<sup>6</sup> Developing on these reassessments, this discussion will focus on how, and why, Conrad and Ford sought to capitalise on Stevenson's commercial successes when they set about collaborating on *Romance*.

### **'Ought to do much better than that': mimicking Stevenson**

Stevenson had a profound effect both upon his contemporaries, and upon the writers who succeeded him, notably Conrad, whose early writing career was overshadowed by Stevenson's reputation







as a writer of romance and adventure in the South Seas.<sup>7</sup> The frequent comparisons between his own tales of European imperial failure in Malaya and Borneo and Stevenson's tales of Polynesia irritated Conrad, and his resentment lingered. This was partly because Stevenson's legacy of financial and public success was still fresh in the literary consciousness while Conrad was struggling to make his mark as a novelist and to ensure financial security through his writing. Furthermore, the literary terrain that Conrad was beginning to inhabit caused many to draw parallels between the two writers. Considering himself intellectually and artistically superior, Conrad balked at the comparison.

In January 1902, Conrad's literary agent, J. B. Pinker, refused further advances on *Romance*. In the midst of an intemperate response, Conrad famously railed against Stevenson, declaring: 'I am no sort of airy R. L. Stevenson who considered his art a prostitute and the artist as no better than one. I dare say he was punctual – but I don't envy him.'<sup>8</sup> It seems to have been a common feeling among the literary fraternity, who were gathered in Kent and East Sussex at the time, that Stevenson was not to be tolerated.<sup>9</sup> As Ralph Parfett notes, Ford complained about the "semi-biblical over-emphasis of word-jugglery" that the school [of romance revival] supposedly espoused': 'Ford's friend Stephen Crane, in reaction to reading one particular phrase by Stevenson, made a similar claim, one that Ford endorsed, namely that Stevenson "put back the clock of English fiction fifty years".<sup>10</sup> Crane, Ford and Conrad were living in close proximity at the time and comments like this on Stevenson reflect the fact that each, in his own way, was seeking a new form of expression for the English novel.

Of course, in his comments, Conrad is also being disingenuous and references to Stevenson reveal some of his own anxieties as a writer. As Hugh Epstein explains, Conrad uses Stevenson as 'a convenient butt for his sense of injury and neglect' when emphasising the 'difficulty of serious composition', and when





he 'wishes to deny his fears (of being unpopular, or of being an over-literary stylist), an image of Stevenson can supply what he wishes to deride or to dismiss'.<sup>11</sup> What seems to pique Conrad is that he regards himself as an experimental writer who is pushing the boundaries of literary art, whereas, according to Conrad, Stevenson remains content to write potboilers with little literary merit. Belittling Stevenson's achievements, and ignoring the breadth and originality of his work, was Conrad's way of excusing his own lack of productivity and of masking his own insecurities. Yet, by the time he came to collaborate on *Romance* with Ford, in the autumn of 1898, Conrad was already the author of one of the most influential texts of the twentieth century, *Heart of Darkness*. He had published *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), *Lord Jim* (1899), *Youth and Other Stories* (1902), and *Typhoon* (1902), and was about to enter his most productive and successful period of writing. He was highly regarded in literary circles, and critically acclaimed, notably by H. G. Wells.<sup>12</sup> His insecurities, it would seem, mostly revolve around financial considerations and his desire for popular acclaim, which was what he sought in his collaboration with Ford. As Ford himself says: 'Conrad was the most unrivalled hatcher of schemes for sudden and unlimited wealth or for swift and undying glory'.<sup>13</sup>

The comment to Pinker about punctuality underscores the fact that Conrad was excusing the tardiness of his instalments of *Seraphina* (later titled *Romance*) on the grounds that true art took time.<sup>14</sup> He was probably taking a further swipe at Stevenson by implying that the Scot lacked depth. As Joyce Piell Wexler says: 'The growth of a market for romance, mystery, adventure and escape novels made so many inferior writers rich that Conrad and others with higher standards felt underpaid.'<sup>15</sup> Yet 'Conrad wanted the income of popular novelists to buy time to write the kind of complex work that appealed to a minority audience'.<sup>16</sup> The problem with Conrad's dismissals, however, is that Stevenson was both a popular and a serious artist: Henry





James had regarded him as an equal, and he was feted by literary figures like W. E. Henley, who later published *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*.<sup>17</sup> Even some of Conrad's friends were bemused by his attitude towards a writer who retained the respect of many in the literary world. In 1928, reflecting on Conrad's career after his death, Ernest Dawson registered dismay at his dismissive remarks: 'Another time he was criticizing a story deliberately written in the *New Arabian Nights* vein, and said: "Ah yes, I daresay it is very good of its kind; I don't know my Stevenson at all well, but . . . ought to do much better than that"' which seemed to me almost blasphemy.<sup>18</sup> In fact Conrad's comment is highly disingenuous: he was quite familiar with Stevenson's work.

When Conrad agreed to work with Ford, it was Stevenson's romance and adventure fiction that was in his mind: Ford claims that on the occasion when he read out some of the unfinished manuscript,

Conrad had expected to hear a reading by the finest stylist in England of a work, far flung in popularity as *Treasure Island* but as 'written' as *Salammô*, by the addition to which a few touches of description, sea-atmosphere, mists, riggings and the like, in a fortnight, fortune should lie at the feet of the adventurers . . . . It was another of those magic enterprises . . . alas, after five years' work there was *Romance* with its *succès d'estime*. Not much of that, even, for the critics of our favoured land do not believe in collaboration. (*Personal Remembrance*, p. 28)

Interestingly, it was Stevenson's friend and would-be-collaborator, Henley, who probably put the idea of Stevenson into Conrad's head. By 18 October 1898 Conrad and Ford had been discussing the possibility of collaborating on Ford's project, *Seraphina*. In a letter to Conrad about the collaboration, Henley had mentioned Stevenson, 'one of the two names he had invoked





as masters of the adventure story' (*Collected Letters 2*: p. 107, n. 2). Conrad responds with,

I have meditated your letter. The line of your argument has surprised me. R. L. S. – Dumas – these are big names and I assure You it had never occurred to me they could be pronounced in connection with my plan to work with Hueffer. But You have judged proper to pronounce them and I am bound to look seriously at the aspect of the matter.<sup>19</sup> (*Collected Letters 2*: p. 107)<sup>20</sup>

If Ford's comments above are genuine, Henley's suggestion had struck a chord. Although regarding Stevenson as meretricious, Conrad and Ford were still prepared to play the 'sedulous ape' in terms of sales and popularity, and *Treasure Island* was an obvious exemplar when they set about turning *Seraphina* into a Stevensonian romance and adventure.<sup>21</sup> *Treasure Island* had kick started the career of Rider Haggard, who was famously challenged by his brother to write 'anything half so good.' Ten weeks later *King Solomon's Mines* (1886) had been written and sold thirty-one thousand copies in its first year of publication, far outstripping even Stevenson's huge sales.<sup>22</sup> Haggard continued to write in the romance and adventure tradition for over thirty years, making a fortune in the process, and indeed he was taken up by Henley, who was already publishing Stevenson, and would later champion Conrad.

When Conrad began his writing career tales of adventure were already big commercial successes, as Andrew Lang explained in his 1891 essay 'Mr. Kipling's Stories': 'There has, indeed, arisen a taste for exotic literature: people have become alive to the strangeness and fascination of the world beyond the bounds of Europe and the United States.'<sup>23</sup> Andrea White notes that by the mid-to-late 1800s the 'emphasis had shifted from books in the eighteenth century about Asia and the coasts of Africa to those





in the nineteenth century about Australia and the Pacific and the African interior' (White, pp. 9-10). In addition to Haggard, a few more instances illustrate the popularity of stories set in the distant lands of empire: by 1889 a six penny reprint of Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* (1855) had sold over 500,000 copies; G. A. Henty's publisher, W. G. Blackie was predicting a sale of 25,000,000 from his various boys' adventure fictions; R. M. Ballantyne wrote over 100 extremely popular tales of romance and adventure; and Stevenson's works, were 're-issued, collected and translated into at least twenty different languages' (White, pp. 8-10).<sup>24</sup> John Meade Faulkner's *Moonfleet* (1898), a tale of smuggling on the southern English coast was proving a publishing sensation, further fuelling the public appetite for such stories. It is, then, hardly surprising that Conrad and Ford, writing about pirates and smuggling in Cuba, should look to the imperial romance and adventure genre.

When Ford began thinking about the genre for *Seraphina* he was encouraged by Edward Garnett: 'Pirates, he was saying, were always very much in the public eye. Any details as to their lives and careers always attracted attention. *Treasure Island* was tremendously to the fore then'.<sup>25</sup> This is a point he clearly forgot, or chose to ignore, when in *A Personal Remembrance* he lamented: 'Why the writer should ever have thought of writing of pirates, heaven knows, or why, having determined to write of pirates, it should have been his ambition to treat them as if in terms of a very faded manuscript of a Greek play!' (*Personal Remembrance*, p. 14). *Treasure Island* was evidently being cited as an example of how to write a bestseller, and Ford, with hindsight, is regretting the decision to compromise a phenomenally successful formula.

Conrad's interest in a profitable writing career was in evidence from the moment *Almayer's Folly* was accepted. When he first met Garnett in Gillingham in 1894 Conrad had expostulated that he would not live in an attic for the sake of his art, indicating his urgent need to make money, and perhaps his unrealistic expect-





tations of an immediately profitable writing career. Anxious to encourage Conrad's literary ambitions, Garnett cited 'the names of various authors who, whatever they may have been doing, were certainly then not living in attics, public favourites such as Stevenson and Kipling and Rider Haggard.'<sup>26</sup> Conrad proceeded to stigmatize Haggard as being "too horrible for words." He objected specifically to the figure of Captain Goode, as well he might!<sup>27</sup> But Garnett does not mention any objection to Stevenson, and this may well be because *Almayer's Folly* was yet to appear, and it was only on its publication that reviewers began to compare the novel to Stevenson's work, a point that will be returned to.

Four years later, and committed to a literary career and the consequent financial risks, Conrad's attitude had mellowed. When Ford read out the fledgling manuscript that would become *Romance*, Conrad seems to have been more receptive to the adventure/romance mode of writing, perhaps because of Henley's invocation of the genre. Garnett's comments may also have been echoing in his ears. Furthermore, in his letters of this time and later, Conrad says little about other boy's adventure story writers, yet becomes acerbic about Stevenson, which suggests that his tales of imperial misadventure, and his success, are very much on Conrad's mind.

Publishers were keen to find the next 'RLS': so saleable were his works that, as Peter Lyon explains, S. S. McClure was willing to double Stevenson's asking price for the proposed sequel to *Kidnapped*.<sup>28</sup> In 1906, Ford and Pinker tried to persuade McClure to publish Conrad in America: 'McClure did not understand Conrad's books very well. But he prided himself on having discovered Robert L. Stevenson for America and was anxious to be in at another such discovery. Pinker, I and I dare-say other people all swore to him that if he published Conrad he would.' (*Return to Yesterday*, p. 239.) Ford describes how, in San Francisco, McClure had bought a stack of umbrellas and





persuaded 'bootblacks' to loan them out to customers in the event of a thunderstorm: 'At the next downfall that city found itself confronted with hundreds of umbrellas each one bearing on its distended upper surface the inscription: "Read *Treasure Island*"' (*Return to Yesterday*, p. 239). This was exactly the kind of publicity and popular acclaim that Pinker sought for Conrad, and Ford claims to have persuaded McClure to take on Conrad by asserting that 'to publish Conrad would be to gain at least as much honour as to have published RLS' (*Return to Yesterday*, p. 240). This anecdote underscores the fact that even Conrad's collaborator and literary agent were associating Conrad's work with Stevenson.

Richard Ambrosini notes that Conrad's sensitivity about such associations stems from publishers' lack of interest in *Seraphina*. He and Ford changed the title to *Romance*, 'thus publicly admitting their debt to Stevenson'.<sup>29</sup> Ambrosini regards *Romance* as 'an unsuccessful mix of *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island*', and calls Stevenson Conrad's 'secret sharer' (Ambrosini, p. 17). Ambrosini claims that *The Secret Agent* (1907) is modelled on Stevenson's 1884 story, 'Zero's Tale of the Explosive Bomb' and that *Victory* (1915) is a tribute to *The Ebb-Tide* (Ambrosini, pp. 21, 18). This last claim is justified by the fact that by 1915 Conrad had gained financial security following the publishing success of *Chance* (1913), and was thus less anxious about comparisons with Stevenson (Ambrosini, p. 18).

Early in 1902, however, with Ford out of action due to illness, Conrad was struggling to complete *Romance* single-handed.<sup>30</sup> He makes no mention of Stevenson in his letter of 6 January 1902 to Pinker, but does comment that Pinker can 'describe and introduce the book [...] as a Straight romantic narrative of adventure.' And yet, as if to distance himself from Stevenson, and possibly Haggard, he asserts that the book is 'not a boy's story. You may take my word for it that it is a piece of literature of which we are neither of us at all ashamed' (*Collected Letters*





2: p. 366). Interestingly though, the eponymous heroine of the book's original title, Seraphina, is also the name of the heroine of a Stevenson novel, *Prince Otto* (1885); and we know that Conrad had read *Treasure Island*, as confirmed by their mutual friend, Sidney Colvin, who averred that 'no less a person than Mr Joseph Conrad [...] prefers *In the South Seas* to *Treasure Island*'.<sup>31</sup> As the coincidences and rebuttals mount, it becomes increasingly difficult to deny the palpable presence of Stevenson hovering at the back of Conrad's consciousness.

### Romance-ing Treasure Island

If *Romance* was an artistic failure, that was as much to do with Ford as it was with Conrad, but without original manuscript evidence, individual contributions are difficult to prove. Ford's *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* includes detailed discussions of the genesis of *Romance*, offering insights into the collaborative process, but circumspection is needed where Ford is concerned. It is worth noting, however, that early in the collaboration Wells had cycled to Ford's house explicitly to dissuade him from working with Conrad:

Mr. Wells came to persuade the writer not to collaborate with Conrad. With an extreme earnestness he pleaded with the writer not to spoil Conrad's style: 'The wonderful Oriental style [...] It's as delicate as clockwork and you'll only ruin it by sticking your fingers in it.' The writer answered that Conrad wanted a collaboration and as far as the writer was concerned Conrad was going to get what he wanted. (*Personal Remembrance*, pp. 51-2)

It was a terse exchange, and Wells rode away having said no more.<sup>32</sup> Clearly his concern was with Conrad's development as a writer. Given Wells's own writing, it is likely that he had a greater grasp of the form and style of romance than Ford or Conrad, and







anticipated an artistic failure for their joint endeavour. In fact an early reviewer of *Romance*, in *The Athenaeum* for 7 November 1903, wrote of Conrad: 'For such a writer – distinctive, strong, individual – collaboration seems a mistake.'<sup>33</sup> Wells was an astute critic and an early champion of Conrad and he obviously felt the same.

The problem with Conrad and Ford attempting to write in the vein of *Treasure Island* or *Kidnapped* was that at this point they were trying to shift the direction of the novel, towards what they called the 'New Form',<sup>34</sup> laying the foundations, even, for what would become the modernist novel.<sup>35</sup> But *Romance* was also conceived as a money-earner. Haggard had succeeded in his bid to out-do Stevenson because he had extrapolated a basic formula from *Treasure Island* and other boys' adventure romances. Substituting men for boys, including more adult themes of sexuality and injecting supernatural elements, Haggard brought the romance and adventure genre to another generation of readers, without losing its essential simplicity and its uncompromised, upright English heroes. Conrad and Ford, on the other hand, were constitutionally and artistically incapable of writing in this mode.

Conrad was much more successful when it came to subverting the conventions of imperial romance and adventure.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Ford was by no means inclined to the adventure romance mode, and his work up to this point and immediately afterwards demonstrates no real engagement with, imperial romance literature.<sup>37</sup> His other collaboration with Conrad, *The Inheritors* (1901), though arguably more successful, was inspired by Wells's scientific romances, but evinces a similar lack of stylistic facility in that genre.<sup>38</sup> In fact neither writer is remembered for their success in writing romance and adventure or science fiction and early reviewers of *Romance* were inclined to agree. The critic for *Munsey's Magazine*, for example, in January 1905, cautions that Conrad 'does not seem to gain by collaborating with





another writer', averring that he 'is quite or very nearly the sole writer of sea stories who combines technical knowledge of matters maritime with a trained literary sense. Now, "Romance," for all that much of its adventure takes place upon the sea, is not a sea story. Any landlubber might have written it' (*Contemporary Reviews* 2: 181). In fact, by 1905 Conrad had extended his range considerably, but the reviewer was still correct to recognize that Conrad is not playing to his strengths, neither in this collaboration, nor in his choice of subject matter.

Indeed, a difference of style seems to have hampered progress. Conrad's letter to William Blackwood on 4 July 1901 outlines the problem: he speaks of having edited *Seraphina* because some 'passages struck me as lacking vigour – others wrong in tone – too much *written* in fact; and therefore I want to write them once more, after my own fashion' (*Collected Letters* 2: p. 338). There is an irony here in that Ford had claimed that Conrad was expecting something 'as written as *Salammbô*' when he first read the manuscript. Presumably, the publishers' rejections caused Conrad to have second thoughts, and his objection to '*written*'-ness seems to refer to Ford's contributions, since he wants to rewrite them 'after my own fashion.' While Conrad's own writing lacks the economy of style and narrative impetus of Stevensonian romance, he is still alert to the need for more 'vigour'. This suggests that he feels impeded by Ford's style and his own inability to write in that mode. Conrad then describes the origins of the story and concludes with:

We try to produce a variation from the usual type of romance our point of view being that the feeling of the romantic in life lies principally in the glamour memory throws over the past and arises from contact with a different race and a different temperament [...]. (*Collected Letters* 2: p. 339)

Perhaps trying to create 'a variation from the usual type of





romance' is their principal mistake, but one doubts if Conrad, or Ford, could have produced a successful romance in any case. Conrad's invocation of 'glamour' reminds us that only two years earlier, in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow, having seen the reality of the Africa of his boyhood dreams, declares 'The glamour's off'; and it is the deliberate lack of glamour in that novella that singles it out as such a powerful critique of European imperialism.<sup>39</sup>

Despite early reviewers mistaking Conrad's tales for romance and adventure narratives, they are in fact much closer to Stevenson's late, more realistic stories of drifters, criminals and egoists in the South Seas than they are to *Treasure Island*. In fact we find a similar ambivalence about the righteousness of power and conquest in *Kidnapped* (1886); and *Catriona* (1893) features a trial and unjust accusations, much in the same way as the finale of *Romance* deals with John Kemp's arraignment and acquittal.<sup>40</sup> Conrad seems wilfully to ignore the darker, more subversive elements of Stevenson's writing; and is either unconscious of, or deliberately avoids acknowledging the debt he may owe to Stevenson, in terms of mood and plot devices. Nevertheless, many favourable early reviewers of *Romance* recognized the link. For example, the reviewer for *The Sketch* on 4 November 1903 claims that 'The adventures of the hero are presented so vividly that recollections of R. L. Stevenson come to the reader again and again' (*Contemporary Reviews* 2: 144). Such comparisons may not have gratified Conrad, but his intention to emulate Stevenson was nevertheless remarked upon in many other early reviews.<sup>41</sup>

After months of trying to place *Seraphina*, and following Blackwood's rejection, Conrad wrote to Pinker on 7 November 1901 that he had finished the manuscript. He says he had 'put remarkable guts into that story' and made it 'more interesting and exciting,' and proceeds to explain how he and Ford had reinterpreted the adventure genre: 'It is, you understand, a story of adventure but written not exactly according to the usual





formula for work of that kind. We have tried to convey a certain impressionism of picturesqueness – something new in its effect as a whole' (*Collected Letters 2*: pp. 357-8). Committed to 'literary impressionism' Conrad and Ford wanted to exploit the public thirst for adventure fiction while trying at the same time to remodel its style according to their own artistic principles.<sup>42</sup> It was a tactic that was ill-conceived from the start.

### The failure of *Romance*

The novel's opening and closing pages mention 'romance' repeatedly, emphasising the point about genre. Indeed, a comparison between the openings of *Romance* and *Treasure Island* reveals some striking similarities. The first page of *Romance* exemplifies the atmospheric build-up that Conrad and Ford were seeking:

I remember the chilly smell of the typical West Indian store, the indescribable smell of damp gloom, of locos, of pimento, of olive oil, of new sugar, of new rum; the glassy double sheen of Ramon's great spectacles, the piercing eyes in the mahogany face while the tap, tap, tap of a cane on the flags went on behind the inner door; the click of the latch; the stream of light. The door, petulantly thrust inwards, struck against some barrels. I remember the rattling of the bolts on that door, and the tall figure that appeared there, snuff-box in hand.<sup>43</sup>

The opening of *Treasure Island* is remarkably similar:

I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow; a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man; his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulders of his soiled blue coat; his hands ragged and scarred, with black broken nails; and the sabre cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white. I





remember him looking round the cove and whistling to himself as he did so, and then breaking out in that old sea-song that he sang so often afterwards: –

‘Fifteen men on a dead man’s chest –

Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!’

in the high, old tottering voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken at the capstan bars.<sup>44</sup>

The passages are notably similar, not just in the invocation of memory and nostalgia to initiate the narrative, but in the deliberate use of ‘I remember’ to begin two sentences in each passage. Then there are the detailed descriptions of two central characters, built up through a series of related clauses. But here the similarities end: Conrad and Ford’s style is impressionistic, relying initially on atmosphere, the sounds and smells, to build the effect before the entry of the mysterious man in the doorway. Their description of Seraphina’s father, Don Balthazar, continues for another eight lines, taking in his wrists, shirt ruffles, hooked nose, cocked hat and bowed legs, as if a camera, zooming in on minute details, is taking snapshots, each detail deepening the sense of the ‘otherness’ of this man, the potential menace. The effect is lugubrious, and the story scarcely moves forward for two pages before the authors leave the remote Cuban past and plunge us further back into Kemp’s childhood and his parents’ histories. The narrative trajectory is initially retrogressive and confusing, lacking the clarity and pace of *Treasure Island*. This is a common Conradian technique for his narrative lines are frequently fractured, ponderous and nostalgic: one thinks in particular of *Lord Jim* (1901) and *Nostromo* (1904).

Stevenson uses the same cumulative description, but his narrative is altogether more brisk, including only enough detail to build a picture of a scruffy, intriguing rogue, Long John Silver. Instead of dwelling on minute detail, Stevenson’s economy of style requires only the most striking features – the tarry pigtail,





the livid facial scar – to indicate a mysterious, shady character with a colourful, romantic past, and, as yet, no mention of the missing leg – that detail is saved for effect a little later. Having Silver break into the jaunty sea-shanty deliberately jars with the descriptive passage to instil a hint of menace coupled with his characteristic playful slyness. It is a clever device that delivers a vivid sense of Silver's complexity and unpredictability in just a few lines. This kind of precision and conciseness is at odds with Conrad's (and Ford's) impressionistic mode of writing. In trying to emulate the opening to *Treasure Island*, they scupper any chance of writing a romance novel because their will-to-impressionism is at odds with Stevenson's economy and pace.

It is impossible to assert with absolute certainty that Conrad and Ford set about deliberately copying *Treasure Island* in the opening of *Romance*, but the similarities outlined here are close enough to suggest that they may have used Stevenson's novel as an exemplar, especially given Conrad's statements about their intention to write a romance. At over twice the length of *Treasure Island*, however, *Romance* is a demanding read. Here, for example, the narrator Kemp describes a fog that he hopes will conceal his escape from pirates:

Would the fog last long enough to serve my turn? That was the only question; and I believed it would, for it settled lower; it settled down denser, almost too heavy to be stirred by the fitful efforts of the breeze. It was a true night fog of the tropics, that, born after sunset, tries to creep back into the warm bosom of the sea before sunrise. (*Romance*, p. 232)

The passage continues for another ten lines recalling an earlier, similar experience of fog. The action is agonisingly delayed to convey the experience of a tropical fog; and given Conrad's travels in the tropics, it is probably his description. The impera-





tive to convey an impression of the fog is favoured at the expense of narrative flow and pace, and the romantic excitement is dissipated. *Romance* is full of such delayed narrative impetus, making for a frustrating read, even if one were not expecting a romance. By refusing a clear moral closure in *Treasure Island* Stevenson was innovative with the genre in his own way, but he never forgot the overall narrative impetus. Conrad and Ford, in reinterpreting the romance genre, have missed the overarching requirement of a clear narrative structure and exposition, as indeed the reviewer for *The Academy and Literature*, on 31 October, 1903, recognized, averring that the novel is ‘all paint, the picture is soulless, inspiration drowned with elaboration’ (*Contemporary Reviews* 2: 145).

*Romance* ends with reflections on the nature of romance. The last page emphasises ‘suffering’ as a human condition: ‘For suffering is the lot of man, but not the inevitable failure or worthless despair which is without end – suffering, the mark of manhood, which bears within its pain a hope of felicity, like a jewel set in iron’ (*Romance*, p. 478). There is little doubting Conrad’s contribution to this passage – ‘felicity’ and the notions of suffering alert us immediately to his preoccupations. In the final two pages *Romance* ‘suffering/s’ appears four times, and this notion of painful experience permeates the close of the novel to the extent that the authors finally, inextricably ally suffering to romance itself. As an old man, nostalgically reflecting on the life that he and Seraphina have experienced since their youthful adventures, Kemp’s words are designed to present a philosophy for life:

And, looking back, we see *Romance* – that subtle thing that is a mirage – that is life. It is the goodness of the years we have lived through, of the old time when we did this or that, when we dwelt here or there [...] that she and I should have passed through so much, good chance and evil chance, sad hours and joyful, all lived down and swept away into





the little heap of dust that is a life. That, too, is Romance!  
(*Romance*, pp. 478-9.)

The passage posits romance as nostalgia, the 'glamour' mentioned earlier, and it is overwrought and tinged with sadness for things gone. Katherine Baxter speaks of the novel's 'recognition of the constant absence of romance as Romance in the living present of our experience' or the 'gap romance produces as an absent present to be filled by narration of the thing that is not there'.<sup>45</sup> *Romance* is thus always conscious of a past that can never be retrieved or relived, a past replete with glamour never to be replicated in the present, hence the nostalgia, the longing, and the pain.

The problem for the authors was that they were seeking to write a romance and adventure novel that would combine the popularity of *Treasure Island* with the aesthetic qualities of Flaubert's *Salammbô* wanting, in effect, the popularity of romance for its revenue generating properties, but unwilling to surrender their artistic ideals. The resultant novel ended up delivering neither, and, as Baxter confirms it did not 'meet their financial expectations and failed to boost their share of the market in any significant way'.<sup>46</sup> With its convoluted plot, long periods of inertia, and self-reflective reveries, *Romance* falls far short of the expectations raised by its deliberately chosen title. It is little wonder that Conrad, and Ford, were disappointed in the mixed reviews, given the years it took to write, and the expectations that they had of following in Stevenson's, and others' footsteps.

Nearly twenty years after Stevenson's bestseller, Conrad and Ford's will-to-experimental impressionism compromised the intended romance emphasis of their collaboration. It is a problem that the reviewer for *The Glasgow Evening News*, 31 December 1903, identified, calling the article 'The Perils of Collaboration': 'Romance, in fact, is an illusion. But when Mr Conrad and Mr Hueffer set out to demonstrate to us that undeni-







able fact by way of a strictly realistic novel, dealing with the very materials most commonly associated with romance, one cannot but feel it a misdirected experiment' (*Contemporary Reviews* 2: 158). John Masefield, writing in *The Speaker* on 14 November, 1903, agrees: 'In this new book, *Romance*, Mr. Conrad has collaborated with Mr. F. M. Hueffer and the collaboration has been salutary in some respects, but in others, if not baneful, at least of doubtful benefit' (*Contemporary Reviews* 2: 154). Many astute critics thus realized that the collaboration had failed to deliver its intended new interpretation of the romance genre.

The genesis of *Treasure Island* in 1883 was simply to satisfy Lloyd Osbourne's boyish appetite for adventure fiction. Narrative pace, drama on the high seas and tropical islands, colourful villains, and a safe return home possessed of a fortune were hallmarks of the genre. That Stevenson managed to satisfy this narrative formula, and to simultaneously subvert it, is a measure of his power as writer and control over his subject matter. His subtle questioning of the simple values of traditional romance and adventure – Silver's charisma and eventual escape from retribution, the greed of the adventurers, Jim's conflicted loyalties – add depth to the genre without diluting or overshadowing its overall purpose. Thus, instead of the maudlin reflections of the elderly Kemp, Jim Hawkins' mature summary in *Treasure Island* recalls the adventure, but also the haunting menace of the tale, without undue moralising:

The bar silver and the arms still lie, for all that I know, where Flint buried them; and certainly they shall lie there for me. Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island; and the worst dreams that I ever have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts, or start upright in bed, with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: 'Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!' (*Treasure Island*, p. 292)





In the space of one paragraph, Stevenson invokes the romance of the adventure and the enduring terror engendered by the experience, rendered in the adult as recurring nightmares. He isolates the key points of the story: greed for silver, the pirate Flint, the sea voyage, the island, and the parrot as the symbol of Silver's menace.

*Treasure Island* is no stereotypical romance and adventure: it is both serious and playful, with a darker mood than anything by writers like Haggard, Henty, Kingston or Ballantyne. It is a masterpiece of narrative economy and colourful adventure, a 'ripping yarn', with a darker underbelly. *Romance* is ponderous and wordy, exemplifying H. G. Wells's complaint about Conrad's style in *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896): 'it never seems to dawn upon [Conrad] that, if a sentence fails to carry the full weight and implication it was meant to do, the remedy is not to add a qualifying clause, but to reject it and try another. His sentences are not unities, they are multitudinous tandems, and he has still to learn the great half of his art, the art of leaving things unwritten'.<sup>47</sup>

Stevenson was only too aware of the need for selectivity when writing fiction. Joining the famous debate on the nature of high art between Walter Besant and Henry James, Stevenson published his response, 'A Humble Remonstrance' in *Longman's Magazine* in May, 1884. He claims that truth is 'a word of very debatable propriety'. Arguing that art could never replicate reality, Stevenson lays down his manifesto for artistic creation: 'What, then, is the object, what the method, of an art, and what the source of its power? The whole secret is that no art does "compete with life". Man's one method, whether he reasons or creates, is to half-shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality.'<sup>48</sup> Filtering out extraneous detail, Stevenson distils the essence of romance and adventure. Conrad, on the other hand, has been frequently criticised for his prolixity and 'adjectival insistence'.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, he issued his own manifesto on the art of fiction in his famous Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*,





declaring that 'All art [...] appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions'.<sup>50</sup> Conrad aims to do justice to the visible, recognisable universe of human experience, and to achieve this he argues for the 'impression' of what we see, hear and feel. Such an aim precludes Stevenson's selectivity, seeking not clarity, but a complexity in artistic expression that is at odds with Stevenson's concept of excluding the 'dazzle and confusion of reality,' and with the narrative mode of romance more generally.

As a consequence, Wells complains that Conrad's narrative in *An Outcast* is opaque: 'his story is not so much told as seen intermittently through a haze of sentences. His style is like a river mist; for a space things are seen clearly, and then comes a great grey bank of printed matter, page on page, creeping round the reader, swallowing him up' (*Critical Heritage*, p. 75). Conrad, however, remained true to his art and, in *Heart of Darkness*, defends his stylistic opacity by remarking that to Marlow 'the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze'.<sup>51</sup> This passage certainly invokes the unique quality of Conrad's style, but at the same time it indicates why it is not necessarily suited to the swifter demands of romance narrative.

### **From romance to actuality: 'the smell and the look of the thing'**

Conrad and Ford felt deflated by some of the adverse critical responses to *Romance*, but in fact the novel did receive appreciative reviews on publication.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, its failure to find a lasting audience beyond that initial reception suggests that Conrad is not at his best when attempting to emulate another author. Even so, they do share some common interests.

Stevenson's tales *The Beach of Falesá*, *The Ebb-Tide*, and to





some extent 'The Bottle Imp' and 'The Isle of Voices' exemplify European corruption, debauchery, and violence in the Pacific islands, and it is in this terrain that we find common ground between Stevenson and Conrad, a factor that may account for Conrad's anxiety and his dismissive remarks. Prior to his untimely death Stevenson had begun to move the tale of imperial adventure into murkier territory, to question the morality and validity of the imperial enterprise. His compromised heroes and corrupt traders anticipate Conrad's themes by eschewing the romantic versions of imperial adventure promoted by the likes of Haggard.

Ambrosini goes so far as to assert that Conrad's subversion of the imperial romance 'would have been impossible if Stevenson had not opened a space critical of adventure by making the rejection of the glamour associated with this idea a constant theme in both his fiction and his nonfiction' (Ambrosini, pp. 23-4). While Ambrosini may overstate the matter, Stevenson's Polynesian tales certainly demonstrate scepticism about the imperial project that anticipates Conrad's critique. In fact Conrad was an early exponent of narratives that challenged Victorian realism's confidence in objective truth and imperial sovereignty,<sup>53</sup> and Priestly could have easily said of Conrad, too, that there was 'nothing Victorian' about the way he told a story. So Conrad's early Malay tales can be seen to follow *The Beach of Falesá* and *The Ebb-Tide*, since they explore the same kind of literary and ideological terrain. Although set in Polynesia rather than the Malay Archipelago, Stevenson's stories spring from his deep knowledge of the region, and his immersion in its culture, just as Conrad had been inspired by his voyages in the South China Seas. Stevenson was conscious of how pioneering this break with imperial narrative tradition was, averring that *The Beach of Falesá* –

is the first realistic South Seas story; I mean with real South Sea character and details of life; everybody else who has





tried, that I have seen, got carried away by the romance and ended in a kind of sugar candy sham epic, and the whole effect was lost – there was no etching, no human grin, consequently no conviction. Now I have got the smell and look of the thing a good deal.<sup>54</sup>

He developed his theme even further in *The Ebb-Tide*, describing that novella to Sidney Colvin on Tuesday 6 June, 1893: ‘There it is, and about as grim a tale as was ever written, and as grimy, and as hateful’ (*Letters* 8: p. 91). He continues in the same vein to Edmund Gosse on 10 June 1893, calling the tale ‘a dreadful, grimy business’ with ‘a vilely realistic dialogue’ that ‘has sown my head with grey hairs’ (*Letters* 8: p. 103). Writing to Henry James on 17 June 1893, he seems to relish engaging with such controversial material:

My dear man the grimness of that story is not to be depicted in words! There are only four characters to be sure, but they are such a troop of swine! And their behaviour is really so deeply beneath any possible standard, that on a retrospect I wonder I have been able to endure them myself until the yarn was finished (*Letters* 8: p. 107).

One can almost detect a note of triumph in Stevenson’s tone as he describes his protagonists’ lack of moral compass.

As Roderick Watson has affirmed ‘*The Ebb-Tide* is undoubtedly Stevenson’s modernist masterpiece’ and a ‘powerful critique of colonial reality’.<sup>55</sup> Watson draws parallels with *Heart of Darkness* and offers a convincing argument for Stevenson’s contribution to the themes of modernist literature when he states that *The Ebb-Tide* ‘is also haunted by Stevenson’s sense of our mislocated place in a much larger universe, on our own island world, as it were, rather as he had imagined the earth itself as a blood-stained “mutinied ship” scudding through space in “Pulvis





et Umbra” (Watson, pp. 73-4.) Such dark, almost nihilistic visions in his later South Seas tales remind us that Stevenson was the author of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1887), a text that deals with the fragmentation of the integrity of the self, in another reflection of modernist sensibilities and of Conrad’s own perception of himself as *homo duplex*. Indeed, Watson deftly charts the unreliability of the narrative voices in *Jekyll and Hyde*, of which there are several, which is ‘similar to postmodern criticism’s fascination with unreliable narrators and the innate instability and ambiguity of all texts’ (Watson, p. 70).

### Conclusion: ‘strange case’ of Conrad and Stevenson

Given the similarities in theme, subject matter and characterisation between Conrad and Stevenson’s imperial tales, and if we accept that *Treasure Island* was an exemplar for Conrad and Ford when they collaborated on *Romance*, it seems strange that Conrad is so frequently scathing about Stevenson. One clue as to why may lie in an early review of *An Outcast of the Islands*. On 18 April 1896 the reviewer for the *National Observer* found Conrad’s new novel ‘undeniably dull’ before proceeding to compare it unfavourably with a Stevenson novel in terms that could almost be describing *Romance*:

It is like one Mr Stevenson’s South Sea stories, grown miraculously long and miraculously tedious. There is no crispness about it and the action is not quick enough, a serious charge to make against a book of adventure. Even schoolboys will probably have some difficulty in getting through it and we fear adults will find it impossible. (*Critical Heritage*, p.70.)

When Wells had made similar criticisms of his style, Conrad was vocal in letters to his friends about how he had been misunderstood, and the criticism rankled for some years. The *National*





*Observer* review would not have endeared him to Stevenson, especially since the reviewer, like many at the time, assumed that the novel was an adventure romance and Norman Sherry cites numerous other examples of Conrad being compared to Stevenson at the time.<sup>56</sup> Nor would the relative failure of *Romance* have helped, for despite his hopes, with Ford, to take the romance/adventure novel to a new level Conrad simply could not emulate Stevenson's success, and this left him bitter, as exemplified by another letter to Pinker on 8 April, 1907:

My head seethes with ideas but I am dead tired not with the work but with the infernal stress under which it is done. I wish I had the sunny nature people talk of in connection with Stevenson. But then Stevenson perhaps – but never mind.<sup>57</sup>

He leaves his intention dangling, but the dismissal of Stevenson's oeuvre is implicit.

Conrad's fortunes changed with the success of *Chance* in 1913. He became feted as an author and achieved some of the financial security he so desperately sought. He continued to make unfavourable remarks about Stevenson, but was more secure in terms of his own literary territory, having moved into other genres and having found a readership for his work. If we are to agree with Ambrosini, he may even have paid homage to Stevenson through the close mirroring of *The Ebb-Tide's* themes, setting, and structure in *Victory*. Epstein has extensively outlined the debt that *Victory* owes to *The Ebb-Tide*, and Watts has also acknowledged, albeit with caveats, Conrad's use of the story.<sup>58</sup> Following Epstein and Watts' evaluations, recalling Colvin's assertion that Conrad had read *Treasure Island*, and acknowledging that *Romance* bears some striking resemblances to that novel, it is tempting to speculate that the watery death of Gentleman Jones in *Victory* may have been inspired by that of Israel Hands in Stevenson's





novel. Jim Hawkins vividly describes Hands' final resting place:

'As the water settled, I could see him lying huddled together on the clean, bright sand in the shadow of the vessel's sides. A fish or two whipped past his body. Sometimes, by the quivering of the water, he appeared to move a little, as if he were trying to rise. But he was dead enough for all that, being both shot and drowned, and was food for fish in the very place where he had designed my slaughter.' (*Treasure Island*, p. 218)

Jones ends up on the seabed in a similar huddle:

'The water's very clear there, and I could see him huddled up on the bottom between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue silk bag, with only the head and the feet sticking out.'<sup>59</sup>

The vision of both men's bodies lying in the pellucid waters of the South Seas is certainly compelling and unusual.

Unaware of how it rankled with Conrad, reviewers nevertheless persisted in drawing comparisons with Stevenson. On 22 December 1900, P. M. P., for *The Post-Standard* (Syracuse, New York), wrote a mock letter to Stevenson by way of a review of *Lord Jim*, entitled, 'Mr. Conrad's "Lord Jim": A Letter to Robert Louis Stevenson on the Subject – The Strange Career of a Man, who Might have been Brave, but Died in the Shadow of Cowardice'.<sup>60</sup> The review discusses the parallels between the two authors, but feels that Conrad still has some way to go to match Stevenson, concluding with: 'I have reason to believe, sir, that the mention in this column of Mr. Conrad's name in conjunction with yours will draw attention to him, for among the readers of this paper there are many who never hear the name of Stevenson without a thrill of pleasure' (*Contemporary Reviews* 1: 337). Conrad may







not have liked the review, but others clearly felt that likening him to Stevenson was a compliment. In the end it is my opinion that Conrad's barbed comments about Stevenson mask a grudging recognition that he was a better writer than he would publicly admit, and the textual and other evidence presented here points to the possibility that Stevenson was indeed 'Conrad's secret sharer.'

## NOTES

- 1 Leon Edel, ed., *Letters III* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974-84) p. 495.
- 2 Of course Hardy was still to publish *The Well Beloved* (1897), but apart from that novel he turned his attention exclusively to poetry. 1895 also witnessed the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde and the publication in English translation of Max Nordau's *Degeneration*.
- 3 J. M. Barrie, *British Weekly*. vol. 9 (2 November 1888).
- 4 J. B. Priestley, *The English Novel* (London: Ernest Benn, 1931), p. 117.
- 5 See Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Richard Ambrosini, *R. L. Stevenson: la poetica del romanzo* (Bulzoni: Rome, 2001); Hugh Epstein, 'Victory's Marionettes: Conrad's Revisitation of Stevenson,' in Carabine, Keith, Owen Knowles and Paul Armstrong eds, *Conrad, James and Other Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp.189-216; Robert Hampson 'Treasure Island, and Victory: Maps, Class, and Sexuality' in Linda Dryden, Stephen Arata and Eric Massie eds, *Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad: Writers of Transition* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2009); and Cedric Watts, 'The Ebb-Tide and Victory', in *Conradiana* vol. 28, no. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 133-37.
- 6 See in particular, Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Parrinder, Patrick and Andrzej Gaziorek eds, *The Oxford History of the Novel in English. Volume Four: The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 7 This is a point that has been made by others, notably Andrea White





in *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), hereafter cited in text as White. Also see Hugh Epstein in 'Victory's Marionettes: Conrad's Revisitation of Stevenson'.

- 8 Karl, Frederick R. and Laurence Davies eds, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad vol. 2 1898-1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 371, hereafter cited in text as *Collected Letters*.
- 9 For more discussion of this literary fraternity see Linda Dryden, 'Conrad, Ford, Wells and Modernism' in *L'Epoque Conradienne: Journal of the French Conrad Society* Volume 37, 2011, pp. 57-68, and Linda Dryden, 'Conrad, Wells and the English Novel, forthcoming in *Studies in the Novel* (Summer 2013).
- 10 Ralph Parfect, 'Romances of Nationhood: Ford and the Adventure Story Tradition', *International Ford Madox Ford Studies*, vol. 5, *Ford Madox Ford and Englishness*, (2006), p. 38. Parfect notes that this comment probably refers to 'Markheim' (1885).
- 11 Hugh Epstein, 'Victory's Marionettes: Conrad's Revisitation of Stevenson,' in *Carabine*, Keith, Owen Knowles and Paul Armstrong eds, *Conrad, James and Other Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 190-1.
- 12 Wells's favourable review of *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), led to a short-lived friendship with Conrad that was punctuated by frequent artistic differences. In this observation and others I am grateful to Rory Watson for his insightful suggestions.
- 13 Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1924), p. 24. Hereafter cited in text as *Personal Remembrance*.
- 14 I will refer to this novel as *Romance* from here on unless it is clear from letters etc. that *Seraphina* is required.
- 15 Joyce Piell Wexler, *Who Paid for Modernism: Art, Money and the Fiction of Conrad, Joyce and Lawrence* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), p. 30.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- 17 Furthermore, the first issue of the ambitious *Cosmopolis* magazine, where 'An Outpost of Progress' (1897) would later appear, included both the first instalment of Stevenson's *Weir of Hermiston*, and Henry James's 'The Figure in the Carpet' in January 1896. *Cosmopolis: An International Review* appeared briefly between





- January 1896 and November 1898, with thirty-five issues. For more details see *Conrad First: The Joseph Conrad Periodical Archive* at <http://www.conradfirst.net/view/periodical?id=73>.
- 18 Ernest Dawson, 'Some Recollections of Joseph Conrad,' *Fortnightly Review* (August 1928), p. 207.
- 19 At this point Ford had not yet changed his name and was still known as Ford Madox Hueffer.
- 20 It would be interesting to speculate whether Conrad was also aware that Dumas, like Stevenson, was also a prodigiously fast writer.
- 21 'Sedulous ape' refers to Stevenson's discussion of the authors and the literature that inspired him to become a writer. See 'A College Magazine' in *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), p. 59.
- 22 Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study* (Glasgow: The Fontana Press, 1991), pp. 16-18.
- 23 Andrew Lang, *Essays in Little* (London: Henry and Co., 1891), p. 200. Andrea White notes that from as early as 1589 with Richard Hakluyt's *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation* travel writing had been whetting the public appetite for writing about distant lands. In fact, long before that John Mandeville's *Travels* (circa 1357) had proved extremely popular.
- 24 For a fuller discussion of the rise of travel fiction and boys' adventure novels see White pp. 8-11.
- 25 Ford Madox Ford, *Return to Yesterday* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1999), p. 133, hereafter cited in text as *Return to Yesterday*.
- 26 Of course Stevenson was to die unexpectedly the next month, 3 December 1894, so Garnett's invocation of him as a living writer, thriving from his earnings is explained.
- 27 Edward Garnett ed., *Letters from Joseph Conrad* (New York: Charter Books, 1956), p. 9.
- 28 See Peter Lyon, *Success Story: The Life and Times of S.S. McClure* (New York: Scribner, 1963), p. 89.
- 29 Richard Ambrosini, 'History, Criticism, Theory, and the Strange Case of Joseph Conrad and R. L. Stevenson' in *Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad: Writers of Transition*, p. 17. Hereafter cited in text as 'Ambrosini'.





- 30 Conrad makes the point in letters to Pinker and David Meldrum, on 6 and 7 January 1902 respectively, that Ford had choked on a chicken bone before Christmas and had been ill ever since, unable to contribute anything to *Seraphina*. See *Collected Letters* 2, pp. 365-7.
- 31 Sidney Colvin, ed., *Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, vol. 3 (New York: Scribner's, 1911), p. 308.
- 32 It would seem that relations between Ford and Wells were quite frosty as evidenced by various comments in *A Personal Remembrance*. This is just one example of their differences.
- 33 In John Peters ed. *Contemporary Reviews, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, Volume 2: Typhoon to Under Western Eyes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 149, hereafter cited in text as *Contemporary Reviews*.
- 34 See Ford's discussion of their quest for the 'New Form' in *A Personal Remembrance*, p. 35.
- 35 For more discussion of what Conrad and Ford were trying to do see Endnote 9 above.
- 36 For example, see Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).
- 37 Ralph Parfait, however, points out that there are elements of adventure fiction in some of Ford's fairy tales of the 1890s. See Parfait pp. 39-40.
- 38 Conrad and Ford were living close to Wells at the time of collaborating on both novels and Wells's proximity prompted their efforts on *The Inheritors*.
- 39 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1946), p. 52.
- 40 Here and elsewhere I am grateful to Laurence Davies for his perceptive and invaluable advice.
- 41 References to how the novel evokes Stevenson appear in reviews in *The Daily News*, 30 October 1903, *The Birmingham Post*, 13 November 1903, and *The Sun* (New York), 8 May 1904, among others (see *Contemporary Reviews* 2, pp. 140, 152, 165). In fact volume 2 of *Contemporary Reviews* contains 47 references to Stevenson in connection with Conrad more generally, indicating how closely they were associated in the public mind.
- 42 For further discussion, see Dryden at Endnote 9 above.





- 43 Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer, *Romance: A Novel* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, n.d.), p. 5, hereafter cited in text as *Romance*.
- 44 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1883), p. 1, hereafter cited in text as *Treasure Island*.
- 45 Katherine Baxter, *Joseph Conrad and the Swansong of Romance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 65.
- 46 Ibid., p. 50.
- 47 Norman Sherry, *Joseph Conrad: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 75, hereafter cited in text as *Critical Heritage*.
- 48 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance,' in *Memories and Portraits*, Skerryvore edn (London: William Heinemann, 1925), pp. 158-9.
- 49 This is a term first coined by F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1972), p. 204.
- 50 Joseph Conrad, 'Preface' to 'The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1887), p. 13.
- 51 *Heart of Darkness*, p. 48.
- 52 See Allan H. Simmons, ed., *Contemporary Reviews. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, vol. 1: Almayer's Folly to Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.)
- 53 See Linda Dryden, "Introduction" in *Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad: Writers of Transition*, pp. 1-14.
- 54 Booth, Bradford A. and Ernest Mehew, eds, *Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994-5), vol. 7, p. 161. Hereafter cited in text as *Letters*.
- 55 Roderick Watson, 'Modernism,' in *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Caroline McCracken-Flesher ed. (New York: The Modern Languages Association of America, 2013), p. 73, hereafter cited in text as Watson.
- 56 See Norman Sherry, *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 70, 122, 142, 158, 256, 354.
- 57 Karl, Frederick R. and Laurence Davies eds, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad vol. 3 1903-1907* (Cambridge: Cambridge University





Press, 1988), p. 428.

58 See Epstein and Watts, cited in Endnote 5 above.

59 Joseph Conrad, *Victory: An Island Tale* (London: The Gresham Publishing Co. Ltd., 1925), p. 411.

60 Allan H. Simmons ed. *Contemporary Reviews*, pp. 335-7.





## ‘Playing among the graves’ in Colinton Manse: Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘Scottish Gothic’ *Garden of Verses*

Adam Lawrence

An analysis of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (1885) reveals a fascination with childhood ‘play’ and the construction of make-believe worlds. The volume is filled with descriptions of toy soldiers, childhood games, and exotic journeys to foreign places; and the child persona describes how he is able to use his imagination to transport himself to ‘the pleasant Land of Play; / – To the fairy-land afar’ (‘The Little Land’, CA: IX).<sup>1</sup> There is certainly an element of idealism here: the verses present the child as an adept whose active imagination seemingly enables him to transcend previously insuperable boundaries. However, the collection also has a darker side to it, reflecting Stevenson’s childhood bouts of sickness, as well as his adult interest in figures of doubleness and his own Scottish ancestry.

In constructing *A Child’s Garden*, Stevenson drew on a wide range of experiences, which were at times happy, and – what is often neglected – at times ‘morbid’. As Stevenson states in one of his reminiscences,<sup>2</sup> ‘I was an only child and, it may be in consequence, both intelligent and sickly. I have three powerful impressions of my childhood: my sufferings when I was sick, my delights in convalescence at my grandfather’s manse of Colinton, near Edinburgh, and the unnatural activity of my mind after I was in bed at night’.<sup>3</sup> Hoping to find some respite from the disruptions of his childhood illness and feeling a sense of isolation made keen by his separation from his ancestral ‘home’, the adult Stevenson clearly saw Colinton as a potential source of rejuvenation, as well as a landscape that could bring him back in touch with his Scottish roots. ‘Out of my reminiscences of life in that dear place’, Stevenson once claimed, ‘all the morbid and painful





elements have disappeared [...] That was my golden age: *et ego in Arcadia vixi*'.<sup>4</sup> But this 'Arcadia' was haunted by the unpredictability of his pulmonary complaint: the very first poem of *A Child's Garden*, 'Bed in Summer' (CGOV: I), alludes to the fact that Stevenson's chronically weak lungs forced him to 'go to bed by day', while other poems allude to 'the breath of the Bogie in my hair' ('North-West Passage', CGOV: XLI) and the shadow that 'grow[s] / Not at all like proper children' ('My Shadow', CGOV: XVIII). In another of his reminiscences, Stevenson recalls that the Manse was 'full of homely Scottish superstitions of grues and ghosts and goblins . . . . Often after nightfall have I looked long and eagerly from the manse windows to see the "spunkies" playing among the graves'.<sup>5</sup> These denizens of Scottish legend, which haunt the landscape around Colinton, make their appearance in *A Child's Garden* under such names as 'bogie', 'fairy', and 'shadow'; they function not only as ghostly reminders of Stevenson's mortality – that he himself was in danger of 'playing among the graves' – but also as imaginative versions of the Scottish identity he wished to create for himself. In seeking out his past, in channelling the 'unnatural activity' of his childhood mind, Stevenson encountered an aboriginal or ancestral residue of a Scotland that he no longer knew.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Stevenson's recollection of his past identity in *A Child's Garden* is presented as an unstable process; the shadows of his illness cling to the version of himself that he creates, disrupting his ability to see himself as whole.

So while the fairy-tale elements of *A Child's Garden* would seem quite prominent, the gloomy tone of several pieces implies also a *Gothic* intrusion of the underworld, which is present in Stevenson's other fictional works of the same period: 'Markheim', 'Thrawn Janet', 'The Merry Men', and, of course, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Because *A Child's Garden* attempts to imaginatively retrieve Scotland, it could be considered as a species of 'Scottish Gothic'. According to Ian Duncan's definition of the term:







The thematic core of Scottish Gothic consists of an association between the *national* and the *uncanny* or *supernatural*. To put it schematically: Scottish Gothic represents [...] the uncanny recursion of a native or ancestral identity alienated from modern life [...] A series of historical disjunctions, most conspicuously Scotland's loss of political independence at the 1707 Union of Parliaments, but also the growing social division between urban professional classes and rural populace and the religious and ethnic division between Lowlands and Highlands, informed a wholesale temporal distinction between Scottish modernity [...] and a category of cultural otherness designated as pre-modern. Recognising its separation from other forms of identity, the modern mind consigns them to a superseded, primitive past – but then assuages its new sense of estrangement by reassembling them as constituents of an organic national culture. Scottish Gothic, however, narrates a parody or critique of the late Enlightenment project of romance revival, in which the reanimation of traditional forms is botched or transgressive. Instead of evoking a familiar way of life, romance desire evokes only the dead, wraiths without life or substance, or else demonic forces expelled from the modern order of nature, whose return threatens a reverse colonization – rendering the present alien, unnatural, fatal, exposing its metaphysical emptiness.<sup>7</sup>

In many respects, the description seems to fit Stevenson's project quite well: the 'garden' represents both the author's past and his 'ancestral identity', now excluded by modern English culture. The attempt to 'reappraise the idea of a lost or excluded native culture',<sup>8</sup> or to reanimate the dead past, is a notable element of Scottish Gothic supernaturalism.<sup>9</sup> In one key aspect, Stevenson's 'Gothic' differs from Duncan's definition: the poems do not explic-





itly engage with the 'historical disjunctions' Duncan outlines, and there is no 'parody or critique of the late Enlightenment project of romance revival';<sup>10</sup> indeed, the collection seems imbued with a childish sincerity, which, unfortunately, generated scorn from both early reviewers and more contemporary critics.<sup>11</sup> It is the recognizable Gothic motifs, however earnestly presented, that deserve further attention and merit examination: like his predecessors Robert Burns and James Hogg, Stevenson celebrated the 'rough vitality of a popular otherworld',<sup>12</sup> which was distinct from the 'fairyland' of Victorian England because it was rooted in the Scottish soil.

An ambivalent mixture of vigour and decrepitude, so characteristic of Stevenson's novels (*Treasure Island*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *The Master of Ballantrae*), pervades the physical setting of *A Child's Garden* and permeates its inhabitants. To demonstrate Stevenson's creative process, the discussion that follows will first examine Stevenson's recollections of Colinton Manse and then consider how these early experiences influenced his poetic version of this landscape in *A Child's Garden*. While we should not dismiss the likelihood that Stevenson was influenced by the Victorian British fascination with fairies,<sup>13</sup> we should also keep in mind that the Manse itself, as Stevenson himself claims, was imbued with a specifically Scottish brand of the supernatural, including ghosts, corporeal disintegration, and, what is more, motifs that hint at 'the possession of living by the dead'.<sup>14</sup> There is, then, an interconnecting Gothic trope in which the 'author' (Stevenson and, simultaneously, his speaker in *A Child's Garden*) is haunted by both his childhood illness (or his *memory* of it) and his relatives; Scottishness, in this scenario, is equated with a sickly, fragmented, aboriginal past, which comes in the form of legendary or ghostly Scottish figures.

### **I: The haunted 'sanctuary' of Colinton Manse**

Very little has been said by scholars about Stevenson's actual





belief in the supernatural figures he describes;<sup>15</sup> it is true that the ‘fairy’ in Victorian England was frequently associated with whimsy and charm, but Stevenson’s sincere account of the Manse should make us pause: his ‘long and eager’ search for the ‘spunkies’ implies that, for Stevenson, these entities were a vital and powerful part of the Scottish environment.<sup>16</sup> ‘A Chapter on Dreams’, an essay written in the late 1880s, confirms that this supernatural realm was the source for much of his work. As Stevenson confides, ‘brownies’, also identified as the ‘little people who manage man’s internal theatre’,<sup>17</sup> ‘do one-half my work for me while I am fast asleep, and in all human likelihood, do the rest for me as well, when I am wide awake and fondly suppose I do it for myself’;<sup>18</sup> ‘the whole of my published fiction’, he concludes, is ‘the single-handed product of some Brownie, some Familiar, some unseen collaborator’.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, a ‘brownie’ might be a whimsical variation on ‘muse’ or ‘daemon’, but it also relates to Stevenson’s attitude towards popular tales and the Scottish environment from which he was constantly exiled: the brownies that apparently gave him some of his plots might be seen as representatives of the folk legends he was told as a child and which, as an adult, he adapted for such literary creations as ‘Thrawn Janet’, ‘The Merry Men’, and *A Child’s Garden*. Indeed (as we shall see) Stevenson understood these Scottish supernatural entities as real forces in his world, and as necessary – if metaphorical – agents for coping with the struggles of life.

Recent scholars have focused on the recuperative themes of *A Child’s Garden*, drawing on Stevenson’s own admission that he tended to write verse when he felt ill. Michael Rosen, for example, has noted that the verses present ‘an Arcadian relief from the pain of his [Stevenson’s] illnesses’.<sup>20</sup> While Ann Colley identifies estrangement as the basic impetus for *A Child’s Garden*, she also stresses that the artistic labour of composing the verses enabled him to return to the pleasant memories of an uninterrupted childhood:





Like many of his contemporaries, Stevenson thought of himself as being alienated and exiled from his homeland and his childhood by virtue of distance and age. Like them he suffered from a desire for reunion, for some point of correspondence between the present and the past, the immediate surroundings and home. Often feeling disposed and trapped in the dualities and the tension between the real and the remembered, he wrote towards home in an attempt to reach a place where there is a possibility of continuity and where there is a sanctuary from the changes that come with the passing of time. His verses offered him a form of hope, of promise, that he could, for the moment, place himself in the track of his former self and re-enter what was irrevocably absent and seemingly unavailable. He could reclaim what was once himself.<sup>21</sup>

There is no denying that there is a certain yearning for youth, for home, for origins in *A Child's Garden*. Stevenson did imagine his past as a 'sanctuary', but one not immune from the changes inflicted by time. *A Child's Garden* demonstrates that recollection is imperfect but also that one's past does not simply vanish: it remains, in the present, in the form of residual effects. Stevenson's own recorded memories identify Colinton Manse itself as the source of rejuvenating power and the inspiration for these recuperative verses; but the Manse, with its ghostly resonances of past generations, its gloomy woods and haunted graveyards, must also be viewed as the source for a much darker contemplation of mortality and physical disintegration.<sup>22</sup>

In Stevenson's recollection, Colinton bears an eerie resemblance to the world of the Scottish folktales he was told as a child: a fresh and verdant landscape filled with eldritch creatures. In the following passage from Stevenson's reminiscences, we get a glimpse of the Gothic *landscape* that provided the inspiration for his verses:





Once past the stable you were now fairly within the garden. On summer afternoons the sloping lawn was literally steeped in sunshine [...] This lawn was a favourite playground; a lilac that hung its scented blossom out of the glossy semicirque of laurels was identified by my playmates and myself as that tree whose very shadow was death [...] Down at the corner of the lawn next the snuff-mill wall there was a practicable passage through the evergreens and a door in the wall, which let you out on a small patch of sand, left in the corner by the river. Just across, the woods rose like a wall into the sky; and their lowest branches trailed in the black waters. Naturally, it was very sunless . . . . There was nothing around and above you but the shadowy foliage of trees. It seemed a marvel how they clung to the steep slope on the other side; and, indeed, they were forced to grow far apart, and showed the ground between them hid by an undergrowth of butter-bur, hemlock, and nettle . . . . I wish I could give you an idea of this place, of the gloom, of the black slow water, of the strange wet smell, of the draggled vegetation on the far side whither the current took everything, and of the incomparably fine, rich yellow sand, without a grit in the whole of it, and moving below your feet with scarcely more resistance than a liquid . . . . I remember climbing down one day to a place where we discovered an island of this treacherous material. O the great discovery! On we leapt in a moment; but on feeling the wet, sluicy island flatten out into a level with the river, and the brown water gathering about our feet, we were off it again as quickly. 'It was a quicksand', we said; and thenceforward the island was held in much the same regard as the lilac tree on the lawn.<sup>23</sup>

Among the dark and shadowy foliage presented here,





Stevenson describes 'that tree whose very shadow was death': the lilac was traditionally a flower placed near graves. Stevenson and his playmates often frequented gravesites and saw the lilac trees or the lilacs themselves near gravestones. Of course, Stevenson himself was often near death, his weak lungs and continual respiratory problems wreaking havoc on his diminutive and frail body. Stevenson clearly revels in the 'gloom' of this dark, dank, but fresh smelling place, with its 'black slow water' and 'dragged vegetation'. There is an irony in such revelry – in his delight in dangerous or treacherous substances, like the quicksand that the children venture into and then dash away from, knowing how close they might have been to death. But this shift finds a parallel in *A Child's Garden*. If the collection begins with memories of Stevenson's childhood, it surely ends with thoughts about Stevenson's adulthood and the reality that growing up is not so much a joyful unity of child and adult as a challenging attempt to cope with one's slowly disintegrating corporeal identity.

An additional passage from Stevenson's memoirs offers even more ample evidence that the 'child's garden' contains more than simply benevolent entities but Scottish Gothic *inhabitants*:

The wall of the church faces to the manse, but the churchyard is on a level with the top of the wall, that is to say, some eight or ten feet above the garden, and the tombstones are visible from the enclosure of the manse. The church, with its campanile, was near the edge, so that on Sundays we could see the cluster of people about the door. Under the retaining wall was a somewhat dark pathway, extending from the stable to the far end of the garden, and called 'The Witches' Walk', from a game we used to play in it. At the stable end it took its rise under a yew, which is one of the glories of the village. Under the circuit of its wide, black branches, it was always dark and cool, and there was a green scurf over all the trunk among which





glistened the round bright drops of resin . . . . This was a sufficiently gloomy commencement for the Witches' Walk; but its chief horror was the retaining wall of the kirkyard itself, about which we were always hovering at even with the strange attraction of fear. This it was that supplied our Arcady with its gods; and in place of classic forms and the split hooves of satyrs, we were full of homely Scottish superstitions of grues and ghosts and goblins... Often after nightfall have I looked long and eagerly from the manse windows to see the 'spunkies' playing among the graves, and have been much chagrined at my failure.<sup>24</sup>

The description here reveals that the manse is a liminal space, one containing spiritual resonance – the churchyard and graveyard, the irresistible pathway leading towards unknown discoveries. Stevenson allows us to visualize the pathway, step by step, and we are pulled along, irresistibly into the child's ritual, into his vision. The 'chief horror' – again a childhood revelry – includes the more ambivalent creatures of Scottish folklore who were more apt to harm than help a human; the verdant landscape, always criss-crossed with dark pathways, shadows, and branches, hints at the ubiquity of the dead past haunting the present.

The particular creatures he describes here are significant; in this instance, we get a glimpse of the Scottish Gothic inhabitants of the Manse that provided the inspiration for his verses; and Stevenson is quick to note that they differed from 'classic forms', presumably those from Greek myth. The 'spunkie' was a fairly common type of fairy in Lowland Scotland, and one that Stevenson refers to in his essay 'The Manse', where he describes the 'dirty Water of Leith', viewed along Lanark Road in Colinton: 'It was a place in that time like no other: the garden cut into provinces by a great hedge of beech, and overlooked by the church and the terrace of the churchyard, where the tombstones were





thick, and after nightfall “spunkies” might be seen to dance, at least by children’.<sup>25</sup> While this is similar to his earlier recollection, here he emphasizes that children were more likely to see these dancing diminutive creatures – perhaps because, like the Will-o’-the-Wisp, spunkies were thought to be souls of unbaptized human babies.<sup>26</sup> In fact, numerous theories about the fairies stressed that these denizens of the underworld had some affinity with the human world; it was quite common in Scottish folklore, for example, for ‘fairies’ to be viewed as spirits of the dead, fallen angels, or as the souls of unbaptized babies, also called ‘piskies’ (a variant on ‘pixies’).<sup>27</sup> The implication here is that children had an affinity with such supernatural creatures, and there is a degree of wistfulness in Stevenson’s recollection. However, the spunkie’s association with dead children was also a reminder of Stevenson’s own lifelong frailty and the possibility that he, too, might depart during one of his bouts of ill health.

Stevenson’s reminiscences also traced the links between illness, ghosts, and cultural heritage. It has been recorded by most of Stevenson’s biographers that the Rev. Lewis Balfour, owner of Colinton Manse, bequeathed a congenital pulmonary weakness to his daughter who, in turn, transmitted it to young ‘Louis’. Between the age of 2 and 11, Stevenson suffered from ‘digestive upsets, feverish colds, gastric fever, bronchitis, and pneumonia’.<sup>28</sup> It is possible, biographer Frank McLynn conjectures, that Stevenson may have suffered from some sort of ‘thyroid abnormality’, which would explain his unusually thin shape and weak musculature.<sup>29</sup> By Stevenson’s own account, provided in his grandson’s biography, his health at this time ‘was of the most precarious description.... My ill-health principally chronicles itself by the terrible long nights that I lay awake, troubled continually with a hacking, exhausting cough, and praying for sleep or morning from the bottom of my shaken little body’.<sup>30</sup> These now well-documented accounts of Stevenson’s ill health led to an adverse critical reaction in the years following Stevenson’s death,







and the criticisms were lodged mainly against those commentators who focused *only* on the author's biography and not on his artistry. The strongest reaction to this brand of 'Stevensoniana' came from Frank Swinnerton who, in his book *R. L. Stevenson: A Critical Study* (1914), offered the following complaint: 'The authors of all this posthumous gloating over Stevenson's illnesses have been concerned to make him a horribly piteous figure, to harrow us in order that we should pity. How much more is Stevenson to be pitied for his self-constituted apostles!'<sup>31</sup> The intention here is not to perpetuate this myth of the 'horribly piteous' Stevenson but rather to acknowledge illness as an important trope in both his Colinton memories and in one of the products of these recollections, *A Child's Garden*. The biographical sensationalizing of Stevenson's childhood and adulthood pulmonary complaints should not dissuade us from exploring what is clearly a driving force in his writing and, what is more, a key *leitmotif* in children's literature.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, it is appropriate that a child with such frighteningly unpredictable health might have a morbid fascination with ghosts and figures of doubleness and that this fascination would be stylized in poetic form by the adult in later years. While chronic illness naturally engendered in Stevenson a fear of death, it also led him to speculate on whether he might leave something behind when he died, or how he might, in a manner, return.

The speculation on an ancestral haunting – a key Gothic trope – is apparent in Stevenson's description of his grandfather, the Rev. Balfour: 'Try as I please, I cannot join myself on with the reverend doctor; and all the while, no doubt, and even as I write the phrase, he moves in my blood, and whispers words to me, and sits efficient in the very knot and centre of my being'.<sup>33</sup> Here we have a major expression of Stevenson's metaphorical *modus operandi* – the diminutive entity, which he also came to call the 'homunculus',<sup>34</sup> residing within the fully-formed human: this ancestral force makes an appearance as Hyde, as the 'Poor Thing'





(in the fable of the same name), and as the shadowy doubles in *A Child's Garden*.

## II: Liminal spaces and Gothic doubles in *A Child's Garden of Verses*

In early childhood, Stevenson came under the influence of his nurse Alison Cunningham, or 'Cummy', who, according to biographer John Steuart, possessed a 'piety compounded in equal parts of fervent religion and gross superstition, of the fear of God and a living belief in the actuality and activity of the devil'.<sup>35</sup> Along with her Bible stories and accounts of suffering Covenanters, Cummy 'was an overflowing treasury of ghost, goblin, witch, warlock, spunky, and fairy stories, which she told him with the curdling realism that comes of whole-hearted belief'.<sup>36</sup> Given this account, we should not be too quick to dismiss the possibility that, within the bright fairy world described in such poems as 'Picture-books in Winter' and 'The Little Land', there lurked a more sinister realm. Along with the unsettling poems that depict uncanny childhood imaginings, including 'Young Night Thought', there are the more overtly 'Gothic' poems of childhood illness and doubleness, including 'North-West Passage', 'My Shadow', and 'To Any Reader'. Moreover, considering that Stevenson thanks 'Cummy' for 'all the story-books [she] read', we might theorize that *A Child's Garden* was influenced by more than just 'fairy' stories – or at least that the fairies were not *only* of the 'bright, fireside, nursery chime' variety ('Dedication: To Alison Cunningham').<sup>37</sup> These are instances where the legendary world of Colinton and Scottish lore seep into the collection – in the form of a shadow, a ghostly presence, or an eerie whisper during the child's night-time reflections.

Stevenson's reminiscences indicate that the landscape of *A Child's Garden* was not that of a typical Victorian children's fairy tale but drawn from a much darker Scottish folk tradition in which 'fairies' were denizens of the underworld, the graveyard,





and the haunted knoll. Three poems from the first two sections of *A Child's Garden* allude to an otherworld that we might interpret as the land of play or dreams, but which, given the passages describing Colinton Manse, could also be viewed as the land of the dead. After all, Stevenson is trying to resuscitate his childhood, and the actual landscape itself is now a liminal one – a physical place, which is full of organic matter, such as trees and streams and rocks and grass, but which also contains residual elements of the past. 'Young Night Thought' (CGOV: IV) is one of the first instances in which Stevenson presents his childhood self as a spectral figure, and is surely an attempt to capture 'the unnatural activity' of his mind as a child in bed at night. The poem begins with an unsettling intrusion of the child's peaceful night-time reverie, even though the persona describes it as an almost routine scenario: 'All night long and every night, / When my mamma puts out the light, / I see the people marching by, / As plain as day, before my eye'. The first three stanzas give the illusion that the speaker is only observing this activity, but then, quite suddenly in the final stanza, the speaker reveals to us that he is a participant when he informs us, 'still beside them close I keep / Until *we* reach the town of Sleep' (emphasis added). Imperceptibly, the speaker has shifted from passive narrator to one of these spectral figures – the 'Armies of emperors and kings', 'marching in so grand a way'. The 'town of Sleep' may be another variation on the 'Land of Nod', but it is also a euphemism for the Land of the Dead – and should remind us again of the Gothic landscape of Colinton Manse. The child begins by seeing these diminutive creatures as separate from himself but ends by acknowledging that he is one of them.<sup>38</sup>

The poems that actually reference 'fairyländ' – either specifically or obliquely – continually suggest that the 'child' himself, that is, Stevenson, is a denizen of this place, and not just an observer; after all, the 'child' conjured in this collection cannot be human since it has passed over from our world and may very well





be one of those creatures glimpsed over the top of the Colinton retaining wall. *A Child's Garden* demonstrates that the very act of recollection inadvertently conjures up a ghostly double, an imitation of ideal childhood.

'North-West Passage' (CGOV: XLI) is a poem sequence that reflects the otherworldly realm of adult memory and a reminder of the always constant threat of mortality; the Gothic trope of the ancestral/legendary haunting is further enhanced by the appearance of a 'bogie', which is a specifically Scottish beastie. The first part, 'Good-Night', establishes the comfortable hearth-side scenario which the children are reluctant to leave; knowing that the 'haunted night returns again', the speaker commissions his child readers to 'face with an undaunted tread / – The long black passage to bed'. But since, as we have already seen, the adult perspective frequently intrudes on the otherwise childish reflection, we can view this assertion of bravery as Stevenson's adult wish to protect his childhood self. The next part, 'Shadow March', introduces the inevitable threat that has always hovered on the margins of the child's sunny world – and, with its almost chant-like rhythm, stands out from many of the other poems in the collection:

All round the house is the jet-black night;  
It stares through the window-pane;  
It crawls in the corners, hiding from the light,  
And it moves with the moving flame.  
Now my little heart goes a-beating like a drum,  
With the breath of the Bogie in my hair;  
And all round the candle the crooked shadows come  
And go marching along up the stair.  
The shadow of the balusters, the shadow of the lamp,  
The shadow of the child that goes to bed –  
All the wicked shadows coming, tramp, tramp, tramp,  
With the black night overhead.





The 'bogie', often called a 'bogey', 'bogle', is a malevolent spirit in the Scottish tradition,<sup>39</sup> also understood as the Scottish version of the 'boggart', which itself is a 'mischievous type of brownie'.<sup>40</sup> An account of both bogles and spunkies in the blood-curdling tale 'Thrawn Janet' offers further proof of the malevolent tendencies of fairyland and therefore one of the dangers of delving into one's ancestral past: as the Scottish narrator says about the protagonist, 'it was borne in upon him what folk said, that Janet was deid lang syne, an' this was a bogle in her clay-cauld flesh'; and later: 'he thocht he heard bogles claverin' in his lug, an whiles he saw spunkies in the room [...] 'either or baith of them [Janet and the black man] were bogles'.<sup>41</sup> Like Janet herself, whose 'thrawn' or twisted neck frightens the moorland parish of Balweary, the 'Bogie' of Stevenson's poem haunts his otherwise sedate existence. While the sequence ends in the third part ('In Port') with the child 'in the Land of Nod at last', we cannot miss the ugly and 'crooked shadows' that have intruded on the neat, clean, and bright landscape of the child's home. It is likely that this particular poem is recalling a memory from Heriot Row rather than Colinton, but Stevenson is reinforcing how his harrowing experience of chronic pulmonary disease constitutes one of the three dominant 'impressions' from childhood. In addition, although the 'passage' announced in the title of the first poem sequence implies the unpredictable shift from health to sickness, it also represents the unpredictable results of digging up one's ancestry. As in other poems, the speaker is saturated in "shadow" (repeated five times in the poem sequence), suggesting that the child's existence or future is in doubt.

Three additional poems reinforce the idea that recollection leads to a fracturing of the self. While the notion of an imaginary friend should be familiar to us, the entity described in 'My Shadow' (CGOV: XVIII) appears to be something more than this. On the one hand, the description of the shadow's ability to shoot 'up taller like an India rubber ball' and then to get 'so little that





there's none of him at all' might be a way of describing what an actual shadow looks like. On the other hand, the child-speaker first introduces this description as an example of the funny way 'he likes to grow' (second stanza), which suggests that this creature is supernatural in some way and possesses an ability to shape-shift. The accumulated detail in the poem further suggests that the shadow is a double of the child. In subsequent stanzas we are told that the shadow has no 'notion of how children ought to play', that he continually makes 'a fool' of the child, that he is 'a coward' and is 'lazy'. Here, the speaker playfully attempts to distinguish the 'shadow' from himself, but the association becomes clear: metaphorically, the shadow *is* the child, or what the child becomes when sickness takes control of his body. 'One morning', we are told, 'I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup; / – But my lazy little shadow, like an errant sleepy-head, / – Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed'. If we read this from a biographical perspective, we can infer that the child-Stevenson has escaped his sick self only for the moment and conjured up a healthy one; however, the subtle implication here is that, before this dew-bespangled morning, the child himself was lying in bed, in the shadow's place.

According to the Scottish folk tradition, child substitution was a common practice of the fairies who, it was widely believed, depended upon humans for the stability of their stock: they sought human blood to sustain their lines and milk to nourish their ailing children.<sup>42</sup> Like the changeling of Scottish legend, the shadow-child in Stevenson's poem cannot exist without the assistance of the human child, sticking close to him, clinging to him. We might consider the shadow to be almost a parasitic figure in that he seems to stick too close; indeed, the poem ends with the narrator waking up to a glorious day, as though he has been rejuvenated; the shadow, meanwhile, 'stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed'. Certainly the changeling figure in Stevenson's poem displays no malice or gluttony (two com-





mon attributes associated with changelings), but he does appear to have abnormal growth patterns, requires an unusual amount of bed rest, and is somewhat peevish.<sup>43</sup> As Jean Webb argues, Stevenson frequently ‘places conflict in these poems as puzzlement, the conflict of the known child-space with the unknown entity of life within which the child is placed’.<sup>44</sup> Specifically in ‘My Shadow’, Webb theorizes, uncertainty comes in the form of the ‘dark mirror-image of the child’.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the ultimate discovery here is that Stevenson is himself the double, the substitute, the changeling, and not the other way around.

As *A Child’s Garden* demonstrates, abundant growth has its hither side: death and decay. The farewell poem in ‘Envoys’, the final sequence of the collection, presents the image of a child that has grown up, a child that is no more; further, the final lines sound an eerie echo of Stevenson’s recollection of the Colinton retaining wall:

As from the house your mother sees  
You playing round the garden trees  
So you may see if you will look  
Through the windows of this book,  
Another child, far, far away,  
And in another garden play.  
But do not think you can at all,  
By knocking on the window, call  
That child to hear you. He intent  
Is all on his play-business bent.  
He does not hear; he will not look  
Nor yet be lured out of this book.  
For, long ago, the truth to say,  
*He has grown up and gone away,*  
And it is but *a child of air*  
That lingers in the garden there.  
(‘To Any Reader’, E: VI; emphasis added)





The message here is that ‘you’ (the child reading this) cannot recall your younger self, just as ‘I’ (the poet himself) cannot. Stevenson’s child knows the Scottish fairy world intimately, but suggests to his readers that they cannot know it – nor *should* they attempt to, since it poses so many dangers. This ‘child of air’, Stevenson seems to be saying, is destined to haunt ‘you’ as some other child, just as it haunted ‘me’ when I was a child, and just as it haunted my forbears when they were children. Colley argues that Stevenson is ‘sensitive to the child that lives within the adult’.<sup>46</sup> This is a key point, although the particular ‘child’ that Stevenson discovered was more like the ‘homunculus’ he described in ‘The Manse’: a miniature version of a relative – perhaps a spunkie – residing in the ‘knot’ of his being – sometimes driving him forward into the future, but at other times pulling him back, through the sunny vales of the garden and into the deep, dank graveyard of his past.

### **Conclusion: The Scottish Gothic Garden**

*A Child’s Garden* demonstrates that the adult self is continually parasitized by the denizens of memory – the past, the ‘grues and ghosts and goblins’, the bogies, and the ‘spunkies’ – all of these entities feeding on the present, gaining strength, if not perfect form, using the energy of the living to find a new future. This is hardly a cheerful thought – the notion of an entity dwelling within the human – but this is precisely the scenario that Stevenson presents throughout his collection, and especially in his poem ‘My Shadow’, which describes the creature that clings to the child and imitates his movements imperfectly. The more we explore these poems, the more we realize that, in actuality, the shadow figures that haunt these poems were not only a part of Stevenson’s childhood make-believe but present his actual childhood self: lonely, isolated, unable to either ‘grow’ properly or achieve the state of health that the supposed ‘real’ child possesses. These unsettling personae reinforce for us that Stevenson’s child cannot control







this landscape, as he controls his toy soldiers (see ‘The Land of Counterpane’, CGOV: XVI; ‘The Unseen Playmate’, CA: I; and ‘The Dumb Soldier’, GA: V); he himself is actually a resident of fairyland, a ‘child of air’ who has ‘grown up and gone away’ (‘To Any Reader’). However, ‘fairyland’ was just one *layer* in the ‘child’s garden’ – perhaps, we could say, the exterior of the garden itself, which conceals the inner sanctum of a graveyard haunted by dead things: relatives, the residue of an ancestral Scottish identity, and possibly the *future* resting place of the writer himself (although, as we know, he died in Samoa).

One anonymous early critic of *A Child’s Garden* felt that, while Stevenson was able to present sentiments that might charm the average child, he ran into ‘difficulties’ by ‘writing throughout in the person of the child’.<sup>47</sup> In response to passages from ‘My Kingdom’ (CA: III), the reviewer remarks, “This is not the child, but the “grown-up” speaking through the mouth of the child. Sometimes, indeed, the youthful voice is made to talk “old” with humour and appropriateness’.<sup>48</sup> What might seem like a technical flaw is also part of the collection’s aesthetic strategy: to relive childhood from an adult perspective. Throughout the collection, Stevenson makes his child speak about regular childhood activities with a depth of thought usually absent from the average child; but this hardly constitutes a flaw. As it was argued above, Stevenson offers a double vision that is probably inevitable when an adult attempts to access his childhood past: he consequently conjures up an aboriginal, legendary version of himself, and offers a hitherto unacknowledged example of the ‘Scottish Gothic’. While *A Child’s Garden* does not offer any explicitly political commentary on Scotland’s marginal position within the larger British cultural scene, the collection engages with a personal sense of isolation and loss. There is, moreover, an ‘uncanny recursion of a native or ancestral identity alienated from modern life’ in the form of Scottish supernaturalism. The image Stevenson creates is that of an eldritch child, a changeling with





adult sensibilities, or a fully formed adult with a ghostly double hovering around him, dwelling within him. It is often noted that folktales tended to portray the changeling – the exchanged fairy progeny – as old, wizened, wise, and experienced;<sup>49</sup> elsewhere Stevenson portrayed this idea through the homunculus motif. The changelings in both the Scottish and British traditions are often elderly fairy folk who have assumed the body of a child in order to receive nourishment. Stevenson wishes to do the same: in the form of a child, he hopes to find nourishment in these memories, which, despite our wish – or his critic's wish – to view them as always pleasant and full of light, are actually tainted by illness and the irreparable damage inflicted by the passage of time.

William Archer, another early reviewer of *A Child's Garden*, took a view almost opposite to that of the anonymous critic mentioned above, complaining that the volume was not adult enough and dwelled only on 'the sunny aspect of childhood, with scarcely a hint of its night side'.<sup>50</sup> Archer goes on to make an unfavourable contrast between Stevenson and Blake, criticizing the former's failure to acknowledge 'the agonized doubts as to the existence of justice, human or divine, which mar the music of childhood for so many'.<sup>51</sup> However, while the collection certainly places great emphasis on happy adventures, the 'night side' of Stevenson's childhood is apparent in the descriptions of the 'Bogie'-like sickness that haunt the persona ('North-West Passage') and the invisible playmates who signify a supernatural encounter with an ambivalent other ('My Shadow' and 'To Any Reader'). In a letter to Archer, from October 1885, Stevenson responded to his critic: 'In my view, one dank, dispirited word is harmful, a crime of *lèse-humanité*, a piece of acquired evil; every gay, every bright word or picture, like every pleasant air of music, is a piece of pleasure set afloat; the reader catches it, and, if he be healthy, goes on his way rejoicing, and it is the business of art so to send him, as often as possible'.<sup>52</sup> The business of Stevenson's art was not only





a form of healing but also a conscious suppression of pain and darkness; the result is the odd but nevertheless striking instance of an uncanny shadow, lurking its way along the fringes of the child's bedroom. The presence of the shadow acknowledges that the dark side is ultimately uncontrollable: the onset of sickness, the inevitable wizening of the skin, and the ultimate arrival of the changeling, 'spunkie', or homunculus. Stevenson's postscript to Archer seems to suggest that, despite his ultimate wish for a 'bright word', he was also quite prepared to accept this uncanny substitute, which was a 'recursion' of his own ancestral legacy: 'The house is, indeed, a great thing, and should be rearranged on sanitary principles; but my heart and all my interest are with the dweller, that *ancient of days and day-old infant man*'.<sup>53</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 All citations from *A Child's Garden of Verses* come from Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Collected Poems of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Roger C. Lewis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2003), pp. 21-65. I have – with slight variation – adopted Michael Rosen's useful abbreviation system to identify the collection's four poem sequences: 'A Child's Garden of Verses' (CGOV), 'The Child Alone' (CA), 'Garden Days' (GD), and 'Envoys' (E); see his article, 'Robert Louis Stevenson and Children's Play: The Contexts of A Child's Garden of Verses', *Children's Literature in Education*, 26.1 (March 1995), 53-72.
- 2 There is to date no complete published edition of Stevenson's 'memoirs', but there are numerous fragments of his reminiscences in the brief 27-page *Memoirs of Himself*, in the widely-quoted Balfour biography, and in Stevenson's many letters and essays (some of which are quoted below).
- 3 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memoirs of Himself* (Philadelphia: H. E. Widener, 1912), p. 16.
- 4 Quoted in Graham Balfour, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 2 vols (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 47.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 51.





- 6 Thanks to Dr. Nicholas Ruddick for help with this and later points in this essay.
- 7 Ian Duncan, 'Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Scottish Gothic', *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 70-71; original emphasis.
- 8 Ibid., p. 71.
- 9 Stevenson, too, was quite conscious of the 'ethnic division between Lowlands and Highlands', a binary he discussed with both wit and sensitivity in 'A Foreigner at Home' (1882). However, a consideration of this dichotomy goes beyond the scope of my analysis of *A Child's Garden*.
- 10 Given that Stevenson continually fretted over his position as a writer of 'romance' in a dominant 'realist' literary market, we might view his poems as a faint echo of a larger 'critique' (serious or parodic) of English Enlightenment culture. For a brief discussion of Stevenson's anxieties over the romance genre, see Jenni Calder, Review of *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, *The Modern Language Review*, 77.4 (October 1982), 937-938.
- 11 Early reviewers criticized the collection for either misrepresenting the assumed maturity level of a child or for presenting an overly idealized child. See *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). As recently as the 1980s and 1990s, critics tended to see the collection as mere children's literature, as a misstep, or as awful examples of technical form and rhyme. See, for example, Rebecca Lukens, 'Stevenson's Garden: Verse is Verse', *Lion and the Unicorn* 4.1/2 (1980/1981), 49-55; and John Goldthwaite, *The Natural History of Make-Believe: A Guide to the Principal Works of Britain, Europe, and America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), p. 31. The work of Michael Rosen, as well as Ann Colley and Jean Webb (discussed later in the essay) suggest fresh departures from such condescension.
- 12 Duncan, p. 73.
- 13 Two important studies on this subject include Carole Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), and Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2001).
- 14 Duncan, p. 71.
- 15 Some exceptions include Kurt Wittig's study, *The Scottish Tradition*





in *Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), p. 262-64; Fred B. Warner, Jr., 'Stevenson's First Scottish Story', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 24.3 (December 1969), 335-344; Carole Silver, 'On the Origin of Fairies: Victorians, Romantics, and Folk Belief', *Browning Institute Studies*, 14 (1986), 141-156; and Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 149-62.

- 16 In *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2001), Lizanne Henderson and Edward Cowan discuss the differences between the fairies of the 'learned' and the Scottish folk traditions. The 'images inherited by the twenty-first century find their inspiration in the butterfly-winged, diaphanously clad, frolicking nymphs of writers such as Shakespeare, and artists such as Blake and Fuseli, with a hefty infusion of later accretion. The romantic Cottingley Fairies, the materialistic Tooth Fairy, and Walt Disney's mischievous Tinker Bell are the pervasive iconographic forms in current popular culture' (p. 13). In contrast, Henderson and Cowan add, the people of pre-industrial Scotland would deny that fairies were anything like these descriptions: they were 'dangerous, capable of inflicting terrible harm, even death upon people and their livestock [...] Though they were occasionally benign, their proclivity towards cruelty and general malevolence meant that they were best avoided at all costs' (p. 14).
- 17 Stevenson, 'A Chapter on Dreams', *Across the Plains with Other Memories and Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1910), p. 159.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- 20 Rosen, p. 55.
- 21 Ann Colley, "'Writing Towards Home": The Landscape of "A Child's Garden of Verses"', *Robert Louis Stevenson Reconsidered: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. by William B. Jones, (Jr. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2003), pp. 174-5.
- 22 These 'gothic' elements are more in line with the fin-de-siècle concerns that marked the 1880s and 1890s; written only one year before *Jekyll and Hyde*, *A Child's Garden* contains some of the same interests in physical metamorphosis and identity. As Jennifer Sattaur has recently shown in *Perceptions of Childhood in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), *Jekyll and Hyde* explores not simply notions of





monstrosity but quite specifically childhood monstrosity: 'What Hyde creates is not just a degenerate monster, but a degenerate *child* monster; and one who destroys both his parents(s), himself, and any chance of a future in his society' (p. 13). While *A Child's Garden* does not approach the chilling horrors of Stevenson's more famous gothic text, it nevertheless presents a speaker who expresses the anxiety over the possibility of degeneration, mortality, and monstrosity; like Dr. Jekyll, the child of Stevenson's enchanted garden has a ghostly double (e.g., 'My Shadow', 'To Any Reader') who bears an uncanny resemblance to him.

23 Quoted in Balfour, pp. 48-50.

24 Quoted in Balfour, pp. 50-51.

25 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Manse', *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 101.

26 Susan Schoon Eberly, 'Fairies and the Folklore of Disability: Changelings, Hybrids, and the Solitary Fairy', *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. by Peter Narváez (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1991), p. 233.

27 Katharine A. Briggs, *A Dictionary of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies, and Other Supernatural Creatures* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), p. 318.

28 Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), p. 11.

29 Ibid., p. 12.

30 Quoted in Balfour, p. 39.

31 Quoted in Maixner, p. 509.

32 An excellent essay on this topic is Seth Lerer, "'Thy Life to Mend, This Book Attend": Reading and Healing in the Arc of Children's Literature, *New Literary History*, 37.3 (Summer 2006), 631-642. Lerer's claim, 'Reading, like healing, takes place best in bed' (p. 631), accurately describes one of inspirations for *A Child's Garden*.

33 Stevenson, 'The Manse', p. 107.

34 Ibid., p. 108.

35 John A. Steuart, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Critical Biography*, vol 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1924), p. 41.

36 Ibid.

37 This is the dedicatory poem that precedes the first section, which I





have designated as CGOV.

- 38 See also Stevenson, 'Armies in the Fire' (CA: VIII), which makes reference to a 'phantom city' and 'phantom armies marching'.
- 39 Henderson and Cowan, p. 133.
- 40 Katharine Briggs, *The Personnel of Fairyland: A Short Account of the Fairy People of Great Britain for Those Who Tell Stories to Children* (Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1971), p. 193.
- 41 Stevenson, 'Thrawn Janet', *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Complete Short Stories*, vol 1, ed. by Ian Bell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), p. 415.
- 42 Ibid, pp. 75 and 167.
- 43 See Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, p. 60.
- 44 Jean Webb, 'Conceptualising Childhood: Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*', *Cambridge Journal of Education* 32.3 (2002), p. 362.
- 45 Ibid., p. 363.
- 46 Colley, p. 305.
- 47 Quoted in Maixner, p. 148.
- 48 Ibid., p. 149.
- 49 Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, p. 60.
- 50 Quoted in Maixner, p. 155.
- 51 Ibid., p. 157.
- 52 Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 Vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), V, p. 142.
- 53 Ibid., p. 143 (emphasis added).





## *Death of Long Pig*

### *Nigel Planer*

(The genesis and production of Nigel Planer's play *Death of Long Pig*)

The climb up through the steaming tropical forest had already taken forty-five minutes of scrambling over – and under – the roots of enormous Pandanu trees in the body-hugging heat, with still no sign of sunlight ahead. Half an hour to the top, a hand-painted sign had said. No matter how many times I had read that there are no venomous snakes and insects in Polynesia, the rustling and fluttering all around me was worrying. And the sticky spider's web I had walked through a few muddy slopes back, had somehow managed to work its way right inside my shirt. I stopped to drink the last of my water and curse Robert Louis Stevenson for being so obtuse in his choice of final resting place. The strange-looking black bird with white bushy eyebrows, which had been dancing ahead of me for the last few minutes, stopped also. Was it some kind of ominous Robin of the South Seas who lured travellers to their certain death? There were disconcerting high-pitched screeches from branches, stretching and scraping against each other deeper in the forest which, had I not read Stevenson's 'Tales of the South Seas', I could have mistaken for the groans of dead sailors who had been boiled in pots and eaten by tattooed islanders. There seemed to be no path whatsoever now and, for all I knew, I could be pushing further and further inland. Where was the famous Road of the Loving Heart, which the islanders had cut up the mountain to carry Stevenson to his grave? I sat down for some moments to consider whether it was sensible carrying on, and to question my urge to find some kind of communion with RLS. I had told friends, family and importantly, my agent that I was going to Upolu in Western Samoa to research a play about Stevenson – that was my reasonable excuse – in truth the fascination was longer, deeper and more personal







than that.

It all began with a photograph of Stevenson that I cut out and kept, long before I knew a single thing about him. Not one of the famous pictures; such as the one of a long haired Stevenson in white, reclining in the grass with a garland of flowers round his head, nor the one with the sickly grin taken in Sydney on the aborted journey home to Scotland. This was a photo I have not seen published anywhere else. I found it in a newspaper, cut it out and put it in a folder when I was in my twenties. Stevenson is not looking at the camera, he has something in his hands on which he is concentrating; it looks as if he is rolling a cigarette. Most likely, he was. There is no doubt that Stevenson was photogenic. Charismatic, mesmeric even, in my picture he looks as wild as a sixties rock star – no, more intelligent than that – he looks like a radical, a long-haired Bohemian who has just broken off a passionate conversation for a moment to roll a fag, and will continue with the next thought in one second. He looks in fact, exactly as Stevenson should.

For some reason, I kept this photograph. It has been on my bedroom wall, it has been on tour with me, pinned on various dressing room mirrors, it has lived in my poetry file. I don't know why I hung on to this photo for so long – perhaps it was Stevenson's capacity to make men fall in love with him. What I saw in this photo was all the contradictions I most aspired to when in my twenties; sensitivity with courage, piercing intelligence with boyish naivety, sartorial elegance with romantic ill health. And, most importantly, addiction to tobacco. Here was a role model one could identify with.

Now thirty five years later, having read a good deal of what he wrote and what's been written about him, having been to Vailima and climbed Mt Vaea to his grave, having been to 17 Heriot Row, to the Savile Club, to the French hotel in Monterrey, and finally having managed to mount a production of my play about him at the Finborough theatre in London, I reach the conclusion that





my instinctive assumptions about his character were nearly one hundred per cent correct. And here I consider with relief, how wonderful it is that I am not an academic who has to provide sensible, objective reasons for his involvement with Stevenson. How lucky I am not to have to justify my instinctive responses, not to have to quote chapter and verse. For instance in the paragraph above, I mentioned that Stevenson had the capacity to make men fall in love with him. I know someone said it of him – I have read it somewhere – but whether it was Henley, Colvin, Henry James or someone else who said it, I don't care. In volume five of these journals, Barry Menikoff reminds us that scholars do not like to be accused of 'writing personally as opposed to objectively', and are 'more comfortable cloaking the random quirks that impelled [...] their writing.' But that kind of objectivity will not help me particularly to write a play, nor to get under the skin of the man. The bibliographical reference notes at the end of this piece will be mercifully short. In fact, impulsive, random quirks are exactly my stock in trade, and that's the way I like it. When it comes to Stevenson, I am not a mature student, I am a twelve-year-old boy.

The second stage of my Stevenson adventure began with an encounter with an extraordinary and eccentric man in Southern France. I was unhappily going through a divorce at the time, but a house in the Tarn had been booked for the summer months, so, perhaps ill-advisedly, we went. A lot of time was spent alone, walking, bird-watching (something my ex-wife hated) or reading. It was while wandering through the mockingly beautiful scenery with my binoculars that I met and struck up a friendship with another bird-watcher. Carruthers – that really was his name – was a hugely tall American who I think had served in the War in the Pacific. He tutored me in many things; the birds of southern France, male emotional continence, (in other words how not to get too hysterical about my pending divorce), and Robert Louis Stevenson. He told me something of Stevenson's Polynesian





years and, most importantly, lent me his old soft-cloth covered copy of 'Travels with my Donkey', which I read in that appropriate setting. I was now a serious RLS devotee.

The idea to write a play about Stevenson came in 2003 whilst looking around the Paul Gauguin Centenary exhibition in Paris. I found Gauguin's Polynesian works overwhelming and this encouraged me to take a more in-depth look at Stevenson's South Seas experience. Reading both men's Pacific writings and letters crystallised for me the central idea for 'Death of Long Pig' – that one actor would play both RLS and Pigo, two very different men who escaped Europe and died within a few years of each other in their island homes. The first half of the play would be Stevenson's and would cover his last days at Vailima, the second half would cover Gauguin's failed suicide attempt on Tahiti in 1897. Two plays in one: thesis, antithesis, and the audience would be left to draw their own conclusion, to make the synthesis, if you like. I knew early on that such a strange idea was unlikely to get commercial managements buzzing around me, but nevertheless had become passionate enough about the subject matter not to care about that.

After reading everything I could lay my hands on – including some fascinating gems like Fanny's journal of the voyage of the *Janet Nicholl*, which I found very revealing – I was fortunate enough to meet and befriend Dr Jenny Newell, a charming young Australian who happened to be head of the Polynesian section of the British museum. She filled me in on Polynesian customs not necessarily covered by Stevenson in *In the South Seas*. Most importantly she gave me tips for cheap accommodation in the Marquesas, Tahiti and Samoa, because by now I had determined absolutely to go there and see for myself. But how to afford the journey? To do it justice would mean several weeks' travelling and I had no deal with Scribners like Louis. I set about doing the next best thing and managed to achieve commissions to write travel pieces for five different publications, including the now





defunct *Erotic Review*. What had been a passion had by now become an obsession.

The South Pacific is not the easiest of places to get to – two long-haul flights back to back at the very least – and the distances between island groups once there are vast; Samoa to Tahiti, for example is roughly the equivalent of London to Moscow. In Stevenson's day it was considerably harder of course, and considerably more dangerous. There were still uncharted reefs to negotiate in the Tuamotu islands, and on arrival in Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas on the first of his South Sea voyages in 1888, Stevenson's ship was over-run with tattooed warriors wielding clubs. His subsequent concern over being killed and eaten was well-founded; cannibalism had not fully disappeared by the 1890s. I had spent the weeks before Samoa sailing around the Marquesas and Tuamotu islands in a cargo ship – albeit a passenger-carrying cargo ship with a French chef on board – and had the pleasure of retracing many of the exact locations described by Stevenson in 'In the South Seas'. By the time I arrived in Apia, I had been away over a month and considered myself an island old-hander.

The Stevensons evidently chose Samoa because, of all the islands visited on their three voyages, it had the best mail connection with the west. Samoa is not your usual holiday destination, not for Europeans. In fact in the two months I was away I did not meet a single English man or woman. Gentle, forested mountains rise away from a wiggly coastline of empty, palm-fringed beaches. All along the coast road are neat villages made up of corrugated-iron roofed bungalows, many of which, in the Samoan style, have no walls at all. Their raised concrete platforms and supporting beams make them look rather like oblong bandstands. Whole extended families – from grandparents to babies – are housed under one roof, exposed to the air, and to the gaze of passers by. At night, since many do have furniture, television and fluorescent lights, this creates an outlandish effect. In





the daytime, wild pigs run around in the road, people wash in the streams close to the shore and the gaudily painted buses drop off hordes of children in neat, church-school uniforms. There are seemingly endless churches, all with corrugated-iron roofs – Congregational, Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Protestant, Anglican – I counted four in a row in one street. Apart from one extremely ugly ten-storey bank, there are no tall buildings in Apia. In fact, the town sprawls so gently across the bay that it is hard to see where it begins and ends at all. There are no cruise ships in its harbour, only one or two bobbing yachts in the bay, and, a mile or so out to sea, the thin line of surf at the edge of the reef makes a noise like distant running trains. ‘The ceaseless requiem of the surf hangs on the ear’, as Stevenson put it, and as I have him say on his veranda in my play.

Having the audacity to put words into Stevenson’s mouth was not a task I took on lightly, and so, before beginning to write, I tried to saturate myself as much as I could with his style. He was a man who, by all reports could talk at speed in fully-formed sentences, with premises, conclusions and sub-clauses. He was witty, verbose, a trifle pompous even, and an original thinker, yet still retained a childish sense of playfulness and wonder. The speech I most enjoyed writing for him – or rather for my character ‘Louis’, which I hope does go some way towards giving the audience an idea of what kind of a fellow RLS was – is a monologue he gives on being served a banana pudding by Java. He has been ill for some days, but is well enough now to eat again – ravenous in fact – and after extemporising over the ubiquitousness of bananas in the modern world, he sets to playing at banana castles with his food, using cocoanut milk for a moat and his teaspoon as a drawbridge. I was keen to show how the man who had suffered from ill-health since childhood would rejoice in everyday things and tastes. After a close brush with death, every day is a gift, every breath a pleasure; another thing Carruthers had taught me in the south of France.





I believe that Stevenson's ill health is what drove him – to work, to travel and to taste the world. It's hardly a huge revelation to point this out. The man who could write an elegy to the lamp-post outside his childhood home, or the simple yet beautiful lines to the sheets on his bed, must have been in some kind of state of euphoria, or at least known the mania of the bipolar sufferer.

After a short prologue, my play begins with Stevenson coming downstairs into daily life at Vailima after a few weeks' sickness. Fanny is in a bad way, driven to distraction by island life and possibly suffering from psychotic symptoms, as described by RLS in his letters home at the time. Their travelling days are over. The characters I chose to represent in the play are RLS and Fanny, obviously, Java the maid, for whom Stevenson had perhaps too much admiration, Joe Strong, their son-in-law, and, to represent the staff of Vailima, a character whom I chose to rename 'Obliging Bob'. This is what in the theatre is called 'a small cheat'. There was an Obliging Bob in Apia, but he lived there some fifty years later, working for Aggie Gray and her famous hotel, helping to keep the American Service men happy while they were stationed in Western Samoa during the war. I felt that this was an allowable cheat, as it would have been complicated – and difficult to cast – to represent all the characters of the Vailima staff, who were plentiful, so Obliging Bob obliged and represents them all.

There is a difference between dramatic time and chronological time, as much as there is between dramatic logic and real logic. To explore the truth of any situation on stage, it is necessary to truncate some parts of its chronological reality and to expand others. To let life go on at its actual pace with its fits and starts and its long periods of complete inactivity would be dramatically about as interesting as an episode of Big Brother, and probably even less eloquent. For these reasons, I decided to bring the story of Joe Strong's conflict with the Stevensons forward in time to the week of Louis' death. This made it possible for the narrative





to have some purchase: for there to be an antagonist. I know there is a fashion these days, particularly I believe in American academia, to revisit Joe Strong's position in the Stevenson family and see it in a more positive light. He wasn't a bad artist either. However for the purposes of my play, I stuck to the unreconstructed, pre-modern version; Joe Strong is my baddy. After all, Joe stole drinks from the Stevenson safe, he slept with native women, he cadged money. In my play it is Joe Strong's hold over Stevenson's step-daughter, Belle, (who we never see) which drives my plot and leads to the final showdown between Fanny and Louis before his death from the famous surprise brain haemorrhage.

Just before he dies, in the play, I do have him saying; 'Do I look strange?' as he is reported to have done, but I also have him saying a good deal besides, including a final attempt at a reconciliation with the spirit of his father. It was a strange and sometimes wonderful experience to have immersed myself so much in his life and words that I would sometimes find phrases coming to me that I could not be sure whether I had invented or was remembering from what I'd read. I still would not be able, without a great deal of consultation of notes to separate my Louis's words from real RLS's. No doubt, taking such liberties would horrify any true student of literature or history, but for me it was nothing short of bliss. On the whole the play received good reviews – one excellent one – but there was one critic who did not like it at all because of what he called its historically inaccurate dialogue. I have learned that one must never pay heed to why a critic liked or disliked something, only that they did. If anything, a fault with 'Death of Long Pig' is that its speech patterns may be too accurate and hence indigestible or unintelligible to the modern ear, so used to getting its period dialogue from the telly.

It took me about a month to write a very shaky first draft and before embarking on a second I sent it to a few people whose opinions I respect. I got very mixed responses. Some people loved





the Stevenson half, but hated the Gauguin, others the other way round. I conducted a rehearsed reading at the London Actor's Centre in front of an invited audience, which went exceptionally well, I thought, but confirmed the play's uncommerciality to me, with producers and agents present looking puzzled and pained. 'Couldn't you make them meet?' they said, or, more alarmingly, 'why did he change his voice half way through?' I had one defender; the excellent Nick Hern, publisher of just about all the new drama in the country at the moment. He became the play's champion and promised to publish the text if ever we did get a production on.

The second draft was roundly rejected by the nine or ten theatre companies I sent it to and a third draft was written. Then, a fourth. It was hard sometimes to keep faith and this was where an obsessive love of the subject matter really helped. Eventually, after two years of sending the manuscript to theatres, I found an ally in Alex Summers, an intern director at the Finborough, a small pub theatre with a big reputation. Neil McPherson, the artistic director of the theatre liked the play enough to lend us his space to conduct further rehearsed readings, but this time under Alex's brilliant direction. The Finborough receives neither grant nor subsidy and so money was not forth-coming, however, further drafts were written, this time to a purpose – answering the difficult but pertinent questions posed by Alex. At last I felt progress was being made.

And then a wonderful thing happened; Dominic Rowan, the actor who had played the Louis/Pigo double in our first reading, was appointed with his wife as the caretakers of Lamb House in Rye, the house where Henry James had lived and written. They thought it would be a good idea to do a rehearsed performance/reading in the gardens of the house in the summer; nothing could be more apposite, I felt. For this occasion we were able to assemble a stellar cast and luckily the weather was superb. A large audience of locals, interested parties and a producer or two







arrived in their straw hats and ate their picnics on the lawn while doing their best to listen to the words over the squawks of Rye's seagull population. And again Nick Hern's presence lent some gravity to the afternoon. After this we were given a possible set of dates at the Finborough, but still no production money. To begin with I sat on the sidelines that afternoon, anxiously watching the actors move about on the lawn, chewing my lip in much the same way as any author would on a first night in a theatre, but after the first few minutes, I gave in to the pleasure of imagination and just lay back under a tree gazing up through its branches at the pellucid sky and, listening to the actors, was transported to Polynesia in the 1890s: an unforgettable experience.

The play did eventually have its premiere the following summer, with the help from many people; among them, film and TV producer Graham Benson, who organised a talk at the Savile club, and a knight of the theatre who wishes to remain anonymous, but who wanted to ensure that fellow actors were getting more than expenses plus that old euphemism of the Fringe 'profit share'.

Casting was a nerve-racking experience and in fact, the final offer went out late on the Friday evening before the Monday morning's first rehearsal. We saw many actors for the role of Louis, and had trawled casting directories to be surprised by how many actors are actually in work at any given time and are therefore unavailable. This was lucky for us because from the instant we first saw Sean Murray, Alex and I knew we had our man. He was standing by the dustbins out the back of the Finborough theatre, rolling a cigarette; just like in my photo. Sean's embodiment of Louis had something uncanny about it, and his performance received universally superb reviews. To describe his work on the role as dedicated would be pedestrian – insanely driven might more reasonably cover it. For example, the play requires the actor playing Louis to vomit blood, and Sean was determined that this should feel authentic – a hard trick to pull off in the





confined – what is politely referred to as ‘intimate’ – space of the Finborough theatre. After trying and rejecting several other methods, Sean ended up with a condom full of beetroot juice and cod liver oil stuffed under his tongue. Arriving at this solution had meant a Sunday of practice in his garden being peered at suspiciously by his neighbours. Sean personally saw to the filling of his own condoms every night.

The experience of having ones play performed is both wonderful and terrible. On the one hand, one might curse the actors for misreading a funny line or for over sentimentalising another. On the other hand, one marvels at their exceptional ability to haul deeply moving emotion out from the apparently mundane. Some of the most surprising moments came when an actor would invest with subtext a line that I thought I had only kept in as a linking device, for instance to the next character’s entrance. For example, early on I have my Louis asking Fanny where Belle is. Belle has gone into Apia to meet the cargo ship. He then asks after Little Austin, then eight years old, Belle’s son and Louis’ step-grandchild. As the playwright, I am merely staking out the territory here, establishing who is what and where they are, or so I thought. But it was thrilling to watch an actor of Sean Murray’s calibre invest these simple questions with meaning and feeling. Just from the way he asked, we knew that Belle is somewhat spend-thrift and that Louis has an overwhelming love and empathy for Little Austin; a small croak in the voice, a little sideways flick of the eyes bringing to life what looks like plonky exposition on the page. As someone who is a little jaded, having spent most of his adult life doing it, this restored my faith in the power of acting.

Of course the play didn’t ‘transfer’, as we say in the business when a play doesn’t make someone enough money to warrant a run in the West End. But to those who saw it, I believe it had meaning and fascination; it’s not often we find ourselves taken to the Pacific side of the world on stage. However as I have been





writing this, an enthusiastic enquiry has come in from the Court Theatre in Christchurch, New Zealand. Perhaps that's where the play really belongs. If it does get an airing in New Zealand, perhaps that will be good enough reason to make another journey to the South Seas.<sup>1</sup>

I did eventually emerge, panting and sweaty, onto the knoll at the top of Mt Vaea. To my right was a view of the ocean and Apia valley below; so spectacular it took away the last remnants of my breath. Below me, beyond the trees were the neat lawns and rooftops of Vailima, Stevenson's house and estate, now lovingly restored, where you can walk through his study, see his tiny bed – incidentally in a different room from Fanny's large one – and stand on what is said by a canny guide to be the exact spot where he dropped dead. When he died, they carried his body in a great procession up here to the top of the mountain to lay him to rest. How they managed on the slope up which I had just struggled, I don't know. Maybe it hadn't rained so heavily the night before. And there on a smaller knoll, under a bread fruit tree was the large white concrete slab with his famous lines on a brass plaque on the Vailima side, and the verses he wrote for Fanny facing the other way, out to sea.

Stevenson longed for home during his illness-inflicted exile. 'I am a Scotsman,' he wrote, 'touch me and you will find a thistle [...] it is Edinburgh, that venerable city, that I still think of as home.' In fact, he missed Scotland so much that he made the Vailima staff wear tartan sarongs and had homely brickwork fireplaces painted in 'trompe l'oeil' on the walls of his study and smoking room. Often in his writings post 1888 he searches for similarities between the South Sea island landscape and that of the Highlands of Scotland: 'I could have fancied that I had slipped ten thousand miles away and was anchored in a Highland lock' he wrote of Atuona bay in the Marquesas. Having visited both I would say he was clutching at straws there.

I wondered if this spot he had chosen, high up above the





house, had been an often-visited haven from the stresses of what must have been a very complicated household. I certainly felt that everyday reality – which for me consists of plot, character and dialogue – had been left several hundred feet below me and quickly fell instead to contemplating the eternal.

#### NOTES

- 1 Sadly, the Court Theatre Arts Centre was destroyed by the earthquake of 22 February 2011, and the production never happened. New Zealand's longest running theatre company survived, however, and operates from new premises.





*Oceania and the Victorian Imagination: Where All Things Are Possible*, ed. by Richard D. Fulton and Peter H. Hoffenberg (Farnham, Surrey & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 209 pp., ISBN 978-1-4094-5711-4, £55.00 / \$99.95.

Two strands of argument run through this collection. Under their joint names, the editors write:

our essays focus on the Oceania in the Victorian imagination, an imagination fully informed and fully informing the colonial enterprise in its many forms [...] Our authors are concerned with how island visions intruded into and shaped Victorian life, how the Victorians may have variously perceived Oceania, or, more fundamentally, how such perceptions affected Victorian culture. (p. 5)

Yet when writing under his own name, one of the editors, Richard D. Fulton, notices a surprising paucity of references to the material products of the Oceanic colonies and protectorates, their role in political debate, and their representation in British school texts, missionary narratives, and adventure stories.

Portions of the South Seas were undeniably part of the empire: if post-colonial and imperial theory work consistently, the South Seas, like the rest of the empire, should have permeated Victorian culture [...] The Imperial South Seas should have helped create the imagined South Seas. However, South Seas images did not populate public spaces because there were not any [...] the South Seas simply did not exist as an artifact in public spaces until near the turn of the century. (p. 164)

If this is a contradiction, it's a creative one. In his essay on





'The South Seas in Mid-Victorian Children's Literature', Fulton argues against any assumption of smoothness or uniformity in the language and culture of the empire. In British imperial discourse, he insists, the Pacific islands received nothing like the attention paid to India, Canada, pre-Federation Australia, or even pre-Scramble Africa. What attention the islands did receive was often shaped by the narrative equivalent of poetic license, according to which 'All things are possible'.

Four of the twelve chapters in *Oceania and the Victorian Imagination* discuss Stevenson's fiction, and a fifth examines photos from the voyage of the *Casco* alongside *In the South Seas*. *Oceania* is an appropriate word for locating his Pacific experiences, bringing together the groups south of the Line such as the Society Islands, the Gilberts (present-day Kiribati), and the Samoan Archipelago with the Hawaiian Islands, which extend almost as far north as the Tropic of Cancer.<sup>1</sup> Despite the posthumous neglect of his Pacific stories, this selection of essays adds to the already solid evidence of Stevenson's role in reshaping British perceptions of the islands, admirably summed up by Caroline McCracken-Flesher and Roslyn Jolly in their contributions to the *Edinburgh Companion* (2010). A volume with parameters other than Fulton and Hoffenberg's could make a similar case for his influence elsewhere in the Anglosphere and in Continental Europe.

Fulton's remarks on the Victorian imagination underscore Stevenson's well-known letter to Colvin about 'The Beach of Falesá': 'It is the first realistic South Sea story; I mean with real South Sea character and details of life. Everybody else who has tried, that I have seen, got carried away by the romance, and ended in a kind of sugar candy sham epic' (28 September 1891). Several chapters on, authors other than Stevenson reinforce the point. Whether sensational or moralistic, many of Stevenson's predecessors saw Oceania through the literary stained glass of romantic primitivism, masculine adventure, or missionary





inspiration. Michelle Elleray has a particularly strong contribution, nuanced and thoroughly well-informed, on the missionary sub-text of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, often simply read as a thrilling tale of gentlemanly formation. Other essays that Stevensonians might find particularly suggestive are Sumangola Bhattacharya's on Louis Becke (who began to write fiction for the *Sydney Bulletin* in 1893, evidently under Stevenson's influence), and the essays by Mandy Treagus and Peter H. Hoffenberg on the presentation of Oceania at international exhibitions.

The five pieces directly involved with Stevenson are all fascinating, though a couple perhaps make too narrow an argument at the expense of the works they discuss. In 'Pacific Phantasmagorias: Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific Photography', Carla Manfredi presents a theoretically sophisticated report on her continuing investigations of four family albums held at the Writer's Museum in Edinburgh. As Manfredi says herself, attributing the individual items to particular family members is an uncertain business (pp. 13-14). All the same, she makes a good case for thinking that the overall quality is not amateurish; moreover, the images have a particular interest in the light of Stevenson's wish that the book form of *In the South Seas* should be illustrated with photographs – a desire unfulfilled. Manfredi's discussion of three landscape images emphasises the phantasmagorical, the surreal, the shadowy, the uncanny, and the elegiac. These renderings of 'a photographic Pacific' (p. 19) are thus more disquieting than the texts themselves. The question that lingers, however, has to do with the media themselves. Stevenson brings to his writing a well-stocked verbal palette, put to memorable use for instance in the description of Anaho Bay in Chapter 3 of *In the South Seas*, which Manfredi cites. Wouldn't any black-and-white image frozen in time by a bulky camera evoke in a modern spectator a sense of something lost – especially when paired with a specific text?<sup>2</sup>

Genie Babb's 'Isolation and Variation on Doctor Moreau's





Oceanic Island' is a triangulation of Wells, Stevenson, and Alfred Russel Wallace. She argues that 'The Ebb-Tide' is a forerunner of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, pointing not only to physical resemblances between Attwater and Moreau, but to their relish for exercising power over others, a shared cruelty of ends and means, and a shared propensity to justify this cruelty by invoking Nature and religion. Although Moreau is vastly more ambitious than Attwater and rigorously dedicated to his programme of experiments, Babb's claim is intriguing and enough to make one wonder about a wider presence of Stevenson in Wells's early fiction. Her other claim is breathtaking: Moreau's theory of human development is modelled on the work of Alfred Russel Wallace. To challenge this argument or to concur needs much more space than the *JSS* can offer.

Over the last two decades, some of the many feminist scholars who work on imperialism have charted the migration of ideas about homeliness and family life from 'Home' in the United Kingdom to unhomely overseas possessions. Navigating by their charts, Ingrid Ranum writes of a new sense of masculinity in the second half of the nineteenth century that valued family over its contraries of individualism and male bonding and eventually spread across the British Empire. According to her chapter, 'At Home in the Empire: Domesticity and Masculine Identity in *Almayer's Folly* and "The Beach of Falesá"', Stevenson's Wiltshire comes to accept this new kind of domestic masculinity, whereas Conrad's *Almayer* is quite unable to adapt.<sup>3</sup> Few readers would quarrel with this assessment, but some will have trouble with its geopolitical assumptions. As Ranum notes in passing, *Almayer's Folly* is set upriver from the east coast of Borneo (present-day Kalimantan), a remote area of the Dutch Empire where *Almayer* is the only white man. He lives in the fictional town of Sambir, which is subject to the local commercial and political intrigues of its Rajah and an Arab trader as well as rare visits from the Dutch navy. Falesá is a high island rather than an atoll, whose inhab-







itants speak a Polynesian language, but, Uma and her mother aside, they are not Samoans. The 'European' presence (Randall seems to be an American) is confined to a few beachcombers and a trader or two, though Protestant missionaries visit regularly. The traders and missionaries may be the advance guard of empire, but the island is locally ruled, neither a protectorate nor a colony. Wiltshire's final question "I'd like to know where I'm to find the whites?" is not simply a racist *cri de coeur* but a response to his displacement to another, similar outpost. What in imperial domesticity theory applies to the Raj or the settler colonies does not inevitably apply to Falesá or Borneo.

These historical objections do not vitiate Ranum's argument – quite the contrary – but it's the informality, even lawlessness of living as a European on or beyond imperial frontiers that make these stories of failed or successful domesticity so vivid and so unpredictable. (This informality does not govern the conduct of Polynesians or Malays, who live by other protocols.) The setting also enables the paradoxes and contradictions of Wiltshire's Defoe-like first person narrative and the ironies, absurdities, and unexpected shifts of mode in Conrad's narrative voice. What kind of domesticity will Nina, Almayer's daughter, enjoy after her elopement with a Balinese prince? This couple shows more promise of mutual love than the parents ever did.

Michelle Patricia Beissel Heath's 'Cooks and Queens and Dreams: The South Sea Islands as Fairy Islands of Fantasy' deals with a tonally heterogeneous group of books for children by Charlotte M. Yonge, E(dith) Nesbit, and Stevenson. Among these Fairy Islands of Fantasy in the South Seas are Treasure and Skull Islands.<sup>4</sup> Citing work by other students of children's literature, Beissel Heath observes: 'All three of these writers can be linked, then, by being faulted for not being clear-cut in their ideology and politics and especially in regarding their positions on empire' (p. 139). She qualifies such judgements by arguing that 'Despite their contradictions, all of these writers [...] were





clear about at least one aspect of empire: in an idealized dream-form it could inspire hope, possibility, and change for an at-times decaying homeland; in its reality, it was often terrifying, if not nightmarish' (p. 139). Putting aside the temptation to debate Heath's readings of the other two authors or ask why novelists must be clear-cut in their politics, I will limit myself to *Treasure Island*, which, even in an 'idealized dream-form', is hard to read as inspiring 'hope, possibility, and change for an at-times decaying homeland' (p. 139). The conduct of the pirates lies somewhere between Hobbes's 'war of all against all' and the wilder shores of Social Darwinism. Theirs is not the multicultural, more or less egalitarian, creatively antinomian fraternity rediscovered by contemporary scholars such as Hans Turley and Marcus Rediker. Piracy may be a metaphor or metonymy for empire (in Latin American accounts of British imperialism it is often both), and in the seventeenth century Caribbean pirates and colonial officials were hard to tell apart, but, like Falesá, *Treasure Island* lies outside the imperium, though not beyond the lure of the golden coinage of several empires. The pirates come from a dramatic tradition of delectable villains, and Silver, described by Henley in the *Saturday Review* (8 December 1883) as 'a buccaneering Borgia', is a character whose 'wickedness is the wickedness of a man of genius' (ibid.). Beissel Heath rightly brings out the 'often terrifying, if not nightmarish' aspects of the story (p. 139), but as admirers of the Gothic tradition know, whether experienced by children, adolescents, or adults, safely-distant terror can be pleasurable, and wickedness entrancing.

The only cumbersome thing about Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega's essay is the title: 'Who's Who in "The Isle of Voices"? How Victorian Robert Louis Stevenson Viewed Pacific Islanders' Perceptions of Victorians and of Themselves.' Her knowledge of Polynesian languages and cultures, her familiarity with ideas from anthropology and psychoanalysis, her shrewd sense of politics and history all show her thinking both locally and glob-





ally. She is an excellent reader (and at home too with oral traditions) who adapts the theory to the text rather than trimming and squeezing the text to fit the theory. Her tone is confident but never hectoring, her writing clear and concise, her argument fascinating and too rich for all but the crudest summary.

Leola begins as a young man, entranced by Western goods such as concertinas and sharp suits, whose only traditional habit, quite unearned, is the laziness of a Hawaiian aristocrat, one of the divinely-sanctioned *ali'i*; his father, Kalamake, consistently 'perverts his sacred art' of wizardry (p. 95). Neither of them has any regard for *tapu* (taboo). In the course of the story, Leola undergoes three rites of passage during which he overcomes his gaucheness, matures, and learns traditional skills. During these transitions, he is guided by two women, his wife on the Isle of Voices and his Hawaiian wife, Lehua, who come to his rescue at times of physical and spiritual danger and know the proper ends and means of ritual. When Lehua, for example, prepares *poi* (pounded taro) after she gets Leola safely back to Moloka'i, she is offering him a sacred food.

Yet Lehua has also come to cautious terms with the ways of incomers. 'Bridging the past, the present and the future, she knows how to keep traditions alive' (p. 103) by making tactical compromises and judicious choices.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, 'At the end of the narrative, there still remain three father-figures allied against the young couple: the Hawaiian sorcerer, a white missionary, and the police, all three representatives [...] of Western imperialism' (p. 104). As for the imagined future, Largeaud-Ortega points to the story's final words, 'who shall say?'. 'The narrator of "The Isle of Voices" is suddenly made voiceless. This may express Stevenson's reluctance to speak to the last for the natives. [...] Stevenson in the Pacific viewed himself as a guest; he very bravely and repeatedly stood against Western hegemony. The open ending of his tale leaves it for native Pacific islanders to determine their own destiny for themselves' (p. 105). Fulton





and Hoffenberg's collection offers us many valuable essays, but this one by itself would be enough to justify the book's existence.

Laurence Davies

## NOTES

- 1 Because Oceania can be a political, cultural, or ecological term as well as a geographical one, there is no consensus on its scope. This collection mainly concerns Polynesia and Micronesia, but has a chapter on William Howitt's portrayals of Victoria and Tasmania, another on a volume of stories by the Australian author Louis Becke, and another on the settler colonies in general.
- 2 I am thinking, for example, of Georges Rodenbach's 'récit-photo' *Bruges-la-morte* (1892), the first novel to be accompanied by photographs.
- 3 Ranum cites Roslyn Jolly's earlier study of domesticity in 'The Beach of Falesá' then goes on to say more about domestic space, drawing on Stevenson's essay 'The Ideal House' (115-16).
- 4 Beissel Heath quotes from an interview with Stevenson in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (14 February 1890, 4) to show that at least some readers thought Treasure Island was in the South Pacific rather than the Caribbean; replying to the journalist, RLS said "I only wish myself that I knew where it really was' (139, n 12). The novel itself artfully plays off circumstantial detail against reticence and mystery.
- 5 Largeaud-Ortega associates her with powerful women in Pacific history, including Queen Lili'uokalani of Hawai'i. She met RLS in 1889, when she was Crown Princess. There is a photograph of their meeting in the City Art Centre, Edinburgh: <http://www.capitalcollections.org.uk/index.php?a=ViewItem&i=19368&WI NID=1378044193966>. As it happens, this author, musician, and constitutional monarch was dethroned by US marines acting on behalf of European and American businessmen and planters on 17 January 1893, three weeks before 'The Isle of Voices' appeared in the *National Observer*.





## Contributors

**Robert-Louis Abrahamson** is Collegiate Professor of English at the University of Maryland University College's European Division. He has written about Stevenson's essays and fables, and has presented conference papers and public talks on Stevenson, as well as reading and commenting on Stevenson's works on his radio show *Evening under Lamplight*. He is a co-editor of the *Essays* volumes in the New Edinburgh Edition of Stevenson. He is a founder of the listserv Reading RLS, and appeared in the short film on Stevenson's fables, *Ai Minimi Drammi*.

**Neil Macara Brown** is a retired Edinburgh community education and environment worker, who also contributed the series on the capital in *Collins Encyclopaedia of Scotland*. He maintains the online Library database on the RLS Website. His recent research interests include the study of Victorian penny papers, particularly their influence upon RLS (see 'Had their day: Robert Louis Stevenson's popular authors', JSS 9).

**Linda Dryden** is Professor of English Literature at Edinburgh Napier University, and the Director of the Centre for Literature and Writing (CLAW). She is co-editor of the *Journal of Stevenson Studies* and in charge of the RLS website. She is the author of two monographs and one edited book, *Joseph Conrad and Robert Louis Stevenson: Writers of Transition*, in addition to many journal articles on Conrad, Stevenson, Wells and issues related to the *fin de siècle*. Linda is currently working on a book on Conrad and Wells.

**Christy Danelle Di Frances** completed her doctoral research on Robert Louis Stevenson's aesthetics of adventure at the University of Aberdeen, where she was nominated for the G. Ross Roy medal. For the 2012-2013 academic year, she was a Special Program Instructor within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, and she now teaches in the





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**Adam Lawrence** is an Assistant Professor of English at Concordia University, where he teaches writing courses and science fiction. Dr. Lawrence has published articles on gender and myth in contemporary Irish fiction, and the human-‘alien’ encounter in twentieth-century science fiction. He is also currently engaged in a project that examines the ‘changeling’ legend as an evolutionary trope in British and American science fiction.

**Catherine Mathews** is a lawyer, practicing in Sydney, Australia. As an Independent Scholar she attended the 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial Stevenson Conference, University of Stirling, 2010 and continues her interest in Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific. Her next paper concerns his efforts in Samoan politics, campaigns on forced labour and relationships with targeted people ‘of influence’, Samoan and European.

**Nigel Planer** was a student of African and Asian Studies at Sussex University before giving up the degree course to train as an actor. He has had a successful career as a performer, working in television, film, radio and theatre ever since. He has written two novels and a best-seller about parenthood, as well as publishing a short collection of poetry. His first play, *On the Ceiling* transferred from Birmingham rep to the West End and then to Radio 4. *Death of Long Pig* was premiered in London in 2009. Both plays are published by Nick Hern Books.





# 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 to be published will be *Prince Otto*, edited by Robert Irvine of the University of Edinburgh: all parts of the volume have now been written and most set up in type while the editor is working on the last few points raised during copy editing. The volume is planned for publication before Christmas 2013. Next should follow *Virginibus Puerisque*, which only lacks the volume introduction. The editors of the other essays volumes are working to the main text (Stevenson's text) so that this can be set up before Christmas 2013, allowing for page references to be made from the explanatory notes of other volumes in our edition. Five volumes of essays are planned, co-ordinated by Richard Dury; publication is planned in 2014 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 2015.

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 working on 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 has allowed us to appoint Lena Wånggren as post-doctoral research fellow. 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 negotiated a formal partnership with the National Library of Scotland: the NLS has agreed to scan a certain number of volumes in their collection at a special price and EdRLS deposits the scanned and fully proofed files with them, to make a Robert Louis Stevenson digital archive. These files are already being used (with acknowledgement to EdRLS) as text-file transcripts of the pdfs on the NLS's Robert Louis Stevenson pages (<http://digital.nls.uk/rlstevenson/editions.html>).

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
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- 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:

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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.

**Volume 4** in 2007 contained essays from the Saranac conference by R. L. Abrahamson, Richard Ambrosini, Hilary J. Beattie, Jenni Calder, Dennis Denisoff, Cinzia Giglioni, Gordon Hirsch, Mary B. Hotaling, William B. Jones Jr, Wendy R. Katz, Jürgen Kramer, Ilaria B. Sborgi, Marilyn Simon, Robert Benjamin Stevenson III, Roderick Watson.

**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.





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