



Journal of Stevenson Studies Volume 8





ii

Journal of Stevenson Studies





Editors

Professor Linda Dryden
Centre for Literature and
Writing
School of Arts and Creative
Industries
Napier University
Craighouse
Edinburgh
EH10 5LG
Scotland
Tel: 0131 455 6128
Email: l.dryden@napier.ac.uk

Professor Emeritus
Roderick Watson
English Studies
University of Stirling
Stirling
FK9 4LA
Scotland
Tel: 01786 467500
Email: r.b.watson@virgin.net

Contributions to volume 10 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.

Published by
The Centre for Scottish Studies
University of Stirling

© The contributors 2011

ISSN: 1744-3857
Printed and bound in the UK by
Antony Rowe Ltd.
Chippenham, Wiltshire.





Editorial Board

Professor Richard Ambrosini
Universita' di Roma Tre
Rome

Professor Stephen Arata
School of English
University of Virginia

Dr Hilary Beattie
Department of Psychiatry
Columbia University

Professor Oliver Buckton
School of English
Florida Atlantic University

Dr Jenni Calder
National Museum of Scotland

Professor Linda Dryden
School of Arts and Creative
Industries
Edinburgh Napier University

Professor Richard Dury
University of Bergamo
(Consultant Editor)

Dr Penny Fielding
Department of English
University of Edinburgh

Professor Gordon Hirsch
Department of English
University of Minnesota

Professor Katherine Linehan
Department of English
Oberlin College
Ohio

Professor Barry Menikoff
Department of English
University of Hawaii at
Manoa

Professor Glenda Norquay
Department of English and
Cultural History
Liverpool John Moores
University

Professor Marshall Walker
Department of English
The University of Waikato

Professor Roderick Watson
Department of English
Studies
University of Stirling





Contents

Editorial	1
James Robertson	
A reliable author and his unreliable critics: the fall and rise of Stevenson's literary reputation.....	5
Lesley Graham	
'Selfless': the shifting reputation of Alison Cunningham in biographies of Robert Louis Stevenson	17
Stuart Kelly	
Plot, narrative and artifice: Walter Scott to Thomas Pynchon via RLS.....	31
Saverio Tomaiuolo	
The strange case of <i>Weir of Hermiston</i> and <i>St. Ives</i> : R. L. Stevenson's last adventures in narration	49
Donald Mackenzie	
Stevenson after Scott: the case of Catriona.....	69
Gordon Hirsch	
Locating RLS in relation to Brander Matthews's and Walter Besant's theories of literary collaboration in the production of popular fiction	97
Roderick Watson	
'Ginger beer and earthquakes' –Stevenson and the terrors of contingency	108
Robert Louis Abrahamson	
'Of all men the most clubbable'? RLS at the Savile Club and the <i>Cornhill Magazine</i>	125
Sarah Ames	
'The Suicide Club': afterlives	143
Jenni Calder	
Stevenson in the wilderness: California, <i>Kidnapped</i> and <i>The Master of Ballantrae</i>	166



**Nathalie Jaëck**

Stevenson's literary utopia 182

Hilary J. Beattie

Stevenson's mirrored images or, games of Hyde and seek.. 197

David Miller'In some shut convent place': the question of
Stevenson's poetry 214**Ann C. Colley**

Locating home234

Richard J. HillIllustrating *Island Nights' Entertainments*: the problem
of exotic authenticity245**Sara Stevenson**Seeing in Time. Visual engagement in Stevenson's idea
of Edinburgh264**Reviews**286**Contributors**297**JSS Notes**.....301



Editorial

This issue of the *Journal of Stevenson Studies* contains essays that have been selected and developed from papers presented at the Stirling conference 'RLS 2010: Locating Stevenson'. Organised by Scott Hames, this event returned the Stevenson academic community to the University of Stirling, for it was there, in the year 2000, that the first of all our subsequent biennial conferences took place. Dr Eric Massie, then a postgraduate at the university, initiated that first event and went on to produce the first issue of the *Journal of Stevenson Studies*. In the ten years since then, under the editorship of Rory Watson and Linda Dryden, we hope that this *Journal* has been a significant critical resource in the growing field of Stevenson studies.

The theme of the 2010 conference was 'Locating Stevenson' and responses to this topic were many and various. The present volume can offer only some of the work presented over three very busy days, but other papers have been earmarked for later publication. We have tried to group the essays in this volume in broadly thematic sets so that their associated topics might seem to follow from and comment on each other, and each set lead on to the next. James Robertson, one of Scotland's leading novelists, opens with his plenary lecture, reflecting on the rise and fall of Stevenson's reputation, while Leslie Graham's essay tracks how 'Cummie' has been represented in numerous biographies of her young charge. Both papers demonstrate the shifting terrain of literary and biographical judgement. The contributions from Stuart Kelly (who gave the other plenary lecture), Saverio Tomaiuolo, Donald Mackenzie and Gordon Hirsch, take us into acts of critical location, or rather re-location, for all four offer fresh contexts or insights into Stevenson's production of popular fiction and how he managed and thought about his art. The essays from Roderick Watson, Robert-Louis Abrahamson, and Sarah Ames all deal with elements to be found in Stevenson's





essay writing or short fiction, looking at his sometimes disturbing propensity for mixing darkness with what at least seems to be frivolity. Jenni Calder's essay touches on similar darknesses, when she reflects on the role of the 'wilderness' in both his life and fiction. The essays from Nathalie Jaëck, Hilary Beattie and David Miller relocate Stevenson's literary achievement from their different and strongly theoretical perspectives. Ann Colley returns us to questions of literal location in her account of how Stevenson slowly became 'at home' in the Pacific, while Richard Hill reflects on the relationship between Stevenson's 'Island' texts and the illustrations used to support them in early publications. Sara Stevenson continues the visual theme with an essay speculating on Stevenson's observation of aspects of Edinburgh in the context of Hill and Adamson, pioneer photographers of that fascinating city.

These essays testify to the diversity and breadth of Stevenson Studies today, and the point is made again if one looks at the institutions and home countries of the 2010 conference delegates, with representatives from the Basque Country, Canada, England, France, French Polynesia, Germany, Hawaii, Italy, Japan, Scotland, Spain, Taiwan and the United States. It seems fitting, then, that Stevenson's Pacific experience should be reflected in the location of the next international conference, which is to be held in Australia at the University of South Wales in 2013, before returning to the United States to be hosted at the University of Virginia in 2015.

In keeping with this ever expanding field of interest, the *New Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, under the general editorship of Stephen Arata, Richard Dury and Penny Fielding, is gathering pace and will soon produce new critical editions that will be absolutely invaluable to scholars and informed readers alike. A brief report on the edition's progress can be found at the end of this volume, and of course Richard Dury's long standing work on the online *RLS*





Newsletter (now in its 11th year) continues to offer an informed and indispensable review of new academic publications, lectures, seminars, conferences, biographical studies, theatre adaptations, recent editions, iconography, translations and every sort of reference to Stevenson in both academic circles and the general media. If you are not on his email list, this remarkable resource, and its archive, can be accessed at <http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org/newsletter>.

The power of electronic dissemination is evidenced again by the fact that the RLS Website (www.robert-louis-stevenson.org) received 20,000 hits on his birthday in November 2010, and it was through this link that Edinburgh Napier University took possession, in May that year, of a library of over 400 books, pamphlets, magazines, and printed Stevensoniana, including letters from Sidney Colvin. This extensive resource was a donation from Mr. Gellius Leopold, whose father (named Robert Louis after Stevenson) and grandfather had been collecting Stevenson material in Holland since the beginning of the twentieth century. The RLS Library will be made available to Stevenson scholars in the spring of 2012, and will be dedicated to Mr. Leopold and his forebears. Other initiatives at a local level in Scotland include a Stevenson Writing Competition for Edinburgh schools and plans to launch an annual RLS Day; a Stevenson discussion between Ian Rankin and Nigel Planar will launch the city's Festival of History in November, while on the same month the UNESCO City of Literature (UCL) in Edinburgh will launch a virtual Stevenson trail to be accessed via the UCL website.

Much has happened in the ten years since the first biennial Stevenson conference at Stirling, and Scott Hames is to be congratulated for closing the circle so effectively with his outstanding organisation of the 2010 event. Back numbers of *JSS* are available on line (after three years) at the Stevenson website, and we may yet consider changing the *Journal's* status to that of an exclusively electronic publication. Many readers will always





favour hard copy, but we do need to increase our subscription list, and electronic publication has clear economic advantages. If you or your institution have a view on this we would like to hear it, and of course we always welcome new subscribers. In the meantime we can announce that Volume 9 of *JSS* will be guest-edited by Richard Dury and Robert-Louis Abrahamson, in a special number devoted to Stevenson's essays and non-fiction output. This issue is currently well under way and will appear in 2012. The regular editors are looking for contributions on any topic of Stevenson studies for Volume 10, and we already have some fine essays earmarked for that edition. *The Journal of Stevenson Studies* would not be possible without the support of the Editorial Board and the co-opted volunteers who peer-review the essays we receive, so, as always, our thanks go to them, with special thanks to our subscribers and contributors.

Roderick Watson and Linda Dryden





A reliable author and his unreliable critics: the fall and rise of Stevenson's literary reputation¹

James Robertson

In an essay of 1888 on 'Popular Authors', Stevenson surveyed the popular or penny press and some of the authors who, contributing to it, turned out reams of adventure stories and romantic yarns for mass consumption. He had devoured much of this material as a boy, and retained a fondness for it even though he recognised that nearly all of it was trash. With his tongue slightly in his cheek, he even wished he could bask in the utterly uncritical admiration that these writers inspired in their readers. Why, he pondered, did they yearn to be published, like supposedly 'serious' authors, in three volumes, taken up by the circulating libraries and reviewed by the critics? Why did they seek 'this fictitious upper popularity, made by hack journalists and countersigned by yawning girls?' He himself, he said, languished under the reverse of their complaint. He, 'an upper-class author, bound and criticised,' longed for 'the penny number and the weekly woodcut!'

Treasure Island was, of course, originally published in instalments in *Young Folks Magazine*. According to Stevenson, he realised from the cold responses in the correspondence column of that paper that his style of writing was not much appreciated, especially when compared with the material turned out by some of the more practised staff writers. Later, when *Treasure Island* appeared in book form, a housemaid used to come and boast to him whenever she had managed another chapter: 'that any pleasure should attend the exercise,' he wrote, 'never crossed her thoughts'. 'Yet,' he acknowledged, 'I was thought well of on my penny paper [. . .] because [. . .] I was a "reliable author".'² In other words, he delivered his instalments on time, and as anyone who has worked in journalism will tell you, delivering copy on





time is at least as important as delivering copy of any quality. Stevenson, despite his claims to the contrary, obviously delivered quality, and on time.

I want to explore the idea of Stevenson being a 'reliable author' in the context of the very bumpy ride he has had from many critics over the last century. We are used to the notion of an 'unreliable narrator' – indeed, there are a few who might fall into this category in Stevenson's *oeuvre* – but one of the reasons why Stevenson fell foul of literary critics for much of the 20th century was for the very fact of his being so 'reliable'. He was, as they saw it, too bourgeois, too conscious of the commercial relationship between author and reader, too concerned with his own style and too willing to compromise it. He wrote essays and poems and novels that could be relied upon not to disturb the conscience or complacency of the middle classes. This is what some of his critics have said. I think this tells us at least as much about them as it does about the quality or matter of his work, but let us for a moment look at what some of them had to say.

'RLS' was the object of cult worship in his lifetime and, as with Robert Burns, this increased dramatically after his early demise. His death at forty-four in the South Seas encouraged the view that he had led a courageous, adventurous life in spite of recurring sickness, and that he presented a model of optimism and moral sturdiness that could be used to impress the young. It is always, I think, detrimental to an author to be exploited in this way for purposes with which he may profoundly disagree – and Stevenson would certainly have objected to being used as a kind of socially and morally acceptable pin-up. There were simply too many 'selections' of 'RLS': *The Pocket R.L.S.* (1906), *A Stevenson Calendar* (1909), *The Wisdom of R. L. Stevenson* (1904), and even an anthology of his *Brave Words About Death* (published – either in a desperate attempt to make sense of the senseless, or with ghastly opportunism – in 1916).

It was Stevenson's misfortune that his star had probably never





been more in the ascendant than at the start of the First World War. The experience of that war meant that almost any cultural figure who had enjoyed widespread acclaim before it was likely to be in for a kicking after it, from those horrified and disgusted by the devastation into which Victorian and Edwardian civilisation had led the world. The main line of attack on Stevenson, however, was that he was a literary lightweight. Either he knew this and was therefore a charlatan, or he didn't and was therefore deluded. He was not serious. He was childish. It wasn't his fault that he died so young, but the truth was – he never grew up. As early as 1897 the Irish novelist George Moore, a contemporary of Stevenson, had made this criticism. It was Moore who attacked what he saw as Stevenson's affected 'style', describing him as 'the best-dressed young man that ever walked in the Burlington Arcade'.³ In 1914 the critic Frank Swinnerton developed this theme, calling Stevenson 'a writer of the second class', a 'poseur', all charm and no substance (I paraphrase.) He was an imitator, not an innovator, and if romance as an art in fiction was dead, it was Stevenson who killed it.

Then came the war, and the understandable crash in credibility of so much of what had preceded it. In 1924 we find Leonard Woolf, of the Bloomsbury group, describing Stevenson's failings as the first ten volumes of the thirty-five-volume Tusitala edition of his works are issued. Woolf says this has given him the opportunity of rereading *Kidnapped*, *Treasure Island*, *The Body Snatcher* and some of the essays, and he is pleasantly surprised at what he finds. Stevenson in top storytelling gear is thoroughly enjoyable. However. 'The worst thing about him is his style' – which is false. Also, he has nothing to say. He is – again – 'quite a good imitator of great writers' but not a great writer himself. 'His ear for verbal music is not fine, and his phrases are rather laboured' but *Treasure Island* is 'thoroughly entertaining'. 'It is pre-eminently a day-dream type of story, and Stevenson always remained a typical day-dream writer. He appeals to the child or





to the primitively childish in grown men and women.⁴

If all of this is damning with very faint praise, it gets worse. In 1925 E. M. Forster thought Stevenson guilty of ‘mannerisms . . . self-consciousness [. . .] sentimentality [. . .] quaintness’. In 1948 F. R. Leavis only includes Stevenson in *The Great Tradition* in a footnote: ‘Scott’, he writes, ‘was primarily a kind of inspired folklorist [. . .] [N]ot having the creative writer’s interest in literature, he made no serious attempt to work out his own form and break away from the bad tradition of the eighteenth century-romance. [. . .] Out of Scott a bad tradition came. It spoiled Fenimore Cooper, who had new and first-hand interests and the makings of a distinguished novelist. And with Stevenson it took on “literary” sophistication and fine writing.’⁵

And so on and so forth. Leavis links Stevenson to Scott and implicitly writes off Scottish fiction as a serious tradition. When we come closer to home, we find the two big critical voices of the inter-war years in Scotland saying much the same. Edwin Muir, writing in the *Modern Scot* in 1931, declared that Stevenson ‘is still read by the vulgar, but he has joined the band of writers on whom, by tacit consent, the serious critics have nothing to say’. Muir obviously thought himself among the serious critics. He then went on to attack Scotland as: ‘a country where everything combined to prevent an imaginative writer from coming to maturity. After three centuries of a culture almost exclusively theological, imaginative literature in Scotland in Stevenson’s time was tolerated, where it was tolerated at all, only as an idle toy. That a novel should influence the character or humanise the emotions was an un-Scottish idea [. . .] One of the earliest ideas which must have been implanted in Stevenson’s mind by universal suggestion was that storytelling was an idle occupation, and could be tolerated only as long as it remained so.’

The example of Scott, Muir says, would have done nothing to dispel this notion. Another fault he shared with Scott was ‘boyish irresponsibility’. Again, Scotland is blamed. ‘A society which





makes a writer a mere entertainer tacitly deprives him of any civic status, puts him among the superior mountebanks, and, if he is a man of independence, drives him into a showy Bohemianism. The defiantly picturesque pose which Stevenson assumed was in part at least the cloak under which he hoped to conceal his humiliating function, that of having to please everybody.⁶

Muir's criticism is wrong in many respects, in my view, but let me mention just two. First, one can hardly say that Scotland deprived Sir Walter Scott of civic status. Second, it is surely simplistic to separate the effects of storytelling and theology, as if in the context of Stevenson's Scotland the two are, or could be, exclusive one of the other: the figure of Stevenson's Calvinistic nursemaid, Cummy, who shared with him not only her ideas of sin, hell and damnation but also vivid tales of the Covenanters and the serial in *Cassell's Weekly Paper*, suggests a more *complex* range of influences acting with more *complexity* on the young Stevenson, than Muir allows. 'It's you who gave me a passion for the drama, Cummy,' Louis told her later, much to her horror. The Victorian era was not only a great age of the novel but also a great age of religion and morality. Nor were conflicts between art and religion confined to Scotland alone, although no one would deny the special effects of Scottish Calvinism. But have these really all been so negative upon our literature? Are they not in fact defining characteristics of it?

But what of the other loud Scottish voice of the inter-war years, that of Christopher Murray Grieve, shortly to fall out in spectacular fashion with Edwin Muir? What did Grieve, a.k.a. Hugh MacDiarmid, make of Stevenson, and how, if at all did he fit him into the idea of a Scottish literary Renaissance?

Over and over again MacDiarmid recycles – approvingly – three quotations from Stevenson: one about D'Artagnan, one about the great gulf of culture and manners that separates the Scots and the English (a quotation, however, which MacDiarmid qualifies every time by saying that Stevenson was mistaken in





finding this even remotely puzzling) and one in which Stevenson complains of how writers are palmed off by society with a little box of toys and told 'you mustn't play with anything else'. Again, MacDiarmid always qualifies this quotation by regretting that Stevenson saw this yet carried on playing with the toys. In an early article in the *Dunfermline Press* in 1922 he wrote:

Stands Stevenson's reputation where it did? Scarcely. 'Thrawn Janet' and the uncompleted *Weir of Hermiston* and a verse or two are almost all of his work that survives in the keen air of pure literature. His immortality is on a lower plane [. . .] The secret of Stevenson's immortality and, at the same time, of his ineffectuality – is just that he never grew up. He is the Peter Pan of letters. He remains forever romantically poised, on the very threshold of manhood. But he can never cross the threshold. Most of us must and do, and the further we penetrate into the temple of reality the further we go from Stevenson – until he remains an elfin figure, framed in distant sunlight, very small, very beautiful, very remote. And life goes on, wherever it goes. And literature has no time for careful posing and attitudinising. Literature today, like ourselves, is truest when baffled and bewildered. 'R.L.S.' with time grows less – but always beautifully less, and, after all, the essence of his message is concentrated into a very little of his work. That will remain – like a star behind us.⁷

Grieve/MacDiarmid, of course, was never a man to strike a pose or an attitude! Actually there is a certain beauty and acute observation in MacDiarmid's article, but it does suggest to me that, having decided that he had the measure of Stevenson, he never bothered to go back and read him again. To say Stevenson ignored 'real life' – well, you can see where he's coming from, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, but it's just not true – and I'll return to this briefly. But time has elapsed, and now, thanks





partly to MacDiarmid's relentless but successful efforts to make us rethink our ideas of Scottish identity and literature, we can turn back to Stevenson – and to Scott, with whom he is so often linked – with greater appreciation and without seeing them as 'the great source of the paralysing ideology of defeatism' (as MacDiarmid saw Scott) and his sidekick. Perhaps it is necessary to knock the reputation of great writers from time to time, so that in the longer term we can appreciate them more.

So, what was it about Stevenson that so irritated, and generated such angst, in the 1920s and 1930s? First, he didn't produce a solid, consistent body of work, but instead dabbled in every kind of form – essays, travel books, polemics, histories, fiction, drama and poetry – and he wrote for both adults and children. He is therefore quite elusive and difficult to pin down. Sometimes this elusiveness can look like flighty irresponsibility. G. K. Chesterton, a sympathetic admirer, wrote in 1902 that, 'He suffered from his versatility, not, as is loosely said, by not doing every department well enough, but by doing every department too well. As child, cockney, pirate, or Puritan, his disguises were so good that most people could not see the same man under all.'⁸

Second, he was popular: popular in his lifetime, and popular long after his death. This meant that he couldn't be any good. In particular, he had written books considered to be mere boys' adventure stories. Other authors have written for both adults and children without being on the receiving end of such opprobrium as has been doled out to Stevenson. The difference lies in the relatively high profile of the children's books. Because his most successful books appeared to be 'for children', everything else he wrote was tainted by association. The fact that *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* are incredibly sophisticated adventure stories, and that they contain within them, if you care to look, some remarkable observations on human greed, fallibility, friendship and loneliness, seems not to have counted for much. *Treasure Island* is, of course, also full of clichés, in the same way





that Shakespeare is full of clichés. Likewise, the sensationalism of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* did little for many years to endear it to literary critics, yet within that slim volume is more about the fractured condition of human beings than you'll find in a dozen psychology text books.

Third, Stevenson, with the 'reliability' of his writing, and with his creed of hard work, honesty, courage and honour, appeared to have no place in a cynical, exhausted, sickened and broken post-1918 world, the world of modernism and competing brutal ideologies and psychology and revolution. Yet in many respects his oeuvre prefigures the key themes of dislocation, alienation and dissolution that mark much 20th-century literature. Stevenson is subversive but he is *subtly* subversive and perhaps this is one reason why he has lasted as long as he has. What appears superficially simple in his work is often complex and subterraneously disturbing. Jenni Calder in her excellent *Life Study* has suggested that if Stevenson as a young man *did* too self-consciously try to please his readers, *was* guilty of placing too much emphasis on style rather than substance, *was* uneasy with the dominant cultural creed of his native country, he recognised his mistakes and thought through what we today might call his 'issues'.⁹ Great though the potential of *Weir of Hermiston* is, she says, don't look to it as an indication of what Stevenson *might* have done. Look instead to the work he was producing in, and about, the South Pacific. There, she says, he '*had* found a language of reality, and could use it with control and consistency'. In *The Ebb-Tide* and 'The Beach of Falesá' he was writing about 'morally ambiguous situations and personalities [. . .] moral and political corruption [. . .] exploitation and degradation.' In the South Seas a man, a European man in particular, did not need to transform himself into Mr Hyde to behave badly. The worst aspects of colonialism and racism were visited on the islands. Yet in this environment a man might also behave well. The narrator of 'The Beach of Falesá', Wiltshire, is far from flawless or heroic, and he isn't magically





reformed or transformed in the course of the story. But that is the power of it: Wiltshire's language is 'ambivalent, honest but limited' and true to Stevenson's experience of the Pacific. Some, like his friend and literary adviser Sidney Colvin, didn't like this new turn, but Stevenson knew he was writing strong stuff. 'And please to observe,' he wrote to Colvin, 'that almost all that is ugly [in the story] is in the whites.'

All writers rise and fall in critical and popular acclaim. Some fall and never rise again. The fact is that Stevenson continues to be read, and now, despite E. M. Forster, Edwin Muir and MacDiarmid, receives increasing critical attention, a hundred and sixteen years after his death. This academic conference, here at the University of Stirling, a mile or so from Stevenson's (and my own) childhood haunts in Bridge of Allan, the fifth in a series of biennial conferences organised by scholars at institutions around the world, is one demonstration of that. The Centre for Scottish Studies' *Journal of Stevenson Studies* at the University of Stirling, and Edinburgh Napier University's recently launched website dedicated to Stevenson studies, are others. Stevenson has never ceased to be popular, but he is once again being taken seriously by academics. I believe this is because Stevenson was ahead of his time – or perhaps 'out of his time' is a better way of putting it: he was a post-modernist before modernism. He addressed uncertainties in an age of certainty, and he was open to possibilities even if he did not have the time to explore them fully in his mature fiction. Think of that key statement in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*: 'With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I [. . .] drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous





and independent denizens.' That, if you like, is a clear line to the age of multiple truths and multiple viewpoints in which we live.

Although some of the critics I've been quoting were also poets or novelists in their own right, you get a very different perspective on Stevenson if you look purely at what other writers have said about him. Stevenson is, I think, a writers' writer, and among those who have voiced at least their admiration of, if not their debt to, him are: Jack London, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Rudyard Kipling, G. K. Chesterton, T. S. Eliot, Marcel Proust, John Steinbeck, Graham Greene, Jorge Luis Borges and Margaret Atwood. (But even their admiration is not uncritical: Stuart Kelly has drawn my attention to this observation from Chesterton: 'The advantage of great men like Blake or Browning or Walt Whitman is that they did not observe the niceties of technical literature. The far greater disadvantage of Stevenson is that he did.')¹⁰ Still, the fact that Stevenson travels across continents and cultures reassures me that he is not revered for chauvinistic reasons. It would, I think, be hard to strike a convincing chauvinistic pose in praise of a writer like Stevenson. There is something reassuring too, in his recurring self-doubt, his fear that whatever he was writing might not be any good. Most writers relate to that. But perhaps the most interesting comments come from Italo Calvino. Calvino sees virtues in what some of the critics see as Stevenson's faults. He praises rather than derides his 'marvellous lightness': 'I love Stevenson because he gives the impression he is flying'. Or, 'In his adventure romances, Stevenson is an aesthete who plays with his materials with great precision and finesse'. Or, most significantly, 'There are those who think [Stevenson] a minor writer and those who see him as one of the great writers. I agree with the latter, because of the clean, light clarity of his style, but also because of the moral nucleus of all his narratives.'¹¹

There you have it. Lightness of touch, gravity of moral nucleus. I don't reread books nearly enough, but I reread Stevenson's prose more than that of any other author. For me he is utterly





reliable in that, just as I am being lulled by familiarity into knowing what it is he is telling me, he tells me something else. He does it in *Jekyll and Hyde* and he does it in his South Seas stories. I read 'The Bottle Imp' once every couple of years because it is so light of touch and yet contains such profundities. It is a folktale, a fairy tale, for adults. This is not easily created, nor is it to be sneered at. Stevenson is the most reliable author on my shelves because, uneven though he may be, he never bores me, and often surprises me. I believe he will be admired and enjoyed by other writers, by critics and by readers for many years to come, and will still be being read long after we are all gone.

NOTES

- 1 This lecture is based on an address to the Robert Louis Stevenson Club annual lunch, at the New Club, Edinburgh, 14th November 2009.
- 2 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Popular Authors' in *Essays Literary and Critical* (London: William Heinemann, 1923), Tusitala Edition, vol XXVIII, p. 25.
- 3 George Moore, *Hail and Farewell*, (London: William Heinemann, 1924), pp. 3-4.
- 4 Leonard Woolf, 'The Fall of Stevenson' from *Nation and the Athenaeum*, 1924, in *Robert Louis Stevenson. The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 517-8.
- 5 F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), n. 2, p. 5.
- 6 Edwin Muir, 'Robert Louis Stevenson' in *The Modern Scot*, Autumn 1931.
- 7 C. M. Grieve, 'R. L. S. and the Future', *Dunfermline Press*, 9 December 1922 in *Hugh MacDiarmid, The Raucle Tongue. Hitherto uncollected prose*, ed. by Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), pp. 35-6.
- 8 'Stevenson', in G. K. Chesterton, *Varied Types* (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1903), p. 103.





- 9 Jenni Calder, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Life Study* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980).
- 10 G. K. Chesterton 'Robert Louis Stevenson' first published in *The Bookman*, London, October 1901, in *Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, p. 501.
- 11 See Richard Dury, 'Robert Louis Stevenson's Critical Reception: Calvino and Stevenson', in *The Robert Louis Stevenson Archive*, at <http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org/richard-dury-archive/critrec.htm#Calvino>.





‘Selfless’: the shifting reputation of Alison Cunningham in biographies of Robert Louis Stevenson

Lesley Graham

The origins of Stevenson’s imagination and his distinctive voice have regularly been located in the influence of Alison Cunningham during his formative years. She sang him Scottish ballads, read to him from the Bible and told him stories of Covenanters and ghosts; gave him an ear for Scots. It is hard to overestimate the impact that the nurse had on the writer’s formative years and indeed her influence on the development of her charge’s talent has certainly not gone unnoticed by his many biographers. This paper analyses the ways in which those biographers have assessed and represented the nurse’s influence on his inner life and work and suggests that these representations of the nurse can be seen as a crucible for the biographer’s view of Stevenson’s early development and preceding biographical accounts of that development.

Alison Cunningham’s reputation has shuttled over the years between two extremes, from ‘good and earnest woman’ to ‘small-minded bigot’ depending on the interpretive framework chosen by the biographer. In the early biographies, she is almost unanimously portrayed as the angel of Stevenson’s infant life: an exemplary nurse, and the paragon of surrogate-motherly love. In fact, the term used most often to describe her devotion is ‘selfless’ – an interesting notion in the context of life-writing suggesting that perhaps only the subject of the biography has an identity worth nurturing textually. Many later biographers have been equally selective, choosing to focus on her dark convictions and bigotry, blaming her even more than Stevenson’s bleakly religious father for the young boy’s ‘precocious grasp of sin’.¹ It has been variably claimed that Cummy’s possessiveness of the child some-





times 'verged on a desire to control' and that, 'Psychologically, [she] was inducing a state of mental tumult which only she could calm'.² It is worth noting, however, that most biographers recognise that Stevenson himself did not hold her responsible for the more debilitating aspects of his active imagination, protesting rather that it was she who gave him 'a passion for the drama'.³

Stevenson begins the essay 'Random Memories: *Rosa Quo Locorum*' with the following words:

Through what little channels, by what hints and premonitions, the consciousness of the man's art dawns first upon the child, it should be not only interesting but instructive to inquire. A matter of curiosity to-day, it will become the ground of science to-morrow.⁴

Although gratifying, his faith in the future's ability to ascertain the source of the writer's skill is, as we know, unfounded and today it is certainly not to science but to biography that we look to find any exploration of the subject of the origins of Stevenson's art. We find that in all of the biographies those origins seem to be located in the influence of Alison Cunningham. Cummy is a liminal character in accounts of Stevenson's life usually appearing only in the first or second chapter, and occasionally briefly reappearing as a figure of fun during the trip to the continent when he was twelve; but she is consistently portrayed as being at the very root of Stevenson's way of being and of his art.

In their reconstructions of the personality and influence of Alison Cunningham, biographers have at their disposal a limited number of primary resources. A certain number of Stevenson's essays such as 'Memories of Himself', 'Rosa quo Locorum', 'Nuits Blanches', 'Nurses', 'Popular Authors', as well as 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured' allude to the influence of his nurse and Guthrie's very slim biography also provides some information, as does *Cummy's Diary* her record of that sojourn on the continent in 1862.⁴ Of course, the dedication to *A Child's Garden*





of Verses – ‘My second mother, my first wife, The angel of my infant life’ – provides ample opportunity for glosses⁵. There is, in other words, a restricted amount of available information about Alison Cunningham, and that information has hardly been added to since her death so it is simply expounded on, recycled, rearranged and reassessed as biographies seek to become more interpretative and sophisticated.

Alison Cunningham’s physical appearance is described in detail by the earliest biographers some of whom had observed her as an old woman. Guthrie describes her as ‘well-knit and robust’; ‘her features were regular and refined’ with ‘brilliant eyes’ and a ‘bright smile’.⁶ Hamilton may overstate his case somewhat in asserting that her physical presence induced: ‘a feeling that afforded you a sense of strong shelter and insuperable peace’ and that there ‘were times, too, when Cummy would grasp you by both shoulders and draw you eagerly to her bosom; and it was as if you were being taken to the heart of womankind.’⁷ Later biographers based their descriptions on photographs and on the Fiddes Watt portrait: they variously describe her as ‘bonny’⁸; ‘a handsome, stalwart woman with piercing blue eyes’⁹ who was ‘handsomer than most queens’.¹⁰

Those who met her said that she ‘gesticulated as the Scotch seldom do’¹¹ or that ‘her hands were the most eloquent’ they had ever known¹²; a body language that she appears to have passed on to her charge. Many latter biographers, including Furnas, claim that Stevenson ‘got his French-like gestures from her “whose hands flew as she spoke till the day of her death”’ adding that ‘This was only one lifelong influence’ (p. 28).

In later years, Bell claims that the old woman allowed herself to be raised on a pedestal by Stevensonians: ‘Still living, she was turned into a character, a little carping Victorian icon, and rendered less than real.’¹³ Yet she was even less of a reality for the biographers like Bell himself who came late to the party: physical descriptions were abandoned as she ceased to be a physical





person and was turned into a legend: less real, easier to bend into an interpretative framework and to use as a biographical device.

Her voice in particular is recruited as an explanatory expedient: the fact that she 'read to him with great dramatic power'¹⁴ being highlighted systematically. Several biographers quote Stevenson's own words (again from the essay 'Rosa quo Locorum') in which he speaks of her reading to him 'the works of others as a poet would scarce dare read his own, gloating on the rhythm, dwelling with delight on the assonances and alliterations'.¹⁵ Guthrie's account of Stevenson's recollection of her voice also provides an opportunity to move on to the biographical task at hand – the isolation of early influences as reportedly identified by the subject himself.

'It's you that gave me a passion for the drama, Cummie,' Louis told her, the last time they ever saw each other, in a room full of people, as she herself recollected. 'Me, Master Lou,' she replied; 'I never put foot inside a playhouse in my life.' 'Ay, woman,' said Louis; 'but it was the grand dramatic way ye had of reciting the hymns'. (p. 37)

Her Scottishness too is immortalised and instrumentalised; from her 'lovely, utterly Scottish name',¹⁶ to the link she gave him 'with the Scots tongue, which was then dying out in the better parts of the city'.¹⁷ According to Walter Blaikie, the child she looked after before RLS, she was 'very Scots, an innate Covenanter'.¹⁸ Nevertheless, that Scottishness may also be construed as a negative characteristic: her rural Scottishness and 'strict adherence to the narrow Covenanting version of Scottish Presbyterianism'¹⁹ in particular are associated with 'an urge to excess'.²⁰ In the end, Furnas opts out of any sustained analysis of the intersection of the nurse's nationality and character arguing that to fully understand the force of the heritage that she received and passed on probably 'requires being born north of the Tweed' (p. 32).





The common denominator in the portrayals of the Alison Cunningham is, as might be expected, her 'intense devotion'²¹ to her charge. She 'tended him devotedly'²²; 'was evidently a paragon'²³ of 'unwearied love'²⁴; 'gave up her life to him, possibly kept him alive';²⁵ 'was selfless in the devotion of her time to his care'.²⁶ Balfour quotes Stevenson's own account:

'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. I [. . .] cannot mention them without a grateful testimony to the unwearied sympathy and long-suffering displayed to me on a hundred such occasions by my good nurse. It seems to me that I should have died if I had been left there alone to cough and weary in the darkness' (p. 33).

Stevenson's own words, his tender pity for his past self – my shaken little body – knowingly or not set up his utter vulnerability, readying the reader for the next phase of development in the biographers' collective quest to chart the genesis of Stevenson's creative life: the other side of Cummy.

While Harman is the only biographer to deny outright that Alison Cunningham's care constituted devotion²⁷, almost all of the others are eager to point out that she was at best a mixed blessing, counterbalancing her selflessness with excessive religiosity. In the tale of Robert Louis Stevenson's childhood Cummy can never be underrated, nor should she be debunked writes Pope Hennessey (p. 30). Debunking, and especially debunking of her attention to his spiritual life, however, was to become the rule. Devotion to a child was all very well, but religious devotion was another matter. Nevertheless, just as the biographers disapprove of her excesses in this area, they embrace it enthusiastically as a necessary point of illumination in the life narrative. The delineations of Alison Cunningham's character and her influence on





Stevenson are thus peppered with contradiction; with buts and yet's. She was devoted to him yet she made him ill with her religious ranting – almost every biographical account of Cummy's influence hinges on a sentence of this type. Rankin, for example, makes the angel/demon, good nanny/bad nanny shift in this way: 'The Victorians and the Edwardians loved this image of the devoted nanny cooling the brow of the infant genius, but there was also a less benign side to the nurse known as "Cummy"' (p. 19). While for Bell, 'Cummy was an extraordinary character, one worthy of her legend, whose influence did Louis immense good and no little harm' (p. 46). Cairney says that 'there is no denying that Cummy was devoted and caring, but her influence on the sensitive child could also have been dangerous'²⁸ while for Harman, 'her devotion to Lewis, intensified by his vulnerability [. . .] went hand in hand with an equally powerful intention to mould the boy to her pattern' (p. 19). One sees in these phrases the clear imprint of Stevenson's own words in 'Memories of Himself': in which he describes his 'high strung religious terrors and ecstasies. It is to my nurse that I owe these last', the result of her 'over-haste to make me a religious pattern'.²⁹

Confusingly perhaps, another of the basic contradictions that the biographer must highlight in any account of Alison Cunningham's style of care is that between her strict fundamentalism and her love of fun: 'Cummy's religion was the narrowest Covenanting form of Scottish Presbyterianism, but he remembered her singing and dancing for him' writes Callow.³⁰ Daiches too points out that, 'Cards, novels and picture books were anathema, yet she both danced and sang to Louis' (p. 11). 'She was no dragon [. . .] and she could dance as well as pray' (Bell, p. 52).

However, the dominant image in almost all of these accounts is the filling of Stevenson's head through the reading matter that his nurse introduced him to, making full use of her talent for dramatic delivery. Again, he is portrayed as a vulnerable little vessel in this festival of filling, feeding and pouring. Cummy is





correspondingly represented as either a well-meaning fundamentalist or an evil force-feeder. 'She was a bigot who poured stories of hellfire, ghosts and persecuted Covenanters into the defenseless child's head'³¹; 'stored his hospitable mind [. . .] with Scripture passages, tales of Bible heroes and of Bunyan heroes, stories of Scots Reformers and Covenanters'.³² 'She filled him with a love for M'Cheyne and others. Presbyterians of the straitest doctrine'³³. Cummy was 'feeding his mind with the strong meat of Scottish theology'³⁴; 'She filled the little boy's head with stories of the Martyrs of Religion, of the Covenanters and the Presbyters and the blood-drenched religious fundamentalists of the previous two centuries.'³⁵ Aldington even refers to beanfeasts of theology.³⁶ The unsuitable material crammed into his mind wasn't only of a religious nature, Callow complains that 'Cummy, with her lurid imagination, had poured stories into her nursling's receptive mind' (p. 201) concerning the chest of drawers made by Brodie that stood in his nursery. For Harman the process amounts to religious brainwashing; a process that 'clearly subverted the authority' of his parents over him (p. 22).

For the biographers, the problem is not so much the nature of the 'virulent and ruthless sectarian propaganda' he was 'subjected from his tenderest years, day in, day out, year in, year out,'³⁷ nor even its long term effects as described by Furnas: 'Louis was too apt a pupil, she too incisive a teacher. All his life the Metrical versions of Job's despair, the close inquiries and bleak replies of the Shorter Catechism, the arbitrary, legally unimpeachable pessimism of the Westminster Confession, put phrases in his mouth and shaped his thinking.' (Furnas 32) – for after all we rather suppose that the biographer must like those phrases and admire the thinking to have chosen to write about their originator. The problem is rather the trauma that was caused to Stevenson the child. Mehew claims that 'it was to her bigotry that he owed the nightmares and "high-strung religious ecstasies and terrors", including "an extreme terror of Hell", that disfigured his early





years.³⁸ For Pope Hennessey, Alison Cunningham did not simply fill his mind but inflamed it: 'with the best intentions in the world [she] managed to inflame the child's mind and diligently to facilitate the awful entrance of the night-hag into the shadowy bedroom.' (p. 30). Calder is more measured: 'Cummy tried, with devotion and selflessness, to mitigate the recurring illnesses and soothe the imagination she did so much to stimulate. She also tried to inject into the child an understanding of the nature of sin. Louis's sufferings were not only the result of illness but the product of night terrors, exacerbated, doubtless by fever, but originating almost certainly in his own mind. Cummy was a mixed blessing' (p. 34).

One might expect that the 'night terror' motif would appear only in the later biographies with the development of interest in child psychology, but in fact it is present from Balfour onwards and this because Stevenson himself identifies the presumed source of his night fears. Before there is even any mention of Cummy in the first biography, Balfour cites Stevenson's evocations of her influence on him. First 'I had an extreme terror of Hell, implanted in me, I suppose by my good nurse, which used to haunt me terribly on stormy nights' (p. 32). Thus the biographer's work is short-circuited – the primal scenes associated with the subjectivity they are recreating identified for them and by the subject himself.

Stevenson simply describes the connection but does not himself apportion any blame on Cummy for the nightmares although some biographers have resolved to do that for him. Biographers such as Bell have noted this reticence: 'it is a mark of how deeply Calvinism penetrated his own psyche that even as an adult Stevenson could not distinguish between her love and the childhood she had created for him' (p. 52). But what Bell calls 'love' Harman calls 'whitewashing': of the dedication to *A Child's Garden of Verses* she writes 'there was no acknowledgement of Cummy's other legacy, of terrifying "night thoughts",





very evident in sinister poems such as “Shadow March”, with its image of Night staring through the window, “the breath of the Bogie” in the speaker’s hair and the inexorable march of shadows towards the bed [. . .] the emotionalism of the dedication [. . .] is even more striking than its whitewashing’ (p. 241). She ignores Stevenson’s overt lack of resentment preferring to identify ‘a controlled savagery in [certain] fragments about the adults who infected his young mind with “high strung religious ecstasies and terrors”’ (p. 23). Aldington, for his part, describes the extreme over-excitement of Stevenson’s mind due to Cummy’s injudicious curriculum of hell-fire, melodrama, martyrs and body-snatchers and shouts out that something should have been done about it: ‘One cannot avoid thinking that a salutary measure would have been the dismissal of “Cummy” and the provision of a properly-trained nurse with some common sense in the treatment of children and the ability to give elementary teaching in the three R’s’ (p. 22).

Just as the assessment of Cunningham’s influence shifts slightly over the course of each biography, so the interpretation of these incidents shifts from account to account with the later biographies feeding off the earlier biographies, sometimes obliquely acknowledging their weight. So that when Davies writes of ‘the early influence of the dreaded Cummy, or the marvellous and wonderful Cummy’ (p. 5) – the reader feels the presence of a substantial and well-rehearsed body of polarised opinion behind those adjectives. Sometimes the reprise is more explicit as when, for example, Callow picks up McLynn’s identification of the boy’s sense of loss and his longing for maternal love; his ‘yearning for the presence of his real mother’ (p. 13). However, as early as Hamilton, some of the supposedly telling biographical anecdotes were perceived of as becoming stale³⁹. There being no new material, the onus was thus on the biographer to adopt a new approach if the biography was to be in any way original. Michel Le Bris, again in reaction to McLynn, chooses all-out defence of





Alison Cunningham, complaining vociferously about the treatment she has received from his predecessors. He argues at length that hers should not be seen as 'negative influences' but simply as the influences that made Stevenson into what he was.⁴⁰ The question is not then whether or not an influence is positive or negative but what one does with it in later life:

Stevenson serait-il resté bloqué sur son cas singulier, ses tourments, ses fantasmes, qu'il aurait peut-être basculé dans la folie, ou se serait transformé en un petit monster égoïste et caractériel. Mais il se trouve, et c'est cela, me semble-t-il, qui devrait nous passionner dans une 'biographie', qu'il sut transcender son expérience singulière en une vision universalisante des forces en jeu dans la psyche humaine, jusqu'à esquisser une véritable logique de l'imaginaire – et c'est dans ce mouvement précisément, qu'il devint écrivain. (p. 76)

It is often unclear whether the biographers' outrage is principally directed against the supposedly traumatic influence that Alison Cunningham had on the child Stevenson, or on the idea that this trauma created his 'darker writings' in later life, or perhaps that the moral formation she imposed prevented him from fully realizing his literary potential. The interpretation generally remains surprisingly binary. Harman, as we have seen takes the course of outright condemnation while others attempt to point out that Stevenson's childhood was in fact a fairly typical one: Masson asserts that the Sabbath observance and the Shorter Catechism type childhood were perfectly normal in Edinburgh fifty years previously when 'more than half of the little boys who then lived in the nurseries in the top storeys of our well-to-do houses [. . .] were being brought up in the same fashion.'⁴¹ Bell picks this up seventy years later 'His childhood circumstances were very Scottish, typical of his class and his day' (p. 52). Calder also points out that a guilt-ridden childhood was a





strong feature of Victorian writing as is clear from depictions by Dickens, George Eliot, Samuel Butler, and Charles Kingsley (p. 35). Aldington disagrees, denying the universality of Stevenson's childhood experience and concurrently attacking, with considerable haughtiness, Cunningham's influence claiming that other childhoods were different: 'at least of those whose education and early reading are supervised by persons of taste and judgement.' (p. 176). He further associates the nurse's influence with a debasement of Stevenson's discernment by way of Skelt's Juvenile Drama: Cummy 'terrified him with stories of ghosts and covenanters and body-snatchers, and perverted his taste by allowing him to buy cut-outs of sanguinary melodramas' (p.19). As late as page 189, the same author, in recounting Stevenson's falling out with Henley – is blaming Cummy for Stevenson's 'almost feminine susceptibility' due to 'the hysteria of his childhood which Cummy's injudicious treatment had inflamed.'

It is notable that the entire body of biographical construal is derived from what Stevenson himself says of his childhood: he was the one who identified his original inspiration as being Cummy's reading, and the night terrors as her doing as well. In this way, he did the biographers' work for them. No biographer so far seems to have thought it worth raising the possibility that Stevenson's account of the source of his night terrors might have been only partially correct, or indeed whether a subject has the epistemic authority to identify the origin of his disorder: nobody, in other words, has thought it worthwhile to investigate any source other than Alison Cunningham for Stevenson's night terrors. Nor is there any real investigation of the idea that beyond the influence her reading matter had on the content and style of his writing, it also affected the moral basis of his thinking. Indeed, this study of the portrayal of Alison Cunningham in the biographies of Stevenson has shed more light on the ways in which biographers have used the iconic nurse as a vehicle for their own agendas and their attitudes to the existing body of biography than it has on the





early processes involved in the development of his writing and world view.

As we have seen, a term used often to describe Alison Cunningham's devotion is 'selfless' – a notion which may be seen as an excuse to treat the identity in question as a lack of identity; to ignore its reality beyond its direct influence on the subject of the biography. 'For generations' claims Furnas, 'this institution of the substitute mother has done strange things to upper-class British children, perhaps to their parents in repercussion, often to "Nanny" herself'⁴²; one of the only hints in this corpus of writing that perhaps Alison Cunningham is worth attending to as a person rather than as a reputation and a convenient biographical rationalization.

NOTES

- 1 Jenni Calder, *RLS A Life Study* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980), p. 32.
- 2 James Pope Hennessey, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), p. 30.
- 3 Graham Balfour, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Volume 1 (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 37.
- 4 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Further Memories*, (London: William Heinemann, 1924), p. 1.
- 5 Charles J. Guthrie, 'Cummy' the Nurse of Robert Louis Stevenson. *A Tribute to the Memory of Alison Cunningham* (Edinburgh, Otto Schulze & Company, 1913). Alison Cunningham, *Cummy's Diary; a diary kept by R. L. Stevenson's nurse, Alison Cunningham, while travelling with him on the continent during 1863*, preface and notes by Robert T. Skinner, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926).
- 6 See for example the pseudo-Freudian conjecture in Hunter Davies, *The Teller of Tales: In Search of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), pp. 7-8: "She did act like a mother, so that is understandable, but the "first wife" phrase is intriguing. How could a little boy think of his nurse as his wife? Did any sort of intimacy take place? Is it an indication of the sort of wife he was looking for in life, to boss him around, but nurse him when he was ill?"





- 7 Charles Guthrie, *Robert Louis Stevenson. Some Personal Recollections* (Edinburgh: W. Green & Son Ltd, 1920), p. 25.
- 8 Clayton Hamilton, *On the Trail of Stevenson* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1915), p. 20.
- 9 Calder, p. 34.
- 10 Pope Hennessey, p. 29.
- 11 J.C. Furnas, *Voyage to Windward: the Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 28.
- 12 Guthrie p. 25.
- 13 Hamilton, p. 20.
- 14 Ian Bell, *Robert Louis Stevenson: Dreams of Exile* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1992), p. 46.
- 15 David Daiches, *Robert Louis Stevenson and his World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), p. 11.
- 16 See, for example, Balfour, p. 39.
- 17 Furnas, p. 28.
- 18 Bell, p. 47.
- 19 Rosaline Masson, *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1922), p. 2.
- 20 Daiches, p. 11.
- 21 Nicholas Rankin, *Dead Man's Chest. Travels After Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 20.
- 22 Balfour, p. 34.
- 23 Daiches, p. 10.
- 24 Alexander H. Japp, *Robert Louis Stevenson. A Record, An Estimate, A Memorial* (New York: Scribners, 1905), p. 25.
- 25 J. Patrick Findlay, *In the Footsteps of R.L.S.* (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, Hay, & Mitchell, 1911), p. 16.
- 26 Calder, p. 34. Many biographers (probably all relying on Balfour p. 34) report that she refused at least one offer of marriage.
- 27 Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson A Biography* (London: Harper, 2005), p. 19.
- 28 '[I]t hardly constitutes excess of attention or devotion to attend to a chronically sick child at night. "My second mother [. . .] angel of my infant life"; the epithets are cloyingly excessive, and one can't help wondering if Stevenson's retrospective praise of his nurse was a desperate attempt to accentuate the positive. [. . .] And the same Cummy who was ready to calm the child with cuddles and blankets was just as likely to wake him up and assault him with prayers. It was, to say the least, a confusing world.' p. 25.





- 29 John Cairney, *The Quest for Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2004), p. 8.
- 30 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits, Memoirs of Himself and Selections from His Notebook* (London: William Heinemann, 1924), pp. 154; 157.
- 31 Philip Callow, *Louis. A Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Constable, 2001), p. 13.
- 32 Callow, p. 13.
- 33 Guthrie, p. 27.
- 34 Balfour, p. 36.
- 35 Findlay, p. 21.
- 36 Harman, p. 21.
- 37 Richard Aldington, *Portrait of a Rebel* (London: Evans Brothers, 1957), p. 17.
- 38 Aldington, p. 18.
- 39 Ernest Meheew, 'Stevenson, Robert Louis (1850–1894)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Lawrence Goldman ed. (Oxford: OUP), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26438> [June 1, 2010].
- 40 This is clear when he prefaces one story with the following justification "Of the many anecdotes that Cummy told me, there is one that seems especially worth recording since it has not yet made its way into any of the books on R.L.S." p. 21.
- 41 Michel le Bris, *R. L. Stevenson. Les années bohémiennes, 1850-1880* (Paris: Nil, 1994), p. 76.
- 42 Rosaline Masson, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1923), pp. 34-5.
- 43 Furnas, p. 28.





Plot, narrative and artifice: Walter Scott to Thomas Pynchon via RLS

Stuart Kelly

I'd like to begin this paper with neither Walter Scott nor Robert Louis Stevenson, but instead with that most enigmatic and reclusive of postmodern novelists, Thomas Pynchon. The reasons for this will, hopefully, become evident later, but at the moment I'll limit myself to saying that Pynchon gets to the nub of a debate about narrative theory that has its origins in the 19th century. In *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Oedipa Maas finally has an epiphany about her situation:

‘Or a plot has been mounted against you, so expensive and elaborate, involving items like the forging of stamps and ancient books, constant surveillance of your movements, planting of post horn images all over San Francisco, bribing of librarians, hiring of professional actors and Pierce Inverarity only knows what-all besides, all financed out of the estate in a way either too secret or too involved for your non-legal mind to know about even though you are co-executor, so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke. Or you are fantasying some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull.’

I just want to leave that quotation hovering in your heads, and we'll come back to it later.

Linking Scott and Stevenson is not an original idea, nor is it a wholly satisfactory comparison. In the wake of the publication of *Kidnapped* (1886), Scott became a critical shorthand to describe Stevenson's work. The anonymous reviewer in *The Spectator* said *Kidnapped* was ‘equal to Sir Walter Scott himself’. Andrew Lang thought Stevenson ‘has more of the spirit of





Scott than any other in English fiction', and, according to Henry James, Alan Breck was 'worthy of Scott at his best.' (This was a slightly backhanded compliment as James was fairly consistently unimpressed by Scott, and telling in that he considered Scott an author lacking in maturity: James said Scott 'is identical with the fireside chronicler. And thoroughly to enjoy him, we must again become as credulous as children at twilight'.) It was the critic William Theodore Watts-Dunton, writing in *The Athenaeum* and elsewhere, who did most to assert Stevenson's critical lineage from Scott. He wrote 'Perhaps indeed at his best he is comparable with only one novelist, and that one the greatest of them all, Walter Scott', going on to claim 'upon Stevenson, if upon any one of Scott's successors, has the mantle of the Wizard fallen'. The link to Scott was a kind of 'critical rhyme' so strong that it was even evoked against itself. Cosmo Monkhouse said Stevenson should 'have a higher ambition than to be the Walter Scott of Tahiti'. Andrew Lang again – incidentally, a figure who sorely requires critical rehabilitation – made a more nuanced analysis of Stevenson where he claimed his temperament was 'more akin to that of M. ZOLA than of SCOTT' (why not, I wonder, Dickens or Bulwer-Lytton or Dumas or Rider Haggard?). One aspect of Scott which I find continually fascinating is the extent to which he circumscribes the debate to the point that he is invoked both *pro* and *contra*. The link between Scott and Stevenson is not just and cannot be merely a question of common birthplace, or Stevenson's embryonic 'at-home-ness' in a Scottish, rather than English or British canon.

One person whom the constant comparison must have slightly infuriated is Stevenson himself. Stevenson's correspondence shows a continual and very subtle engagement with Scott and his works, and it is an engagement quite unlike that of the majority of his contemporaries. One of the earliest references comes in a letter to his mother from 1874 when Stevenson discusses his proposal for a book on four epoch-changing Scots: Knox, Hume,





Burns and Scott. I'll quote his appraisal in full: 'Scott again, the ever delightful man, sane, courageous, admirable; the birth of Romance, in a dawn that was a sunset; snobbery, conservatism, the wrong thread in history and notably in that of his own land'. This is a dense series of paradoxes and doubles, and it derived, ultimately I think, from Thomas Carlyle's essay-long study of Scott in his review of Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. In particular, 'the dawn that was a sunset' recalls Carlyle's opinion that the deaths of Goethe and Scott, in Spring and Autumn 1832 respectively, was curiously apposite and reflected their different significance: Goethe was the point of alighting, Scott merely the terminus. Carlyle praised Scott's 'healthiness' (he described British literature 'puking and sprawling in Byronism') but went on to argue it masked a secret sickness: his small-mindedness and bourgeois ambition. It is worth noting as well that Stevenson calls Scott 'the ever delightful man' – not the 'ever delightful writer'. In 1884, between two very Scott-esque Stevenson novels, *The Black Arrow* and *Prince Otto*, Stevenson wrote 'Thus no Waverley Novel approaches in power, blackness, bitterness and moral elevation to the diary and Lockhart's narrative of the end, and yet the Waverley Novels are better reading for every day than the life. You may take a tonic daily but not a phlebotomy'. We tend to describe Scott's literary career as an arc that dwindles into senescence – and Stevenson was not immune from this trait, writing in 1894 that he had 'failed to die at the happy moment and begin to look forward with alarm to old age and the time when I shall be writing later Wilkie Collins, not to say Knights of Malta – a reference to Scott's unpublished *Siege of Malta*, the book which Buchan hoped 'no literary resurrectionist will ever be guilty of the crime of giving it to the world', and which Edinburgh University Press published two years ago. The more classical Victorian idea of Scott's career is one that ends with what we now call *The Journal*, not *Count Robert of Paris* or *Castle Dangerous*.

It is a critical commonplace nowadays that Scott's strongest





works are the 'Scotch Novels' as they were called in the 19th century; and writers as diverse as Virginia Woolf and Georg Lukacs, A. N. Wilson and James Robertson have identified the early novels (from *Waverley* through to *The Bride of Lammermoor*) as Scott's finest and deepest works. Stevenson did not hold this opinion. He described *Waverley* to his mother as 'so poor and dull', while praising *The Fortunes of Nigel* as 'so very strong and mature'. To his father he praised *Kenilworth* and *Quentin Durward*, and referred to *Woodstock* as 'a delight'. (His pleasure in *The Fortunes of Nigel* is particularly pleasing, as it was a novel that most critics excoriated, especially because of the supposedly unfair depiction of James VI and I). Although Stevenson says that 'the love of the slapdash and the shoddy grew upon Scott with success', it is the middle period novels, the 'English' sweep from *The Monastery* to *Woodstock* that he expresses his approval of most often. (The exception to this would be the novella *The Highland Widow* from *Chronicles of the Canongate*, which must be counted one of Scott's darkest and most psychologically aberrant and eerie tales: in it, a mother organises for her son's proscription by stopping him joining the Hanoverian army: Stevenson refers to it as 'near perfect'). Stevenson paid a sly homage to Scott by including him as a cameo role in *St Ives* (a game which Galt pioneered in *The Steam Boat* and which de Quincey toyed with in his review – which appeared before publication – of his translation of a fake German *Waverley* Novel, *Walladmor*).

There is, I should mention, one particular 'lost' manuscript of Stevenson's I'd very much like to see: a letter to W. E. Henley from June 1881. In the Booth and Mehew *Collected Letters*, it appears solely as a partial transcription from a Sotheby's catalogue, with in square brackets, a note on a large omitted section on 'Stevenson's indebtedness to Scott'.

Stevenson's appreciation of the middle period Scott has a more profound influence on his work than just, for example, enthusiastic critical comparisons between Richard Crookback





in *The Black Arrow* and Scott's depictions of kings. The middle period novels are important in that Scott provided them with very elaborate narrative prefaces. He invented a cast of surrogate authors – Captain Clutterbuck, Dr Dryasdust, the Eidolon of *Waverley*, and brought back characters from previous novels, such as Jonathan Oldbuck, Dousterswivel and the Rev. Josiah Cargill – all in a kind of Scriblerian fantasia on the nature of authorship. In these prefaces Scott develops his theory of fiction, and that, perhaps more than the fictions themselves, has a permanent impact of Stevenson's aesthetics.

The idea that Sir Walter Scott even had a 'theory' of fiction can seem anathematic to the portrait he presents of himself, and which is expanded and confirmed in Lockhart's *Life*. He repeatedly stresses his whim, his amateurism (despite being a professional author) and his desire only to please himself. At the end of *Count Robert of Paris* he clings to this extemporary aesthetic, 'nor is it pleasant to feel one's self discharging, with pain and toil, a task which, upon other occasions, has proved as light to himself as it might be fairly held trifling by the public'. The most explicit statement of his anti-theory theory comes in the preface to *The Fortunes of Nigel*, where the Eidolon expounds thus:

Believe me, I have not been fool enough to neglect ordinary precautions. I have repeatedly laid down my future work to scale, divided it into volumes and chapters, and endeavoured to construct a story which I meant should evolve itself gradually and strikingly, maintain suspense, and stimulate curiosity; and which, finally, should terminate in a striking catastrophe. But I think there is a demon who seats himself on the feather of my pen when I begin to write, and leads it astray from the purpose. Characters expand under my hand; incidents are multiplied; the story lingers, while the materials increase; my regular mansion turns out a Gothic anomaly, and the work is closed long





before I have attained the point I proposed.

Nevertheless, it is my contention that Scott did have a theory of narrative. It was not doctrinaire, nor was it fully-formed throughout his life, but taking together the prefaces to the middle period novels, a few of the later Magnum prefaces (despite the disparagement of the Edinburgh Edition of the *Waverley Novels* towards the Magnum, I find less diminution in Scott's abilities in the Magnum Prefaces than in the last novels) and the Essay on Romance for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, I think it is possible to get at the core of Scott's aesthetics.

Crucial to this is a very distinctive Scott word: 'inartificial'. It is paramount to stress now that Scott's use of the words 'artificial' and 'inartificial' are not the same as Stevenson's. When, in 'A Gossip of Romance', Stevenson refers to the death of Clarissa Harlowe as 'somewhat frigid and artificial', he is using the word pejoratively. For Scott, the inverse was true. His first attempt at prose (the completion of Strutt's *Queenhoo Hall*) had, he latterly concluded, a 'hasty and inartificial conclusion'; Dryden's 'Cymon and Iphigenia' 'must be confessed, is otherwise inartificial'; and the 'History of Leonora' is 'equally unnecessarily and inartificially' put 'into that of *Joseph Andrews*'. Scott, throughout his career, was haunted by the failure of his novel *The Monastery* – it spawned the only true sequel in the *Waverley Novels*, *The Abbot*; it is worried over in the prefaces to *The Fortunes of Nigel* and *Peveril of the Peak*, and Scott wrote a detailed account of its mediocre critical reception and possible flaws when he came to re-edit it for the Magnum Opus. There, he says, 'the ending of the Monastery' was 'objected to as inartificial'. (Oddly, reading the reviews of *The Monastery*, the term doesn't occur.) Whenever Scott uses the word 'inartificial' it is probably necessary for a modern reader to superscribe it, mentally, with the phrase 'done without art or artifice'. For Scott, 'inartificial' is the pejorative term.





Why should this be? In the preface to the Magnum Edition of *The Monastery*, Scott sets out in detail the defining characteristics of two different forms of fictitious prose compositions. On one hand, there is the form that we would call the picaresque, 'where the hero is conducted through a variety of detached scenes, in which various agents appear and disappear, without, perhaps, having any permanent influence on the progress of the story' and where the plot elements 'are only connected with each other by having happened to be witnessed by the same individual, whose identity unites them together, as the string of a necklace links the beads, which are otherwise detached'. Crucially Scott claims that this form of composition 'is what most frequently occurs in nature', and equally crucially, insists that:

the province of the romance writer being artificial, there is more required from him than a mere compliance with the simplicity of reality, – just as we demand from the scientific gardener, that he shall arrange, in curious knots and artificial parterres, the flowers which 'nature boon' distributes freely on hill and dale.

This comparison derives from a book called *The History of Fiction* written by John Dunlop in 1814. It opens: 'The art of fictitious narrative appears to have its origin in the same principles of selection by which the fine arts in general are created and perfected. Among the vast variety of trees and shrubs which are presented to his view, a savage finds, in his wanderings, some which peculiarly attract his notice by their beauty and fragrance, and these he at length selects, and plants them round his dwelling'.

To summarise this position: in the best books, things happen in a manner unlike reality. At the end of *Peveril of the Peak* Scott introduces a self-conscious, metatextual version of this theory. Charles II says:

'Here is a plot without a drop of blood; and all the elements of a romance, without its conclusion. Here we have





a wandering island princess, (I pray my Lady of Derby's pardon,) a dwarf, a Moorish sorceress, an impenitent rogue, and a repentant man of rank, and yet all ends without either hanging or marriage.'

– "Not altogether without the latter," said the Countess', and announces the happy ending.

It is difficult to underestimate how significant this seemingly simple realisation is: books and reality are different. It is a fissure in the theory of the novel itself. Is it a mirror or a mirage? Does it make up or lay out?

It is this theory of artificiality that underpins the dispute between Henry James and Stevenson, most notably in the wonderful essay, 'A Humble Remonstrance'. In its first great cadenza, Stevenson writes:

Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant; a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate. Life imposes by brute energy, like inarticulate thunder; art catches the ear, among the far louder noises of experience, like an air artificially made by a discreet musician. A proposition in geometry does not compete with life; and a proposition in geometry is a fair and luminous parallel for a work of art. Both are reasonable, both untrue to the crude fact; both inhere in nature, neither represents it. The novel, which is a work of art, exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, as a shoe must still consist of leather, but by its immeasurable difference from life, which is designed and significant, and is both the method and the meaning of the work.

In comparison to Scott's image of the beads on a thread, Stevenson offers a metaphor for romance: 'all the circumstances





in a tale answer one another like notes in music'.

Stevenson, although he inherits the idea of narrative artificiality from Scott, uses it to chastise Scott. The terms of Stevenson's praise ('neat' is a frequently used word) contrasts starkly with Scott's own practice. In 'A Gossip on Romance', Stevenson is scathing, despite praising Scott as 'out and away the king of the romantics'. He quotes a passage from *Guy Mannering* for especial praise, and then, rather sneakily, reveals to the reader he has omitted a section. 'It is not merely bad English, or bad style; it is abominably bad narrative besides', he writes, 'a man who gave in such copy would be discharged from the staff of a daily paper'. Warming to his theme, he criticises the 'ungrammatical and undramatic rigmarole of words' and complains that Scott 'so often fobs us off with languid, inarticulate twaddle'. Scott is 'a great romantic – an idle child', who 'tasted fully the pleasures of his art, but of its toils and vigils and distresses never man knew less'. Scott understands the theoretical structure but lacks the technical craftsmanship to put it into creative practice. In an ironic twist, for Stevenson, it is Scott's wholehearted commitment to life's haphazardness that precludes him being a great artist.

I don't think it's possible to stress sufficiently just how influential and persistent this approach to the idea of narrative is. The same dichotomy becomes more grandiose in the face-off between Naturalism and Symbolism, when Oscar Wilde could write 'I love acting. It is so much more real than life' while Emile Zola was scientifically anatomising the lives of prostitutes, train drivers, department store employees and miners. It is the contemporary issue of contention between James Wood, the Professor of the *Practice of Literary Criticism* at Harvard, and Zadie Smith, author of *White Teeth*, *The Autograph Man* and *On Beauty*, over the legacy of David Foster Wallace. Wood has advocated 'lifelikeness' as the novel's supreme quality; Smith has maintained that real life is too surreal to be real. Wood wants narrative perfection





without artificiality; Smith wants artificiality without narrative perfection. David Shields' recent manifesto, *Reality Hunger*, is inspired by the self-same crux: because Shields feels that his experience of living his life is unlike the lives he reads about in novels, he concludes that the novel as a genre has reached the limit of its capabilities.

It is also, of course, precisely the quandary that Oedipa Maas finds herself in in the quotation with which I began this talk. What happens when life starts to look like plot; when, in contradiction to Kierkegaard's assertion, we live life forward and understand it along the same vector? It is perhaps most nimbly summed up by Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*: 'to our eternal, private, bodily dismay we are each born in the middle of things, live in the middle of things and die in the middle of things'. What happens when we see a beginning and an end as well as a permanent middle?

I'd like to go on to discuss two reiterations of the idea of the artificial structure of narrative and the inartificial unplottedness of life (or nature, or reality), each hooked back, in different ways, to Stevenson. In doing so, I'd like to suggest some canonical alternatives to where we might locate Stevenson.

The first is a figure whose critical standing has somewhat diminished, and whom I note does not feature in any of the abstracts for the papers at this weekend's conference: Gilbert Keith Chesterton, who, among a great many other things, was a biographer of Stevenson and wrote perceptively on Scott. As a Christian and Catholic apologist, Chesterton would fundamentally disagree that reality lacked narrative: as he wrote 'I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller'. But what is so ingenious about this under-rated and phenomenally eloquent writer is that he proposes an ethics, rather than an aesthetics, of artificiality.

In his essay on Stevenson from *Twelve Types* in 1902, Chesterton wrote:





The conception which unites the whole varied work of Stevenson was that romance, or the vision of the possibilities of things, was far more important than mere occurrences: that one was the soul of our life, the other the body, and that the soul was the precious thing. The germ of all his stories lies in the idea that every landscape or scrap of scenery has a soul: and that soul is a story.

This riffs on the opening of 'A Gossip on Romance'. One major difference between Scott and Stevenson lies in the reason why they preferred the 'artificial'. For Scott, the 'mere compliance with the simplicity of reality' was deemed insufficient for a work of art. Stevenson, conversely, thinks art is a necessary distillation of the overwhelming abundance of reality: as he put it in 'A Humble Remonstrance':

to 'compete with life', whose sun we cannot look upon, whose passions and diseases waste and slay us – to compete with the flavour of wine, the beauty of the dawn, the scorching of fire, the bitterness of death and separation – here is, indeed, a projected escalade of heaven; here are, indeed, labours for a Hercules in a dress coat, armed with a pen and a dictionary to depict the passions, armed with a tube of superior flake-white to paint the portrait of the insufferable sun. No art is true in this sense: none can 'compete with life'.

Chesterton very cunningly and slyly gives a strong misreading of Stevenson, most particularly in his 'spiritual autobiography', *Orthodoxy*, of 1908. Fairy tales, romances – and by extension, the highest of the literary arts – return us to an awareness of the fantastical, conditional and plenitudinous nature of reality. Literature is not a shielding of the eyes from the ineffable, but the falling away of the eye's scales (I'm sure Chesterton would be horrified to think he pre-empted Russian formalism's theory





of defamiliarisation). By being artificial, fictions are more true than reality. In chapter four of *Orthodoxy*, provocatively called 'The Ethics of Elfland', Chesterton asserts 'they are not fantasies: compared with them other things are fantastical'. He continues:

this elementary wonder, however, is not a mere fancy derived from the fairy tales; on the contrary, all the fire of the fairy tales is derived from this. Just as we all like love tales because there is an instinct of sex, we all like astonishing tales because they touch the nerve of the ancient instinct of astonishment. This is proved by the fact that when we are very young children we do not need fairy tales: we need only tales. Mere life is interesting enough. A child of seven is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door and saw a dragon. But a child of three is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door. Boys like romantic tales; but babies like realistic tales – because they find them romantic. In fact a baby is about the only person, I should think, to whom a modern realistic novel could be read without boring him.

At another point he comments: 'the fairy tale discusses what a sane man will do in a mad world. The sober realistic novel discusses what an essential lunatic will do in a dull world'.

In 'A Gossip on Romance', Stevenson had written of 'the realisation and apotheosis of the day-dreams of common men. His stories may be nourished with the realities of life, but their true mark is to satisfy the nameless longings of the reader, and to obey the ideal laws of the day-dream'. It is easy to see how easily Chesterton could take his cue from these words and imply a theistic reading of Stevenson's ideas on romance. Writing about Scott allowed Chesterton the opportunity to again insist on his notion that the heart of reality is, in a mystical and practical sense, unreal:

To say that Scott had more than any other man that ever





lived a sense of the romantic seems, in these days, a slight and superficial tribute. The whole modern theory arises from one fundamental mistake--the idea that romance is in some way a plaything with life, a figment, a conventionality, a thing upon the outside. No genuine criticism of romance will ever arise until we have grasped the fact that romance lies not upon the outside of life but absolutely in the centre of it.

The fictionality of fiction plays out in three different ways in its transmission from Scott to Chesterton via Stevenson. For Scott, reality is too mundane to be artful. For Stevenson, it is too complex to be transcribed. And for Chesterton, fiction is too true to be limited to 'realism'.

I'd like to turn now to – well, not my speciality, but perhaps my field of operations: the contemporary novel. I think the last ten years have seen a significant resurgence of work which might be considered to follow in the footsteps of Scott and, more particularly, Stevenson, and which use the self-conscious fictionality of fiction for surprising, new and often political ends.

In 2003, Michael Chabon – Pulitzer Prize winner and one of the most exciting novelists currently writing – edited a volume entitled *McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales*. In the introduction Chabon attacked modern writers – including himself – for the preponderance of 'contemporary, quotidian, plotless, moment-of-truth, revelatory stories, sparkling with epiphanic dew'. There was a time, he wrote, when short stories might include pirates, cowboys, ninjas, gumshoes, astronauts, soldiers, robots, ghosts, spies and knights. Chabon's anthology was an attempt to reinvigorate the 'adventure' story, an ambition I'm sure you'll agree the 'Writer for Boys RLS' would have approved. In various interviews, Chabon discussed how he suffered from writer's block after his first novel – a predicament which formed the basis for his second novel, *Wonder Boys*,





but which can't really inspire more than one book. Genre was a form of transfusion: in later works such as *The Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, *The Final Solution*, *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* and *Gentlemen of the Road* he has sought to unite 'literary' qualities (or to be more precise, an awareness of the nature of literature gleaned from literary theory) with 'genre' ones. Lev Grossman has written that he thinks 'This is literature in mid-transformation [. . .] the highbrow and the lowbrow, once kept chastely separate, are now hooking up, [and] you can almost see the future of literature coming'. The novel *Gentlemen of the Road* – which Chabon originally wanted to call *Jews With Swords* – is a historical swashbuckler that manages to deal with anti-Semitism and Zionism. *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* is an alt-history, and writing in a self-consciously fictional form allows Chabon to explore, for example, millenarian thinking amongst orthodox Jews and its terrorist implications in a manner impossible for the 'realist' novel.

Chabon is, as Grossman suggests, at the forefront of an emergent movement, or perhaps the forefront of a radical rehabilitation. Among the other authors associated with this trend in America, the most well-known over here would be Jonathan Lethem (who has variously melded high concept literature with parody Chandler – he literalises some of Chandler's more baroque metaphors in *Gun, With Occasional Music* – and another novel of gumshoe alterity, *Motherless Brooklyn*; a science fiction / Western hybrid (*Girl in Landscape*); science fiction / campus novel hybrid, *As She Climbed Across The Table*; a superhero fantasia cum *bildungsroman*, *The Fortress of Solitude*, a romantic comedy, *You Don't Love Me Yet* and most recently *Chronic City*. Other prominent exponents would be G. W. Dahlquist, author of *The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters*; Kelly Link, author of *Pretty Monsters*, Rick Moody, author of *The Omega Force* and Bill Willingham, the graphic novelist responsible for the multiple Eisner winning *Fables*.





Perhaps the most important text so far has been Thomas Pynchon's late novel, *Against the Day* (2006). In *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), the question about whether reality behaved like a narrative was the focus of the 'poetics of paranoia' that typified Pynchon's earlier work. *Against the Day* does something different. The first section, opening in 1893 and entitled 'The Light Over The Ranges' introduces Randolph St Cosmo, Darby Suckling, Lindsay Noseworth, Miles Blundell, Chick Counterfly and their dog Pugnax, collectively known as The Chums of Chance; a group of teenage aeronautical adventurers in a dirigible, the *Inconvenience*. When they arrive at the Chicago World Fair, Pynchon writes:

The Chums of Chance could have been granted no more appropriate form of 'ground-leave' than the Chicago Fair, as the great national celebration possessed the exact degree of fictitiousness to permit the boys agency and access. The harsh nonfictional world waited outside the White City's limits, held off for this brief summer, making the entire commemorative season beside Lake Michigan at once dream-like and real. [. . .] Lew Basnight seemed a sociable enough young man, though it soon became obvious he had not, until now, so much as heard of the Chums of Chance. 'But every boy knows the Chums of Chance' declared Lindsay Noseworth perplexedly. 'What could you've been reading, as a youth?' Lew obligingly tried to remember. 'Wild West, African explorers, the usual adventure stuff. But you boys – you're not storybook characters?' He had a thought. 'Are you?' 'No more than Wyatt Earp or Nellie Bly', Randolph supposed. 'Although the longer a fellow's name has been in the magazines, the harder it is to tell fiction from non-fiction'. 'I guess I read the sports pages mostly' 'Good!' declared Chick Counterfly 'at least we won't have to get on to the Anarchist Question'.





The Chums ostentatious declaration of their reality is made more complicated for the reader since we have already been introduced to many of the titles of the books of their adventures (the narrator of *Against the Day* refers to ‘my faithful readers’ when asking them to remember that ‘Darby is the “baby” of the crew’). In the first few pages we learn about *The Chums of Chance and the Evil Half-wit*, *The Chums of Chance at Krakatoa*, *The Chums of Chance Search for Atlantis* – later in the novel we get *The Chums of Chance and the Mussulman Horde* and *The Chums of Chance in the Bowels of the Earth*, about which ‘letters have come in from as far away as Tunbridge Wells, England, expressing displeasure, often quite intense, with my harmless little intraterrestrial scherzo’. So we are encouraged to read the Chums as ontologically problematic: they appear in books but claim they are not characters. To make the point in his typically winking fashion, Pugnax the Dog is reading – yes – *The Princess Casamassima* by Henry James – a book the erudite Lindsay says concerns ‘the inexorably rising tide of World Anarchism [. . .] a sinister affliction to which I pray we shall suffer no occasion for exposure more immediate than that to be experienced, as with Pugnax at this moment, safely within the fictional leaves of some book’.

The plot of *Against the Day* is labyrinthine and baroque. (It includes a memorable villain, Scarsdale Vibe and his family, the Bad Vibes, and their plot to stop Nikolai Tesla harnessing the earth’s magnetic field to provide free power to everybody.) Like a parody of the Great Game, it shuttles between Afghanistan and Alaska. The world is drifting towards 1914, and it becomes clearer and clearer that the Chums are not like us. They are better than us. Pynchon uses their fictionality to chastise reality, offering us a nobler, more daring, more spirited version. But their goodness comes with a limitation: like the dirigible they pilot, they are above us, increasingly disconnected and unable to intervene. Their fictionality prevents them from altering history: they are,





in a profoundly Pynchonesque way, the most alternative of alternative cultures. Fleetwood Vibe sums it up beautifully: 'I used to read Dickens as a child. The cruelty didn't surprise me, but I did wonder at the moments of uncompensated kindness, which I had never observed outside the pages of fiction'. Or, as the glorious final chords of the book put it:

Never sleeping, clamorous as a non-stop feast day, *Inconvenience*, once a vehicle of sky-pilgrimage, has transformed into its own destination, where any wish that can be made is at least addressed, if not always granted. For every wish to come true would mean that in the known Creation, good unsought and uncompensated would have evolved somehow, to become at least more accessible to us. No one aboard *Inconvenience* has yet observed any sign of this. They know – Miles is certain – it is there, like an approaching rainstorm, but invisible. Soon they will see the pressure-gauge begin the fall. They will feel the turn in the wind. They will put on smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky. They fly toward grace.

It is almost as if Pynchon has provided an epic gloss on Stevenson's contrast in 'A Humble Remonstrance': 'life is monstrous and illogical, art is flowing and rational'. And just to give you a hint of this novel's depth and intricacy: Lew Basnight eventually becomes an agent for a mystical espionage ring, the True Worshipers of the Ineffable Tetractys – T.W.I.T. for short – dedicated to fighting anarchism. One of the agents he meets is the Hermit (they're all named after Tarot Arcana) who runs a cigar-divan. The only other mention of cigar-divan I know of is the name of the opening chapter of Stevenson's *The Dynamiter*.

I realise I've come a long way from Scott and Stevenson, but the point bears repeating. From Scott, Stevenson inherited a notion which had not been articulated before; that there is a pro-





found difference from the quotidian manner in which we experience our lives and the interconnected web of coincidences and parallels that make narrative art. It is no wonder that so many novels concern literal as well as metaphorical plots, whether that's *Peveril of the Peak* or *The Master of Ballantrae*: plot itself derives from the Old French *compeloter*, to roll into a ball, just as *denouement* means to untie rather than tie-up. This interstice between plot and un-plot has proved to be fertile for writers as diverse as Chesterton, for whom it took on a religious hue, and Pynchon, for whom it took on a nostalgic, recriminatory role.

I'd like to conclude with a few remarks purely in my capacity as Literary Editor. Why, given Scotland started this awareness, and can boast writers such as Scott, Stevenson, Conan-Doyle and Buchan, do so many contemporary Scottish novelists shy away from exploiting the full extent of imaginative possibility, preferring instead a politically naive social realism? Is the highest ambition, as I once heard a creative writing student say, to be the Irvine Welsh of Falkirk? There are writers – I'd cite Andrew Crumey and Elaine di Rollo – who are willing to use self-conscious fictions for radical ends, but they tend to be overlooked or co-opted into a wan 'European postmodern' or 'Borgesian' (a great lover of Stevenson) context. In a recent event I chaired a discussion with my friend A. L. Kennedy at the National Library of Scotland on her influences. She attacked the (academic) notion that influence always leaves a trace of imitation, citing her huge admiration for the work of South American and Caribbean magic realists. (I'd argue you could see that in *So I Am Glad*, but let it stand). She went on to say that the idea of one novel being 'more real' than another seemed incomprehensible to her: contrast Ian McEwan and China Mieville: they're both fictions, they're both made up, she said. As such, she revealed her lineage back to Stevenson. And to prove the point, the next work she chose was 'Markheim'.





The strange case of *Weir of Hermiston* and *St. Ives*: R. L. Stevenson's last adventures in narration

Saverio Tomaiuolo

Notwithstanding their differences, *Weir of Hermiston* and *St. Ives* mirror, in fictional form, the very issues that were at stake for Robert Louis Stevenson in his essays and ideas on literature, in his view of Scotland as a divided and dissociated nation, and in his creative approach to Scottish history and geography. But, above all, these novels exemplify Stevenson's view of fiction as an adventurous voyage not only in space and time, but also in words and sentences, a textual challenge on the possibilities and limits of writing. Both novels were conceived and written in Vailima, where the cultural, geographic and climatic distance from his contested and missed homeland offered him the occasion to review, and sometimes to revise, his biographic and literary past. Unfortunately, contemporary critical studies on Stevenson have focused mainly on *Weir of Hermiston*, almost universally acclaimed as his uncompleted masterpiece, while deliberately neglecting the other novel he was writing in those same years.

In fact there has been a widespread downplaying of *St. Ives*, whose completion (following Conan Doyle's refusal) was entrusted by Sidney Colvin and by the members of Stevenson's family to Arthur Quiller-Couch, who had written in 1887 a novel inspired by the style *Treasure Island*, entitled *Dead Man's Rock*. Many perplexities derive not just from the presumably modest literary quality of Stevenson's last romance, but in particular from the writer's own dissatisfied comments (partially motivated by the difficulties he faced during its intermittent and problematic gestation), and from the critical attacks *St. Ives* had to undergo soon after it was in print. An example is given by a review published in the *Athenaeum* on 16 October 1897, signed by Joseph





Jacobs, who blames it as the product of 'a fagged mind', after having praised the style of Quiller-Couch's spurious continuation as the only positive quality of Stevenson's last novel. In Jacob's opinion, *St. Ives* is 'a rattling, touch-and-go tale of adventure of a somewhat ordinary type', whose most 'remarkable (and significant) thing [. . .] is the skill with which Mr. Quiller Couch has supplied the last six chapters'.¹ Nevertheless *Weir of Hermiston* and *St. Ives* share many more common elements than is at first apparent: both novels begin in Scotland in 1813², they introduce the issue of Scottishness, they both treat the question of evil (identified with devil-like figures such as Frank Innes and Alain St. Ives), they offer similar representations of women as expressions of natural forces (the two Kirsties and Flora Gilchrist), they include the figure of Walter Scott as a literary model and a fictional character, and finally they point to the necessity of heroism in an antiheroic age. Although they do not speak the same narrative language and do not share the same style, they spring from the same Scottish source and try to answer the same questions, embodying Stevenson's dualistic nature as an engaged and popular writer, as a serious intellectual and a nostalgic narrator of adventures.

Weir of Hermiston (1896) is a story based upon multiple forms of dissociation, experienced by the main character Archie Weir in the course of his personal and cultural evolution. Stevenson's unfinished novel resembles a *bildungsroman* set in a half-invented and half-remembered Lowland Scotland, whose protagonist undergoes a series of rites of passage: from the contrast with the father figure (the authoritarian judge Adam Weir) to the loss of the mother (the fragile and religious Lady Rutherford), from the exile from Edinburgh to Hermiston to the contact with the mythical tales of the Elliots, from the realisation that friendship is ephemeral (as in the case of Frank Innes) to the process of sexual and emotional initiation after his meeting Young Kirstie. All of these elements are woven around a tale based on





unresolved antitheses that reflect the dual nature of Scottish history and culture. Finally, in this novel Stevenson tries to find a common ground between his interest in realistic psychological characterisation, whose literary outcome is represented by South-Sea fictions such as 'The Beach of Falesá' (1892) and *The Ebb-Tide* (1894), and his Scottish cultural background. The oral quality of *Weir of Hermiston* bears in fact a strong resemblance to the narrative technique used in *The Ebb-Tide* (Stevenson's last completed novel), sharing its ironic treatment of the notion of truth. Focusing more on characterisation than on adventures (at least in the fragment he left his readers), Stevenson fills *Weir of Hermiston* with the biographical and literary experiences of his maturity, along with an increasing interest in realism, seen by him not as a negation of romance but as an alternative narrative perspective on events. Thus Attwater, for example, the realistically portrayed protagonist of *The Ebb-Tide*, can be seen as an authoritarian father figure who may be compared to Judge Weir, as if Stevenson in *Weir of Hermiston* was looking back to his historical, biographical and cultural past through the lens of the present.³

The 'Introductory' to *Weir of Hermiston* is the section in which all of these textual, narrative and ideological premises are best translated into a fictional form. From a topographic point of view, the Weaver's Stone is the setting where the most relevant scenes of the novel take place: Archie's memories of Covenanting tales of persecution read by his mother Jean, his meetings with Young Kirstie, and – according to the author's planning – Frank Innes's murder by the hand of Archie. In Bakhtinian terms, this place represents the novel's *chronotope*, which fuses chronological and geographical references in one single unity.⁴ The omniscient narrator, deliberately distanced from the biographical author, does not always introduce specific historical and literary references to give chronological and topographic credibility to its tale. In the ballad-like style of the 'Introductory' history and geography





are employed like fluid documents that serve the sole purpose of creating a pre-text for the narration:

In the wild end of a moorland parish, far out of the sight of any house, there stands a cairn among the heather, and a little by east of it, in the going down of the brae-side, a monument with some verses half defaced. It was here that Claverhouse shot with his own hand the Praying Weaver of Balweary, and the chisel of Old Mortality has clinked on that lonely gravestone.⁵

Stevenson's decision to adopt an oracular narrator (emotionally involved in the events, but whose identity cannot deduced from the fragment Stevenson left his readers), has significant textual, narrative and ideological resonances. The allusions to John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee (who persecuted Covenanters in the South-West of Scotland from 1678, and whose contradictory nature is evoked in Scottish historical memory through epithets such as 'Bloody Clavers' and 'Bonnie Dundee') and to Robert Patterson (the stonemason whose house was ransacked in 1745 by retreating Highlanders during the Jacobite rebellion, and to whom Walter Scott dedicated *Old Mortality*) are used to enhance the notion that fiction and history are not mutually irreconcilable. Indeed, historical documentation and artistic creation may find a common ground in the figure of the 'Praying Weaver', a fictional Covenanter associated to the village of Balweary who metaphorically represents the figure of the narrator 'weaving' a tale.

In the second paragraph of *Weir of Hermiston*, the late-nineteenth-century narrator, who recounts the events from a chronological vantage point, relates this Scottish public context to the private events of the main characters (Archie, Adam, Frank, the two Kirsties and the Four Black Brothers), making their fictional 'story' part of Scots historical memory, and turning a ballad-like narration into a nineteenth-century novel:





To this day, of winter nights, when the sleet is on the window and the cattle are quiet in the byre, there will be told again, amid the silence of the young and the additions and corrections of the old, the tale of the Justice-Clerk and of his son, young Hermiston, that vanished from men's knowledge; of the two Kirsties and the Four Black Brothers of the Cauldstaneslap; and of Frank Innes, 'the young fool advocate,' that came into these moorland parts to find his destiny (p. 85).

Hermiston represents the place in which history and myth, fact and fiction, reality and imagination coexist. This literary heterocosm allows Stevenson to introduce famous literary figures within an invented narrative frame. More than any other writer mentioned in the novel (including James Hogg and Robert Burns), Walter Scott figures as a recurring presence and as the incarnation of that Scottish cultural heritage to which *Weir of Hermiston* pays its tribute. Apart from the implicit reference to *Old Mortality* included in the 'Introductory', Scott is mentioned with reference to the management of Adam Weir's country house at Hermiston. The narrator tells that '[my] lord had been led by the influence of Mr Sheriff Scott into a considerable design of planting; many acres were accordingly set out with fir, and the little feathery besoms gave a false scale and lent a strange air of a toy-shop to the moors' (p. 126). Some pages later, in the course of Kirstie's (mediated) narration of the heroic vicissitudes of the Four Black Brothers, Scott's spirit is invoked again:

Some century earlier the last of the minstrels might have fashioned the last of the ballads out of that Homeric fight and chase; but the spirit was dead, or had been reincarnated already in Mr Sheriff Scott, and the degenerate moor-men must be content to tell the tale in prose, and to make of the 'Four Black Brothers' a unit after the fashion of the 'Twelve Apostles' of the 'Three Musketeers' (p. 136).





Another allusion to Scott, which in a way anticipates the post-modern trend to incorporate 'real' historical or literary figures into a literary text, is related to the narration of the lives of the Four Black Brothers, and of the poet/shepherd Dand in particular. According to the narrator, 'Walter Scott owned to Dandie the text of the "Raid of Wearie" in the *Ministrelsy*, and made him welcome at his house, and appreciated his talents, such as they were, with all his usual generosity' (p. 140). In this, as well as in other cases, Stevenson makes Walter Scott, the persecuted Covenanters, Archie Weir, the Justice-Clerk, Frank Innes, the Elliott brothers, and the two Kirsties part of the same literary world and of the same events which take place in the half-fictional, half-biographical landscape of *Hermiston*, mixing Scottish memory and personal desire

The 'dualistic' quality of narration in *Weir of Hermiston* finds a thematic exemplification in the antithesis between Archie and Adam Weir, two embodiments of Scotland as an internally divided nation. As far as Archie's character is concerned, *Weir of Hermiston* is suspended between autobiographical reminiscences – his precarious health and 'the childish maladies with which the boy was troubled' (p. 97), his partaking in the Edinburgh Speculative Society, his interest in 'Byronism' – and an adventurous impulse spurred by his passionate love story with Kirstie which, along with his rebellion against his father, initiates him into maturity. As for Stevenson's characterisation of Archie's sentimental enemy Frank Innes, it is far less complex than his portrait of Judge Weir, and has been cited by critics as one of the novel's weak points. Indeed, the 'young advocate' is just a 'devilish' flat character, as the title of chapter 7 suggests. ('Enter Mephistopheles' is a quotation from Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*). His sole and exclusive role is to be the antagonist of Archie's pure feelings and to be Kirstie's seducer, at least according to Stevenson's plans. Frank Innes is partially inspired by the lawyer George William Thomson Omond (1846-1929),





one of the founders of the *Edinburgh University Magazine* and a member of the Speculative Society. Omond was disliked by Stevenson, who described his speeches as ‘inarticulate and foolish’ in a letter to James Walter Ferrier dated 23 November 1872. Frank Innes is the typical figure of the villain derived from the tradition of the romance, and will have his counterpart in the character of Alain in *St. Ives* (who is also identified with the devil on more than one occasion), although the latter character also shares Archie’s ante-litteram ‘Byronism’.

While the transition from sentimental immaturity to sexual initiation is represented in *Weir of Hermiston* by Archie’s tormented relationship with Young Kirstie (which would lead to Frank Innes’s murder), his first rite of passage from acquiescent boy to rebellious man occurs after he has witnessed Duncan Jopp’s cruel trial and death sentence in 1813. In turn, the character of Adam Weir in *Weir of Hermiston* is a complex portrait of paternal and institutional power. Although the Justice-Clerk living in George Street bears some resemblances to Stevenson’s father Thomas and is partially based upon his personal memories, Stevenson integrates these biographical elements with the historical reference to Lord Braxfield (1722-1799), who was first introduced in the essay ‘Some Portraits by Raeburn’, included in *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers* (1881). Despite the Judge’s notorious harshness, Henry Raeburn’s portrait on display at the Scottish Academy (which is the main object of Stevenson’s essay) shows a rather convivial figure. In the case of *Weir of Hermiston*, Stevenson does not choose to describe Adam Weir’s physical traits, but uses the Judge’s short sentences and his Scottish dialect to convey his special mixture of cruelty and irony. Adam’s characterisation thus complicates the antithesis between youth and old age, rebellion and authority, innovation and tradition, demonstrating (in line with Stevenson’s poetical and ideological principles) that in Scottish culture and history these oppositions cannot be easily solved. From a linguistic point





of view, the dualistic nature of Scotland is dramatised in the clash between Archie's predilection for English and Adam's use of Scots.⁶ Far from being a mere stylistic device to convey the contrast between Scottish dialect and cultivated English, the languages adopted by Archie and Adam represent their opposite *ideologemes* (in Mikhail Bakhtin's definition) and their perspectives on the question of justice and punishment, as well as their notions of good and evil. Although Archie will later find in Scots a common linguistic ground to create an intimacy with Young Kirstie (as the embodiment of primeval Scottish values and uncontrollable natural forces), his dissociation from his paternal cultural heritage is exposed at first in his challenging choice to use English:

'And now, if you please, we shall approach this business with a little more parteeularity. I hear that at the hanging of Duncan Jopp – and, man! ye had a fine client there – in the middle of all the riff-raff of the ceety, ye thought fit to cry out, "This is a damned murder and my gorge rises at the man that haangit him"'.
[Registration mark]

'No, sir, these were not my words,' cried Archie.

'What were yer words, then?' asked the Judge.

'I believe I said, "I denounce it as a murder!"' said the son.

'I beg your pardon – a God-defying murder. I have no wish to conceal the truth,' he added, and looked his father for a moment in the face (p. 112).
[Registration mark]

The novel's abrupt ending, describing Kirstie's passionately violent reply to Archie's words, includes an emblematic example of Stevenson's depiction of women as untameable natural forces. Here the young man is confronted with the primal elements of femininity, which make Kirstie an expression of the most uncanny side of Scottish rural landscape, of its chaotic mixture of irreconcilable elements and unsolvable interrogatives:

There arose from before him the curtains of boyhood, and





he saw for the first time the ambiguous face of woman as she is. In vain he looked back over her interview; he saw not where he had offended. It seemed unprovoked, a wilful convulsion of brute nature... (p. 194).

Because of its light tone, of its unpretentious structure and of its partially predictable plot, *St. Ives* may seem inferior to the 'serious' *Weir of Hermiston*. When Stevenson began working on it, in fact, *St. Ives* seemed to him only a *divertissement* with no literary ambitions that would probably cost him less toil than the wide-ranging and more complex *Weir of Hermiston*. However, as months passed by, the balance of the two novels changed and their roles reversed, turning *St. Ives* into a sort of narrative nightmare. Apart from his constant requests for informative books dealing with topics ranging from balloon ascensions to American privateers (craft with 18 guns and a crew of 180 people operating in British waters in the years 1812-14), the first part of *St. Ives* had to be rewritten because Stevenson realised that he had made a great mistake in his portrayal of its hero Viscount Anne Champdivers St. Ives, a French soldier fighting during the Napoleonic Wars and imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. Stevenson realised his errors when he received a copy of the *Mémoires d'un conscrit de 1808* by L. F. Gille:

I had miserable luck with *St. Ives*; being already half-way through it, a book I had ordered six months ago arrives at last, and I have to change the first half of it from top to bottom! How could I have dreamed the French prisoners were watched over like a female charity school, kept in a grotesque livery, and shaved twice a week? And I had made my points on the idea that they were unshaved and clothed anyhow.⁷

Notwithstanding its stylistic differences from *Weir of Hermiston*, *St. Ives* represents another attempt to reflect on





Scottish culture and history. The novel is Stevenson's farewell to romance, the literary form that gave him success, which he defended against accusations of literary immaturity in many essays, and which he considered as an expression of pure narration.⁸ In *St. Ives* Stevenson not only sums up his ideas on romance (through the mediation of literary models such as Alexander Dumas, Victor Hugo and Stanley John Weyman), but goes back to his previous adventure novels. Most notably, for example, this text features a character narrating in the first person his past experiences (like *Treasure Island*) and it is basically a series of vicissitudes originated by the hero's picaresque wanderings in Scotland (like *Kidnapped*).

Opening on May 1813 (the same year in which Duncan Jopp is hanged and when the actual narration of *Weir of Hermiston* begins), *St. Ives* centres on the character of Anne St. Ives, a refined French Viscount whose parents were killed during the French Revolution. After having fought with Napoleon, he is captured by English soldiers and imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle, where his adventures begin. Stevenson's choice of a foreigner suggests that he wanted to offer another picture of southern Scotland from an 'alien' perspective. Like the 'recluse of Hermiston' Archie Weir, the prisoner Anne St. Ives begins to discover Scotland from the outside, only to be successively involved in Scottish culture via a sentimental relationship (in his case with a girl named Flora Gilchrist). Anne's employment as an interpreter for his fellow-prisoners and the fact that he carves a wooden rampant Lion (the symbol of Scotland) to offer it as a gift for Flora enhance his role as a mediating subject, who tries to connect opposites through his linguistic and creative ability, just as Stevenson did in all of his literary works. Such elements complicate the nature of *St. Ives* as a novel (dismissed as a mere 'swashbuckler' by contemporary critics), and foreground its status as a problematic achievement in Stevenson's macrotext. Indeed, if *St. Ives* includes the typical formulae of the romance form (the gallant knight, the devoted





lover, the female heroine in need of help, the devilish enemy, the final confrontation etc.), it is rather less typical in its representation of Anne's traits as a foreigner abroad with his own opinions as a curious observer of Scottish history and culture. Narrated through the unmediated voice of its protagonist, *St. Ives* is basically a 'novel of character', as defined by Stevenson in 'A Humble Remonstrance' as a class of fiction characterised by its lack of a coherent plot and by a series of unrelated adventures revolving around the hero.

The fact that the 'older self' of the narrator remembers his 'younger self', and recounts his past adventures, gives the story an implicitly ironic tone. Moreover, the use of the first person in *St. Ives* suits the laws of romance as a genre, since this strategy is more emotionally involving and helps the reader to identify with the hero/narrator. Finally, the decision to use the figure of the 'protagonist-as-narrator' who reports facts is connected to (and justified by) the biographical events surrounding the composition of *St. Ives*. Due to his precarious health in the years 1893-1894, Stevenson was forced to dictate most of the novel to his step-daughter and amanuensis Belle Strong, and sometimes when he could not even speak, he used the deaf and dumb alphabet to communicate. The use of first person narration is linked thus to narrative desire, as if Stevenson had to dictate to Belle the 'ideal' and 'perfect' adventure that he himself wished to listen to.

Conceived as an ideal farewell, both to his first boyish daydreams as reader of romances and to his literary forefathers, *St. Ives* is a tribute to Stevenson's most beloved French novelist Alexander Dumas, and in particular to what he considered as Dumas's masterpiece: the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*. In his last romance Stevenson tries to evoke the atmosphere and the heroic impulses that animate the French literary tradition, which influenced him, to the point that he even imitates the linguistic register of a French character speaking a refined English.⁹ This occurs most notably in the sections describing Anne's feelings for





Flora Gilchrist. Like Young Kirstie in *Weir of Hermiston*, Flora is the embodiment of the impulsive Scottish character. Although Flora is light, while Kirstie was dark, both women are associated to natural forces (Flora is repeatedly called 'daughter of the winds'). Furthermore, Kirstie and Flora represent the main reason behind Archie and Anne's heroic actions, which lead them to leave their state of (metaphorical and physical) seclusion:

There was one young lady in particular, about eighteen or nineteen, tall, of a gallant carriage, and with a profusion of hair in which the sun found threads of gold. As soon as she came in the courtyard (and she was a rather frequent visitor) it seemed I was aware of it. She had an air of angelic candour, yet of a high spirit; she stepped like a Diana, every movement was noble and free [. . .] I could have clapped my hands in applause, and was ready to acclaim her a genuine daughter of the winds (pp. 5-6).

The French school of Dumas, however, is not the only source for the creation of *St. Ives*. In the last years of his life Stevenson was increasingly fascinated by Stanley John Weyman's 'sword and cloak' historical romances *A Gentleman of France* (1894) and *Under the Red Robe* (1894), which represented for him the proofs that the romance genre was still alive and kicking on English soil. In a letter to Weyman sent from Vailima on 5 April 1893, Stevenson congratulates him on the first chapter of *A Gentleman of France*, which had just started serialisation in *Longman's Magazine*. In Stevenson's words, 'I never read a better first chapter, and I never want to read a better. The interest is so completely and so immediately settled on the hero that one might almost say it did not matter what was to follow'.¹⁰ In another letter dated 18 May 1894, written to Weyman after having finished reading his book, Stevenson not only re-asserts his critical opinions on the potentialities and limits of romance, proving that he was evidently self-aware of its narrative strate-





gies, but suggests an inherent connection between the novel he was writing at the time (namely, *St. Ives*) and *A Gentleman of France*:

It is true the book is a little shapeless, but that is inherent in the *genre*. You cannot both eat your cake and have it. A story must either be a huge breaker – or it must be the surf along the beach, one climax after another climax and none measurably greater than the other. Yours is the second method; admirably you have done it; and long may you continue to do so.

I dare say you will have shortly a fine occasion to copy out this criticism and send it back for my own use. I have been already more than a year over a book of mere adventure like your own, and strangely enough, it might very well have borne your title, *A Gentleman of France*. But I fear in competition he will come in a bad second.¹¹

In *St. Ives* Stevenson integrates the deployment of such romance codes to a specific geographic location that was part of his literary and cultural project. Indeed, the Scottish setting represents one of the undisputed protagonists of *St. Ives*, evoked by Stevenson with a mixture of irony and nostalgia. As with *Weir of Hermiston* the lines separating the fictional and the real geography of Scotland are indistinguishable. Edinburgh, where Stevenson lived during his youth and where he attended the meetings of the Speculative Society (called in *St. Ives* the ‘University of Cramond’) is perceived, so to say, under the French eyes of Anne St. Ives. In one of the most affectionate sections of the novel, the prisoner Anne looks down on Edinburgh from an elevated view. It can be easy to imagine that, in those same moments, Archie Weir, Adam Weir and Frank Innes were walking down its streets in Stevenson’s fictional heterocosm:

[Whenever] I desired to be solitary, I was suffered to sit here behind my piece of cannon unmolested. The cliff





went down before me almost sheer, but mantled with a thicket of climbing trees; from farther down, an outwork raised its turret; and across the valley I had a view of that long terrace of Princes Street which serves as a promenade to the fashionable inhabitants of Edinburgh. A singularity in a military prison, that it should command a view on the chief thoroughfare! (p. 39).

The plot of *St. Ives* is a variation of the traditional return home of the hero (the *nostos*), which has Homer's *Odyssey* among its genotexts. After Anne has killed in a duel the brutal Goguelat (and will be accordingly accused of murder), and has escaped Edinburgh Castle to reach Amersham Place in Bedfordshire in order to meet his rich uncle the Count (and his 'double' in the figure of his cousin Alain), the whole action revolves around his vexed return to Swanston Cottage to join the beloved Flora. It is in the course of his travels between Scotland and England that the main adventures take place. In the course his long journey, Anne St. Ives is accompanied by a young Scottish factotum and training valet named Rawley, who represents a mature recapitulation of the character of David Balfour in *Kidnapped* and, to some extent, of Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island*. In line with Stevenson's interest in dualities, Rowley and Anne embody the contrast between innocence and experience, Scots 'naturalness' and French 'refinement'. Anne's nostalgia for his youth (inspired by his encounter with Rowley) seems to reflect Stevenson's own longing for the days that are no more and that period of childhood in which readers identify with the characters of the novels they are reading. The more mature Stevenson, however, must recognise the impossibility of heroism in what the narrator of *Weir of Hermiston* calls 'an age of incredulity'.

Viscount Alain, Anne's cousin, is the quintessential villain of romances and Anne's principal enemy. His most remarkable feature is that, apart from being a spy, a sort of ante-litteram





Byronic dandy like Archie Weir, and a spendthrift (which causes him the loss of his rich uncle's inheritance), he is portrayed as Anne's dark double. This character is introduced for the first time in the course of a dialogue between Anne and Daniel Romaine, the Count's London solicitor:

'To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit? how did you recognise me? and how did you know I was here?' [. . .]

'It is rather an odd story,' says [Daniel Romanine], 'and, with your leave, I'll answer the second question first. It was from a *certain resemblance you bear to your cousin, M. le Vicomte.*'

'I trust, sir, that I resemble him advantageously?' said I.

'I hasten to reassure you,' was the reply: 'you do. To my eyes, M. Alain de St.-Yves has scarce a pleasing exterior. And yet, when I knew you were here, and was actually looking for you – why, *the likeness helped.* As for how I came to know your whereabouts, by an odd enough chance, it is again M. Alain we have to thank' (p. 33, my italics).

The second part of *St. Ives* deals with Alain's attempt to regain the stolen 'treasure' (as it is defined in the novel) the Count has given to Anne St. Ives, whose attitude towards his double is a combination of attraction and repulsion. Like Frank Innes in *Weir of Hermiston*, Alain is constructed as a merely functional character who acts as Anne's antagonist, and is usually associated to the devil. For instance, Chapter XIX (from which the last excerpt was taken) is entitled 'The Devil and All at Amersham Place'; it is to be noticed that in *Weir of Hermiston* the chapter describing Frank Innes's arrival at Hermiston was entitled 'Enter Mephistopheles'. In this way, Stevenson's *St. Ives* replicates the laws of the genre, as defined by critics such as Northrop Frye: '[the] central form of the romance is dialectical: everything is focussed on a conflict between the hero and its enemy [. . .]





Hence the hero of romance is homologous to the mythic Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of the lower world'.¹²

While in *Weir of Hermiston* Walter Scott was simply mentioned by the narrator and by some characters, in *St. Ives* he makes his appearance in the story as a 'real' human being. The casual encounter with Anne, accompanied by a Scots drover named Sim (who is Flora's uncle), takes place on the Borders, as if Stevenson/Anne wanted not only to make one of his dreams come true through the creative power of language, but also wished to bid an affectionate farewell to a writer who embodied the Scottish literary and cultural heritage:

Our encounter was of a tall, stoutish, elderly gentleman, a little grizzled, and of a rugged but cheerful and engaging countenance. He sat on a hill pony, wrapped in a plaid over his green coat, and was accompanied by a horsewoman, his daughter, a young lady of the most charming appearance [. . .] Presently I was aware that the stranger's eye was directed on myself; and there ensued a conversation, some of which I could not help overhearing at the time, and the rest have pieced together more or less plausibly from the report of Sim. [. . .]

Years after it chanced that I was one day diverting myself with a Waverley Novel, when what should I come upon but the identical narrative of my green-coated gentleman upon the moors! In a moment the scene, the tones of his voice, his northern accent, and the very aspect of the earth and sky and temperature of the weather, flashed back into my mind with the reality of dreams. The unknown in the green-coat had been the Great Unknown! I had met Scott; I had heard a story from his lips; I should have been able to write, to claim acquaintance, to tell him that his legend still tingled in my ears (pp. 85-6).





Stevenson's awareness of the incongruities and paradoxes of fictional narrations has important repercussions not only on the way he created his novels, but also on the way he (un)finished them. By leaving *Weir of Hermiston* and *St. Ives* partially 'open', like typical postmodern fictions, Stevenson accidentally created two stories which readers experience as perpetually unending narrations. In the case of *St. Ives*, for instance, neither Arthur Quiller-Couch's linguistically respectful completion (he comes to the point of imitating Stevenson's style) nor Jenni Calder's philologically more accurate ending (in her edition of the novel, dated 1990) can claim to put a full stop to Anne's adventures.¹³ On the contrary, they seem to demonstrate the impossibility of a conclusion. As far as *Weir of Hermiston* is concerned, readers cannot even be sure that the famous last words written by Stevenson ('a wilful convulsion of brute nature...') are the ultimate traces we have of Archie and Kirstie's story. As a matter of fact, the 1892 manuscript (at Pierpont Morgan Library, New York) includes two more pages of dialogue.¹⁴

Contrary to what Stevenson asserted in 'A Humble Remonstrance' (1884), in these last incomplete fictions art comes to the point of resembling life, because it seems to be 'monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant'. The very fact that the accounts of Stevenson's last minute diverge proves that it is almost impossible to look for certainties even in the most ineluctable of all human events. Like his novels, Stevenson's physical 'ending' turned into a narration based upon the surprises and incongruities of storytelling. For instance, according to Belle Strong, Stevenson (who was dropping the oil in the salad Fanny was preparing) suddenly said 'What's that?' or 'What a pain' and, putting both hands to his head, uttered the ominous 'Do I look strange?' On the contrary, in Fanny's account given to Charles Baxter, her portrait of Stevenson is less domestic and hagiographic. Fanny confesses that Stevenson mixed himself a whisky and soda so strong that, in his momentary absence, she





had to drink a portion of it. Then, when Stevenson had returned and drunk it up, he flushed and said 'Do I look queer, Fanny?'¹⁵ These biographic accounts are the product of re-created personal history, and as such they are subject to all the alterations and imperfections of memory. In this sense, it does not seem irrelevant that in his dedication of *Weir of Hermiston* to Fanny (added posthumously), Stevenson describes the empty space upon which he wanted to write his last, and unfinished, work of fiction as an 'imperfect page':

If any deed be done, if any fire
Burn in the imperfect page, the praise be thine.

NOTES

- 1 Joseph Jacobs, from an unsigned review, *Athenaeum*, 16 October 1897, p. 3651, quoted in *Robert Louis Stevenson. The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 485.
- 2 In truth, *Weir of Hermiston* and *St. Ives* are set in 1814, a year which had for Stevenson a literary and historical value. The year 1814 was not just 'the year of Napoleon's defeat and exile to Elba, but [also] the year of Scott's first Scottish historical novel *Waverley*. Scott himself appears in and around the edges of these last tales [. . .] Adam Weir keeps a town house in George Square, like Scott's father, while his wife's family, like Scott's mother's, is named Rutherford'. Ian Duncan, 'Stevenson and Fiction', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Penny Fielding (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 21.
- 3 'Like Attwater, Hermiston is a brutal lawgiver and unforgiving father, his justice founded in Old Testament notions of retribution'. Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the 'Fin de Siècle'* (London: Palgrave, 2006), p. 51.
- 4 See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981).
- 5 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Weir of Hermiston*, ed. by Emma Letley (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 83. All further references will be to this





edition, with pages parenthetically indicated.

- 6 David Daiches argues that '[in] the confrontation between Archie and his father in *Weir of Hermiston*, the father's mocking Scots and the son's clipped and defensive English illuminate splendidly the situation that is being presented'. David Daiches, 'Stevenson and Scotland', in *Stevenson and Victorian Scotland*, ed. by Jenni Calder (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), p. 28.
- 7 Letter to Sidney Colvin dated 24 or 25 April 1894, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Meheew (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1994-1995), vol 8, pp. 279-80.
- 8 In Glenda Norquay's words, romance for Stevenson 'becomes associated not only with models of imaginative engagement in early childhood but also with the period of boyhood in which total immersion in a text is possible'. Glenda Norquay, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Theories of Reading. The Reader as Vagabond* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 74-5.
- 9 In 'Books Which Have Influenced Me' (1887), Stevenson confesses that '[perhaps] my dearest and best friend outside of Shakespeare is d'Artagnan – the elderly d'Artagnan of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*'. In 'A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's' (1887), he adds that, along with Scott, Shakespeare, Moliere, Montaigne and Meredith's *The Egoist*, the *Vicomte de Bragelonne* is part of 'the inner circle of my intimates'. R. L. Stevenson on Fiction. *An Anthology of Literary and Critical Essays*, ed. by Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 111; p. 118.
- 10 *Letters*, vol 8, p. 49.
- 11 *Letters*, vol 8, p. 285. I would like to thank Glenda Norquay for having introduced me to S. J. Weyman and to his influence on Stevenson in her paper entitled 'Romance and Revivification' ('Locating Stevenson', 6th Biennial Robert Louis Stevenson Conference, University of Stirling, 8-10 July 2010).
- 12 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 187.
- 13 Stevenson's novel was interrupted at chapter XXX. Although Quiller-Couch corresponded with Sidney Colvin and was advised by Belle Strong to include a reference to the American privateer 'The True





Blooded Yankee', he preferred to introduce new characters such as Captain Colenso, and to allude only briefly to privateers. In her edition Jenni Calder (through the help of the researches made by R. J. Storey) gives more prominence to 'The True Blooded Yankee'. Quiller-Couch and Calder describe an adventurous balloon ascension involving Anne, which was part of Stevenson's original plan for his novel.

- 14 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston*, ed. by Catherine Kerrigan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 115-7.
- 15 *Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Ernest Mehew (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 609-10; *Letters*, vol 8, p. 404n.





Stevenson after Scott: the case of *Catriona*

Donald Mackenzie

The first edition of *Kidnapped* ends with the square-bracketed paragraph

[Just there, with his hand upon his fortune, the present editor inclines for the time to say farewell to David. How Alan escaped, and what was done about the murder, with a variety of other delectable particulars, may be some day set forth. That is a thing, however, that hinges on the public fancy. The editor has great kindness for both Alan and David, and would gladly spend much of his life in their society; but in this he may find himself to stand alone. In the fear of which, unless any one should complain of scurvy usage, he hastens to protest that all went well with both, in the limited and human sense of the word ‘well;’ that whatever befell them, it was not dishonour, and whatever failed them they were not found wanting to themselves.] (p. 208).

This was cut in the Edinburgh Edition, and no loss. After the taut complexity of sorrow and the half-spoken in the parting with Alan, it reads as a soggy compound of the avuncular editorial in a Victorian youth magazine with the bookman chat of an Andrew Lang. From that soggianness there stands out its final emphasis on integrity: ‘whatever failed them they were not founding wanting to themselves.’ Integrity here is dramatized with more than a dash of Stoic-Romantic pathos. When the sequel finally came, seven years later, the focus for integrity lies on David alone. And his integrity is not only dramatised but sifted, in ways that generate Stevenson’s most extended engagement with Scott – an engagement more illuminating than any of his comments as a critic on the latter, suggestive as some of them are.

‘A Gossip on Romance’ closes by dismissing Scott as ‘a great daydreamer, a seer of fit and beautiful and humorous visions, but hardly a great artist; hardly, in the manful sense, an artist at all.’ This shares the widespread failure of nineteenth and earlier





twentieth criticism to apprehend Scott's mastery of thematic patterning, whether massive as in *Redgauntlet* or taut as in *The Fair Maid of Perth*, his analytic orchestration of grouped characters, his formal inventiveness¹. By contrast, the 1874 essay on 'Victor Hugo's Romances' plots luminously the role of landscape and history in Scott versus Fielding.

Continuous narration is the flat board on to which the novelist throws everything. And from this there results for him a great loss of vividness, but a great compensating gain in his power over the subject [. . .] He can show his readers, behind and around the personages that for the moment occupy the foreground of his story, the continual suggestion of the landscape; the turn of the weather that will turn with it men's lives and fortunes, dimly foreshadowed on the horizon; the fatality of distant events, the stream of national tendency, the salient framework of causation. And all this thrown upon the flat board—all this entering, naturally and smoothly, into the texture of continuous intelligent narration.

This touches the difference between Fielding and Scott. In the work of the latter, true to his character of a modern and a romantic, we become suddenly conscious of the background.²

A passage in *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, IV, keys landscape to history as oral tradition, locating Scott in a wider working of the folk-imagination:

The character of a place is often most perfectly expressed in its associations. An event strikes root and grows into a legend, when it has happened amongst congenial surroundings [. . .] To a man like Scott, the different appearances of nature seemed each to contain its own legend





ready-made, which it was his to call forth; in such or such a place, only such or such events ought with propriety to happen; and in this spirit he made the *Lady of the Lake* for Ben Venue, the *Heart of Midlothian* for Edinburgh, and the *Pirate*, so indifferently written but so romantically conceived, for the desolate islands and roaring tideways of the North. The common run of mankind have, from generation to generation, an instinct almost as delicate as that of Scott; but where he created new things, they only forget what is unsuitable among the old; and by survival of the fittest, a body of tradition becomes a work of art.³

That chimes with the better-known passage on locations in 'A Gossip on Romance' and anticipates what Buchan will do with the latter in the chronotopes of his post-World War I historical novels.⁴ And the citing of *The Pirate* brings us back to 'A Gossip on Romance' and the Paterian epiphany it triggers there:

In that ill-written, ragged book, *The Pirate*, the figure of Cleveland – cast up by the sea on the resounding foreland of Dunrossness – moving with the blood on his hands and the Spanish words on his tongue, amid the simple islanders – singing a serenade under the window of his Shetland mistress – is conceived in the highest manner of romantic invention. The words of his song, 'Through groves of palm,' sung in such a scene and by such a lover, clench, as in a nutshell, the emphatic contrast upon which the tale is built.⁵

I

In Stevenson's fiction *Catriona* stands out as his one essay at a full-dress Scott novel; to be precise, at the kind of Scott novel – there are others – which meshes the story of its protagonists with the history of their society and its culture in a phase of transition or at a point of crisis. In essaying such a novel *Catriona* systematically deploys a range of paradigms out of Scott. Its inset 'Tale of Tod Lapraik' is seeded from 'Wandering Willie's





Tale' in *Redgauntlet*. Prestongrange in Chapter Four analyses for David Balfour the *realpolitik* of the Highlands six years after Culloden as Fergus Mac-Ivor on the retreat from Derby analyses for Waverley the *realpolitik* of the Jacobite catastrophe that will follow. David detained on the Bass, and sidelined from the action at a point of crisis, finesses on Waverley recuperating from his deer-hunt injuries as the '45 is launched, or on the siege of Torquilstone Castle recounted by Rebecca to the bedridden Ivanhoe, or on Darsie Latimer imprisoned and carried round the country, transvested and masked. The netting of justice in law and law in politics throughout Part One recalls the inter-tangling of all three in *The Heart of Midlothian*, where, as in *Catriona*, that tangling is set against the resolute integrity of the protagonist: "You are the head of Justice in this country," David cries to Prestongrange in their first night-time encounter, "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. You might be glad of it, I think: it is your own protection.'⁶

One might note – here and throughout Part One of *Catriona* – how the ample chiaroscuro of law, politics and justice in *The Heart of Midlothian* has yielded to a dry-point engraving; and what is gained, what lost in that yielding. The Lord Advocate himself and his antagonist the lawyer Charles Stewart (announced in the title of Chapter II as "The Highland Writer"), cross the Highland/Lowland divide as, in opposing ways, do Fergus Mac-Ivor and Baillie Nicol Jarvie. "The Duke and I are Highlanders", Prestongrange tells David:

But we are Highlanders civilised, and it is not so with the great mass of our clans and families. They have still savage virtues and defects. They are still barbarians, like





these Stewarts; only the Campbells were barbarians on the right side, and the Stewarts were barbarians on the wrong (p. 246).

This condenses to *realpolitik* aphorism the cultural historiography the Waverley novels deploy out of the Scottish Enlightenment. And behind such a notation rise the larger issues of Scottish identity, of distinct and conflicting Scottish traditions – Highland and Lowland, Jacobite and Presbyterian, Scots, Gaelic and English – not to mention Scottish identity in relation to England – which, along with the possibilities of marriage among those traditions, constitute one burden of *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*.

In contrast to such Enlightenment perspectives ‘The Tale of Tod Lapraik’ locates Stevenson in a Scottish tradition of *diablerie* whose founding classics are ‘Tam o’ Shanter’ and the 1824 twin peaks of Scottish Gothic, *Redgauntlet* and the *Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. In relation to these ‘Tod Lapraik’ aligns itself with Burns and Hogg against Scott. It aligns itself with Burns in the bacchanalian energy (now theologically darkened) of the warlock on the Bass. It aligns itself with Hogg in its doppelgänger motif (given an anthropological touch of the shamanistic in the episode of Tam on the crag face and the solan goose with ‘something unco in the creature’s ee’ that ‘seemed to understand its employ brawly, birzing the saft rope between the neb of it and a crinkled jag o’ stane’) (p. 332).

‘Wandering Willie’s Tale’ gives Stevenson his title (‘a neighbour they ca’d Laurie Lapraik – a sly tod’), and a hinterland in the Covenanted decades, the phase of Scottish history most richly and darkly mythologised by the folk-imagination. But its Prophet Peden, in comparison even to Habakkuk Mucklewrath in *Old Mortality*, is a figure of Gothic cartoon out of early Fritz Lang:

And there was Peden, glowering at him, gash an’ waefu’;





Peden wi' his lang chafts an' luntin een, the maud happed
about his kist, and the hand of him held out wi' the black
nails upon the finger nebs – for he had nae care of the
body (p. 330).

The episode of the girl who mocks the Prophet's devotions, deftly proleptic in its detail of the story to follow ('the voice of him was like a solan's', 'in the gairden his lane', 'the Lord has a deid shot prepared for you', 'gied but the ae skirl'), comes out of a Scottish equivalent to the world of Bunyan's *Mr Badman*. 'Wandering Willie's Tale' centres history, whether as process or as retrospective tableau. History as process can be looped on a casual detail ('Sir John, sitting in his father's chair [. . .] a small walking rapier by his side, instead of the auld broad-sword that had a hundred-weight of steel about it, what with blade, chape, and basket-hilt'). History as retrospective tableau is evoked in the peasant's vision – that magnificent *nekuia* of a folk-epic imagination – of Hell as Redgauntlet Castle:

But, Lord take us in keeping! what a set of ghastly revel-
lers they were that sat round that table! – My guidshire
kenn'd mony that had long before gane to their place.
There was the fierce Middleton, and the dissolute Rothes,
and the crafty Lauderdale; and Dalyell, with his bald head
and a beard to his girdle; and Earlshall, with Cameron's
blude on his hand; and wild Bonshaw, that tied blessed
Mr Cargill's limbs till the blude sprung; and Dumbarton
Douglas, the twice-turned traitor, baith to country and
king. There was the Bluidy Advocate Mackenzie, who,
for his worldly wit and wisdom, had been to the rest as a
god. And there was Claverhouse, as beautiful as when he
lived, with his long, dark, curled locks, streaming down to
his laced buff-coat, and his left hand always on his right
spule-blade, to hide the wound that the silver bullet had
made. He sat apart from them all, and looked at them





with a melancholy, haughty countenance; while the rest hallooed, and sung, and laughed, that the room rang. But their smiles were fearfully contorted from time to time; and their laughter passed into such wild sounds, as made my guidsire's very nails grow blue, and chilled the marrow in his banes.

'The Tale of Tod Lapraik', by contrast, pegs out folk-tale as emblematic, Bunyan-esque story, and drives through the emblematic to the metaphysical – in this case an ontological metaphysics of evil. In the context of Stevenson's *oeuvre* at large it solders two intuitions of that ontology: evil as the daemonic energy – Blakean, beyond good and evil – that elides into the demonic; and evil as squalid, muddled, either sluggishly inert or possessed of a reptilian tenacity. The former flares its charismatic ambivalence in Long John Silver or James Durie. The latter is present in the other pirates of *Treasure Island* and their bedraggled successors in *The Master of Ballantrae*, or in Uncle Ebenezer and in the crew of the brig *Covenant*. It has its most potent avatar in *The Master of Ballantrae* with the slow corruption of the doggedly decent, unglamorous Mr Henry by the persecution of his brother and by the hatred that persecution engenders. And at the climax of *The Ebb-Tide* the two intuitions dance out a taut ballet in the confrontation of Attwater and Huish.

In 'Tod Lapraik' the inertia of evil is imaged in the first account of its protagonist:

There he sat, a muckle fat, white hash of a man like creish, wi' a kind of a holy smile that gart me scunner. The hand of him aye cawed the shuttle, but his een was steeked. We cried to him by his name, we skirled in the deid lug of him, we shook him by the shou'ther. Nae mainner o' service! There he sat on his dowp, an' cawed the shuttle and smiled like creish. (p. 330).





At the climax that evocation, with its telescoping repetition in the final sentence, is soldered to its antithesis in the figure of the dancing warlock:

A' the time we lay there it lowped and flang and capered and span like a teetotum, and whiles we could hear it skel-loch as it span. I hae seen lassies, the daft queans, that would lowp and dance a winter's nicht, and still be lowping and dancing when the winter's day cam in. But there would be folk there to hauld them company, and the lads to egg them on; and this thing was its lee-lane. And there would be a fiddler diddling his elbock in the chimney-side; and this thing had nae music but the skirling of the solans. And the lassies were bits o' young things wi' the reid life dinnling and stending in their members; and this was a muckle, fat, creishy man, and him fa'n in the vale o' years. Say what ye like, I maun say what I believe. It was joy was in the creature's heart; the joy o' hell, I daursay: joy whatever. Mony a time I have askit mysel, why witches and warlocks should sell their sauls (whilk are their maist dear possessions) and be auld, duddy, wrunkl't wives or auld, feckless, doddered men; and then I mind upon Tod Lapraik dancing a' they hours by his lane in the black glory of his heart (p. 334).

Within *Catriona* itself 'Tod Lapraik' can seem a pure inset, a bravura performance in Scots of which its author could justifiably be proud, a folk-tale tucked into its novel with a cross-reference from the professional folklorist's notebook: "She was the story," claims Neil, "of Uistean More M'Gillie Phadrig and the Gavar Vore". 'Wandering Willie's Tale', in contrast, is knit to its novel by the centring of history as-and-through story and, beyond that, by the play of its Scottish Gothic against the English Gothic of the doom of the house of Redgauntlet, and by a range of motifs: the horse-shoe frown, the stranger guide, the spirited horse whose





spunk is soon out of him, a perplexing underworld, and, not least, the motif of a retainer's feudal loyalty. But in fact 'Tod Lapraik' is knit into its novel not only by plotting (the sequential links of the narrative) but as fable (the narrative sequence as vehicle of large-scale meaning). Its telling precipitates the Highland/Lowland clash of Black Andie and Neil. That in turn opens the way to the complex casuistry of duty and self-deception through which David finally escapes from the Bass in time to make his slewed romance-heroic dash for Inverary and the trial. Both of these will reward analysing.

At the base of casuistry lies the applying of absolute principles to specific cases in a world whose moral complexity challenges, if it does not baffle, the absolute. This requires casuistry to negotiate a proper moral flexibility amid the deceptions and the self-deceptions into which that flexibility can degenerate. In Christianity it has flourished within the Anglican and Puritan traditions, as well as the Catholic. And it has had a long history within romance. There it joins hands on one side with that play of wile which romance can foreground from the *Odyssey* onwards. On the other side it joins hands with the cruces of honour, as social code and as personal integrity, which can figure equally in medieval quest-romance and in the imperial romance of *The Ebb-Tide*, *The Four Feathers* or *Lord Jim*. Conrad in his essay on James salutes the latter, in the context of his transfiguring the paradigms of adventure-romance, as 'the historian of fine consciences'⁷; Stevenson, working within those paradigms, is another, and nowhere more so than in *Catriona*. Whether as self-debate and self-analysis or as wily negotiation, casuistry provides a spinal structure for the novel. It surfaces as early as Chapter III when David makes his way to Pilrig through a late-summer landscape of grimly emblematic suggestion. It is there in the adolescent intensity of his conversation with Catriona in Chapter VIII ('I Make a Fault in Honour')⁸. It steers his housekeeping with her in Holland. But the central exploring of casuistry comes





in his release from the Bass and its sequel.

In Scott, David's negotiations with Black Andie would have been matter for a single brisk paragraph. Stevenson handles them as a fine-meshed psychodrama of casuistry in David's fluctuations of mood, his self-dramatizing and his prudential self-deceptions, the play of Odyssean wile with and against moral imperatives, the play of these in turn against the prudential integrity of Black Andie, and the casuistic finesse in which all are resolved by the latter's delivering him to land at the fixed hour but sailing him up the Forth to Clackmannan Pool (having gone ashore at Queensferry, while David remains aboard, to arrange a horse for his ride to Inverary).

Andie ran the moment of my liberation very fine, showing himself a man of his bare word, but scarce serving his employers with a heaped measure; and by about fifty seconds after two I was in the saddle and on the full stretch for Stirling (p. 342).

The drama of casuistry and resource has launched us on the adventure of the romance hero's eleventh-hour dash. But unlike the comic-strip buoyancy of D'Artagnan's quest for Buckingham in Chapter 20 of *The Three Musketeers* or the epic brio of Quatermain and Umslopogaas at the climax of *Alan Quatermain*, riding to save Nyleptha from treachery and death, David's ride encounters the Stevensonian romance-realities of landscape and weather. It lapses into a dogged pedestrian energy, and a final wandering ('The more part of the night we walked blindfold among sheets of rain, and day found us aimless on the mountains') to bring David to the church door at Inverary 'a little before the end of the sermon', and the chapter to a generic rest of romance in its cusped final sentence: 'As for me, I continued to sit there, very wet and weary, and a good deal anxious as to what should happen next, but greatly exulting in my success' (p. 345).

That generic rest the sequel will knock aside into irrelevance.





Casuistic integrity yields to the political theatre of the trial where James Stewart has been doomed in advance. 'I could have told it my own self', says the lawyer Stewart to David 'three days ago before the play began' (p. 345). Images of theatre thread the chapters that follow: Sheriff Miller 'dealing out each word the way an actor does, to give the most expression possible' (p. 348); David interposing in the lawyers' cabal 'with as much simplicity of manner as I could assume' (p. 349); Prestongrange saying bitterly to David 'You should certainly be called; the Bar is the true scene for your talents (p. 355). And theatre articulates the final judgment on the Lord Advocate: 'I think he was at once far more sincere, and a far more artful performer than I supposed.' (p. 359). The insoluble doubleness – not duplicity – David recognises there matches the ambiguity which tracks his own relations with Prestongrange. At the end of chapter XVII:

I came away, vastly pleased to have my peace made, yet a little concerned in conscience; nor could I help wondering, as I went back, whether, perhaps, I had not been a scruple too good-natured. But there was the fact, that this was a man that might have been my father, an able man, a great dignitary, and one that, in the hour of my need, had reached a hand to my assistance (p. 356).

Ambiguity here is, in a precise sense, casuistic. David acknowledges as much in the next chapter when he tells Prestongrange: 'I was a good deal affected by your goodness, but I'll never can deny I was moved besides by my own interest. There was self-seeking in my heart, and I think shame of it now' (p. 364). Casuistic calculation faces the key code-of-honour concept, shame. The psycho-social cost, for David, of their tension smoulders and crackles through Chapter XVIII ('The Tee'd Ball') up to his last extended conversation with Prestongrange where Stevenson holds the balance steady between the wisdom (both worldly and paternal) of the Lord Advocate, and the hero's stiff integrity.





But it is with ruse the chapter ends. Prestongrange keeps him employed in copying while Catriona is got out of the public eye after springing her father from jail. And the closing sentence crystallises out the ambivalence – not ambiguity – of David's relation to him: 'I think shame to write of this man that loaded me with so many goodnesses. He was kind to me as any father, yet I ever thought him as false as a cracked bell (p. 365).

Ambiguity shadows also the last stand of David's integrity, when in Chapter XVII ('The Memorial') he drily refuses to launch that footnote to history, the lawyers' would-be revolution in the Parliament House. Significantly, in so doing, he finds himself taking up a stance akin to Prestongrange's in their first interview, as he reviews the politics of the proposal in the historical perspective of the Porteous Riots and the 'Forty-Five. But in so doing he also begins his own disengagement from the world of politics and history, or, rather, from history *as* politics. *Catriona* is a *bildungsroman* whose protagonist, unlike Waverley or Darsie Latimer, is to be disenchanted not of romance illusions but of faith in the mundane public world. 'They are all for by-ends, the whole clan of them!' he cries to Prestongrange when the latter counsels adaptability to that world (p. 364). The cry neatly compounds an ironic cultural historiography ('the whole clan of them') with an idiom out of Bunyan. Such an idiom surfaces as early as David's first self-probing casuistry ('Next, again, it was the Accuser of the Brethren that gave me a turn of his argument' p. 232) in Chapter III, where it is brilliantly juxtaposed with an idiom out of ballad when he meets the eldritch wife under the gibbet of her two hanged sons. The affinity of 'Tod Lapraik' with Bunyan I noted earlier, and that affinity is taken up into the three-fold rejection which rings out, rhetorical and massed, amid the social comedy of the last chapter of Part One.

There is first the rejection of history seen as a monolithic force:

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 heroic resolves, and take long risks; and the course of events will push them upon the one side and go on like a marching army.

Counterpointing this comes the rejection of romance heroics: 'For, upon a retrospect, it appeared I had not done so grandly, after all; but with the greatest possible amount of big speech and preparation, had accomplished nothing at all.' (One notes there again the theatrical metaphor, linking the worlds of adventure-romance and law-court). And between the two comes that vision of doubleness for which 'The Tale of Tod of Lapraik' has keyed us: James Stewart 'had been hanged by fraud and violence:

and the world wagged along, and there was not a penny-weight of difference; and the villains of that horrid plot were decent, kind, respectable fathers of families, who went to kirk and took the sacrament!

But I had had my view of that detestable business they call politics – I had seen it from behind, when it is all bones and blackness; and I was cured for life from any temptations to take part in it again. A plain, quiet, private path was that which I was ambitious to walk in, when I might keep my head out of the way of dangers and my conscience out of the road of temptation. (pp. 382-3)

This is a retreat from history into the private world. And it is, I think, precisely *retreat* and neither exit nor escape. It is not the formulaic exit of romance (variously tuned to fairy-tale, the domestic or the elegiac), as practised by Scott (*Waverley*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *Quentin Durward*) and Pushkin (*The Captain's Daughter*) before Stevenson, or by Stanley Weyman (*Under the Red Robe*) and Buchan (*Witch Wood*), after. Neither is it the escape out of history into a greenwood myth offered to, and rejected by, the protagonists of a defeated revolution in Buchan's *Midwinter*, or swallowing up the protagonist of a





defeated revolution in *The Blanket of the Dark*. Still less is it the bad faith of escape into an idyll cocooned from history, as happens ostentatiously in *Esmond* 9, or as wish-fulfilment dream in Romola's sojourn among the plague-stricken villagers as a Madonna of the Religion of Humanity¹⁰. But even as retreat, and a retreat endowed with the authority of what Part One has presented, it is still arguably a shrinking of historical possibilities, of the possibilities the historical novel had figured in Scott.

II

This is borne out in Part Two, excellent though much of it, at a local level, is: the vignettes of landscape, some things, at least, in its prolonged sympathetic comedy of developing love. *Catriona*, like *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, is a Telemachus romance of the young protagonist making his liminal crossing into the male adult world. Unlike its predecessors *Catriona* incorporates into the Telemachus paradigm the formulaic matter of romance, from its medieval watershed onwards, in tales of love and chivalric combat. Chivalric combat is relocated as the testing of the hero's integrity, from the fencing of his night-interview with Prestongrange through Simon Fraser's frontal assault in Chapter VI to its climax in the up-ended duel of Chapter VIII, after which he can challenge his assembled antagonists and be dismissed with honour – but into a world of secret dangers, if also reunion with Allan (Chapters IX–XIII). It is worth noting that this sequence is punctuated by the two domestic chapters 'In the Advocate's House', where David has his first encounter with James More, and 'I Make a Fault in Honour', where he undergoes the caustic comedy of his conversation with Lady Allardyce, and the casuistic anguish of his conversation with Catriona, a conversation bookended by a romance world of masculine adventure ('I found I could talk with her as easily and rationally as I might with Allan', p. 267) and a romance world of the youthful erotic ('the better part of that night [I] walked by myself in the barley-fields,





and had such a sense of Catriona's presence that I seemed to bear her in my arms', p. 271).

Both chapters anticipate Part Two; and the final chapters of Part One ('I Am Much in the Hands of the Ladies' and 'I Continue to Move in Good Society'), which drive the unmasking of the public world through to its final rejection, also marshal us into the familial conflicts of Part Two where the testing carried out along one rising, if zig-zag, line through Part One, is carried out cross-wise in erotic baffling and domestic exasperations. And it is here the failure – or, if not failure, limitations – of the female figures come into play. When set against their analogues in Scott, Barbara Grant, one might say, is a Di Vernon doll with spring-loaded heels, and Catriona, alongside that tragic Jacobite idealist, Flora Mac-Ivor, at best only a bright shadow on the air. One could cap that with Stevenson's self-judgment in 'A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's':

the heroine cannot open her mouth but what, all in a moment, the fine phrases of preparation fall from round her like the robes from Cinderella [. . .] Authors, at least, know it well [. . .] I said authors; but indeed I had a side eye to one author in particular, with whose works I am very well acquainted, though I cannot read them, and who has spent many vigils in this cause, sitting beside his ailing puppets and (like a magician) wearying his art to restore them to youth and beauty.¹¹

Yet to leave it there would not be accurate. Certainly both, as female protagonists, lack presence. (On this score Stevenson, significantly, does better with the humour-figure of Lady Allardyce, who has only a cameo role). But their true limitation is that they, and so David's relation with them, cannot rise out of plot into fable. Barbara Grant makes an effective marionette-agent in his sentimental education: nothing more. As the romantic idealist and devoted daughter who has to be disenchanted, Catriona





counterpoints the fatherless David in his disenchanting with the mundane public world. She enables James escape not knowing the escape has been masterminded by Prestongrange. The latter and his daughter celebrate her action in a pastiche-into-parody of an adventure-romance episode: “And was not this prettily done?” he went on. “Is not this Highland maid a piece of a heroine?” (p. 363). The reality in the casual cruelty and blasé good will of the political machine is dropped into the flow of the next chapter:

There was some whispering, of course, upon the escape of that discredited person; but the Government replied by a show of rigour, one of the cell porters was flogged, the lieutenant of the guard (my poor friend, Duncansby) was broken of his rank, and as for Catriona, all men were well enough pleased that her fault should be passed by in silence. (p. 380)

As a romantic, Catriona can be used to make a wryly gendered comment on romance heroics:

and then I have to twist my story round about, so that the fighting is to stop, and yet me have the best of it, just like you and the lieutenant; and I am the boy that makes the fine speeches all through, like Mr. David Balfour (p. 289).

This may be matched with David’s comment in Chapter XXIII as they make their night journey from Rotterdam, amid assorted mundane troubles:

here we are like the king’s sons and the old wives’ daughters in your daft-like Highland tales. Soon we’ll be going over the ‘*seven Bens, the seven glens, and the seven mountain moors.*’ Which was a common byword or over-come in those tales of hers that had stuck in my memory. (p. 407)





Catriona as Highlander remains a cultural exotic. Any possible integrating of her culture into David's is deflected, in the moment of its raising, into an anachronistic, if plangent, nineteenth century romantic nationalism of language:¹²

the old ancient true name of this place that we have our foot-soles on, and that our bones are made of, will be Alban [. . .] and it is called so still in your own tongue that you forget.'

'Troth,' said I, 'and that I never learned!' [. . .]

'But your fathers and mothers talked it, one generation with another,' said she. 'And it was sung about the cradles before you and me were ever dreamed of; and your name remembers it still. Ah, if you could talk that language you would find me another girl. The heart speaks in that tongue (p. 291).

This ensures the love-story will fail to carry a weight of historical meaning, fail to carry historical change, historical choice and configuration as such stories do in *Waverley*¹³ or *The Bride of Lammermoor*. It ensures the ending of Part Two in a purely individual drama of family relations, the final diminution of a story at whose core 'the matter of the trial is treated juridically and philosophically'¹⁴ into a Hitchcockian dynamics of suspense. Against those closing chapters at Bazin's inn (complete with their Hitchcockian detail of the turning windmill sails) one has only to recall another inn-and-beach drama at the close of *Redgauntlet* to register the distance we have travelled from Scott.

III

Standing back we can see in all this a rejection of the possibility of grand narrative. I deliberately say grand, as distinct from master-, narrative. By the latter I mean the kind of comprehending and axial world-history variously offered by the *Aeneid*, *Piers Plowman*, *The Communist Manifesto* and Stapledon's *First and*





Last Men. Grand narrative deals in no such world-comprehending vision. It requires only a historical story of some magnitude – a magnitude manifested in a certain internal complexity and in a persuasive claim to enduring significance – together with a style adequate to that magnitude in both manifestations. In Scott's novels, claims Pushkin, 'we grow acquainted with the past, not encumbered with the *enflure* of French tragedies, or with the prudery of novels of sentiment, or with the dignité of history, but in a contemporary, homely manner'.¹⁵ But in fact Scott can incorporate grand narrative into the historical novel as romance and the historical novel as study in provincial life. So can his two most brilliant European heirs of the next generation, Mickiewicz and Pushkin himself. The latter in *The Captain's Daughter* might provide the most illuminating analogue for what Stevenson does with Scott in *Catriona*. Unlike the unfinished *Blackamoor of Peter the Great* which is shaping up to be a fully-upholstered Scott novel, *The Captain's Daughter* strips *Waverley* and *The Heart of Midlothian* down to their fundamental paradigms and telescopes both in the virtuoso economy of its own narrative. This gives a kinship with Stevenson in the latter's bent for structural pattern, and his unrelenting drive for economy of statement¹⁶. But in Stevenson that drive co-exists with a sharp-edged elaboration of episode into drama or epiphany – an elaboration as richly at work in *Catriona* as in anything he wrote; and his economy is the economy of 'picked and pointed phrase, or rather especially the combination of picked and pointed phrases'¹⁷. Such an economy and such an elaboration alike separate *Catriona* not only from Pushkin's unrelenting concision but also from that pellucid amplitude of historical significance his concision can enfold in the folk-tale *realpolitik* of Grinev's conversation with Pugachev at the end of Chapter Eleven, or his dream of the muzhik-father, murderous and gently calling, in Chapter Two. (I have proposed elsewhere¹⁸ that the latter assimilates and transcends the Gothic nightmare of Frank's dream at the climax of *Rob Roy*). In the end





Catriona is as firmly, though much less emphatically, distinct from *The Captain's Daughter* as it is from the prolonged tapestry of Stevenson's beloved *Vicomte de Bragelonne*.

Grand narrative in the nineteenth has been seen as the province of the historians¹⁹. For Stevenson, I take it, such narrative becomes a possibility vanished over the receding horizon of high Victorian culture. The large-scale reasons for this in the intertwining histories of nineteenth century ideas, culture, sensibility I have not the space, still less the capacity, to examine. But I end by considering two reasons specific to Stevenson – both of which involve acts of location and choices of perspective by him, both of which open into wider perspectives within which we, in turn, can locate him.

His engagement with history was serious and lifelong. Barry Menikoff has argued that the 1881 application for the Edinburgh Chair of History and Constitutional Law was not the absurdity biographers have taken it to be²⁰; and Roslyn Jolly, taking this up, has located Stevenson at a crucial juncture in late nineteenth century historiography when 'the discipline of history was in a state of transition from a "romantic" literary past to a "scientific" professional future'²¹. In the three-volume history of the Highlands he was planning in 1880-81 the second, on *The Transformation of the Highlands*, would have been comprehensive of politics, religion, economics and social structures, and analytic. 'I breathe after this Highland business', he writes to his father, 'feeling a real, fresh, lively and modern subject; full of romance and scientific interest in front of me'.²² But the history he actually writes, in the adolescent *Pentland Rising* and in the late work on contemporary Samoan politics, deals with the experience of minorities at the hands of larger powers. This is a recurrent pre-occupation with Stevenson,²³ whether that experience be rendered in terms of cameo (as with the Camisards in *Travels with a Donkey*) or from a side-angle as with the Covenanters of *Heathercat* who are not bidding to be incorporated into the contending grand





narratives of either Scott or M'Crie. What I have called history from a side-angle can be defined against the history from below which is, of course, a major element in Scott. The latter is history seen from the perspective of the politically powerless. It is fundamentally dramatic and presented *in mediis rebus*. History from the side-angle is fundamentally narrative, the narrative of an observer sympathetic to the powerless but in some measure detached, whose detachment can open into irony and that irony swell or break in a mordant sense of cosmic absurdity. This is what Stevenson achieves in that passage from Chapter VIII of *A Footnote to History* whose combination of minute, monograph detail with the mordantly absurd can so curiously anticipate the historiography of Namier:

Beyond a doubt, coming after Knappe's decisive letter of the day before, this impotent conclusion shook the credit of Germany among the natives of both sides: the Tamaseses fearing they were deserted, the Mataafas (with secret delight) hoping they were feared. And it gave an impetus to that ridiculous business which might have earned for the whole episode the name of the war of flags. British and American flags had been planted the night before, and were seen that morning flying over what they claimed about Lauili. British and American passengers, on the way up and down, pointed out from the decks of the war-ships, with generous vagueness, the boundaries of problematical estates. Ten days later, the beach of Saluafata bay fluttered [. . .] with the flag of Germany. The Americans riposted with a claim to Tamasese's camp, some small part of which (says Knappe) did really belong to 'an American nigger'. The disease spread, the flags were multiplied, the operations of war became an egg-dance among miniature neutral territories; and though all men took a hand in these proceedings, all men in turn were





struck with their absurdity. Mullan, Leary's successor, warned Knappe, in an emphatic dispatch, not to squander and discredit the solemnity of that emblem which was all he had to be a defence to his own consulate. And Knappe himself, in his dispatch of March 21st, 1899, castigates the practise with much sense. But this was after the tragic-comic culmination had been reached, and the burnt rags of one of these too-frequently mendacious signals gone on a progress to Washington, like Caesar's body, arousing indignation where it came. To such results are nations conducted by the patent artifices of a Becker.²⁴

Such a sense of the absurd explodes any charting of grand narrative (see Namier's evoking of Goya, and of Breughel's 'Fall of Icarus', in his *England in the Age of the American Revolution* to illustrate a disquisition on a 'history started in ridiculous beginnings while small men did things both infinitely smaller and infinitely greater than they knew'²⁵). Stevenson in 'Pulvis et Umbra' (1888) evokes to dazzling effect a sense of the cosmos itself as mordantly absurd. Fourteen years earlier the *Les Misérables* passage of the Hugo essay had evoked a like sense over the workings of society and its law in a passage that anticipates David in *Catriona* on the relentless march of events. In *Catriona* the workings of law are explicitly, as in *Kidnapped* they are implicitly, central. Barry Menikoff in *Narrating Scotland* has documented, with precision and suggestively, the Scottish tradition of law as focus for history out of which both texts come.²⁶ For *Catriona* the best epigraph might be taken from the Introduction to the unfinished *Records of a Family of Engineers* which incises upon the history of Scotland, as articulated in its law, a drier vision of the mordantly absurd:

But the law (however administered, and I am bound to aver that, in Scotland, 'it couldna weel be waur') acts as a kind of dredge, and with dispassionate impartiality brings





up into the light of day, and shows us for a moment, in the jury-box or on the gallows, the creeping things of the past. By these broken glimpses we are able to trace many other and more inglorious Stevensons, picking a private way through the brawl that makes Scots history.²⁷

– A ‘kind of dredge’ and ‘the creeping things of history’ may call up, mutedly, the vision in Habakkuk of history as appetite and power, against which the prophet cries out to his God:

wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net and gather them in their drag²⁸.

And cutting across, piercing through, that vision in turn is the theological irony of the text of Romans 5:13²⁹ on which the preacher is discoursing when David arrives at Inverary: ‘For until the law, sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed where there is no law.’

If all this gives one (manifold) reason for the displacement of historical grand narrative in Stevenson, a passage from another of the *Scribner’s* essays, ‘The Coast of Fife’, lights up a second which carries such a displacement deep into the working of his art:

I still see Magus Muir two hundred years ago; a desert place, quite unenclosed; in the midst, the primate’s carriage fleeing at the gallop; the assassins loose-reined in pursuit, Burley Balfour, pistol in hand among the first. No scene of history has ever written itself so deeply on my mind; not because Balfour, that questionable zealot, was an ancestral cousin of my own; not because of the plead-





ings of the victim and his daughter; not even because of the live bum-bee that flew out of Sharpe's 'bacco-box, thus indicating clearly his complicity with Satan [. . .] The figure that always fixed my attention is that of Hackston of Rathillet, sitting in the saddle with his cloak about his mouth, and through all that long, bungling, vociferous hurly-burly, revolving privately a case of conscience. He would take no hand in the deed, because he had a private spite against the victim, and 'that action' must be sullied with no suggestion of a worldly motive; on the other hand, 'that action' in itself was highly justified, he had cast in his lot with 'the actors,' and he must stay there, inactive but publicly sharing the responsibility. 'You are a gentleman – you will protect me!' cried the wounded old man, crawling towards him. 'I will never lay a hand on you,' said Hackston, and put his cloak about his mouth. It is an old temptation with me, to pluck away that cloak and see that face – to open that bosom and to read the heart. With incomplete romances about Hackston, the drawers of my youth were lumbered. I read him up in every printed book that I could lay my hands on. I even dug among the Wodrow manuscripts, sitting shamefaced in the very room where my hero had been tortured two centuries before, and keenly conscious of my youth in the midst of other and (as I fondly thought) more gifted students. All was vain: that he had passed a riotous nonage, that he was a zealot, that he twice displayed (compared with his grotesque companions) some tincture of soldierly resolution and even of military common-sense, and that he figured memorably in the scene of Magus Muir, so much and no more could I make out. But whenever I cast my eyes backward, it is to see him like a landmark on the plains of history, sitting with his cloak about his mouth, inscrutable. How small a thing creates an immortality! I do not





think he can have been a man entirely commonplace; but had he not thrown his cloak about his mouth, or had the witnesses forgot to chronicle the action, he would not thus have haunted the imagination of my boyhood, and to-day he would scarce delay me for a paragraph.³⁰

That dovetails some issues this article has pursued. It calls up Stevenson the life-long writer of incomplete romances and Stevenson the serious, frustrated historical investigator. Against the violence and muddle of historical event, and against the (implicitly un-storied?) bareness of 'the plains of history', it sets the Puritan's casuistic self-debate on a fine, imperative point of conscience in which, as in the casuistry that moulds the first half of *Catriona*, private and public meet. The enigmatic finality of Hacketson's gesture calls out and frustrates a desire to know whose terms may suggest, equally, Hawthorne's ambivalence about the reading of the human heart and Hamlet's rebuff to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The gesture cannot be read, it can only be notched in that emblematic style which Chesterton so unerringly seized as the heart of Stevenson's writing.³¹ That leaves it akin to, though still on the far side of a historical trench from, the world of Paterian epiphany. Or, more accurately, one might say that this passage locates Stevenson as, on the one hand, looking back into, drawing from, a Bunyanesque world of emblematic episode (and, as *emblematic*, distinct from the world of ballad or saga laconicism that Scott can so effortlessly call up); on the other, looking forward into a world of Paterian and post-Paterian epiphany, the narrative world of James, Conrad, Ford. But the concluding sentences redirect the epiphany into one of the inherent dialectics of romance, and the bleak capacity of that dialectic to evacuate human experience of a meaning ontologically grounded:

An incident, at once romantic and dramatic, which at once awakes the judgment and makes a picture for the eye, how





little do we realise its perdurable power! Perhaps no one does so but the author, just as none but he appreciates the influence of jingling words; so that he looks on upon life, with something of a covert smile, seeing people led by what they fancy to be thoughts and what are really the accustomed artifices of his own trade, or roused by what they take to be principles and are really picturesque effects.³²

Roslyn Jolly has commented on the 'epistemological scepticism' Stevenson in 'A Humble Remonstrance' voices towards the claims of history, as against fiction, to attain to truth; and rightly says that 'his ideas about history were much more variegated than the polemical statements in his 1884 essay suggest'.³³ The scepticism of this last passage is more comprehensive and corroding. It can align Stevenson with Conrad at his most sceptical. As with Conrad, it represents one pole towards which the author is drawn, and which much in his work defines itself in resistance against. *Catriona*, for all its retreat from history, exemplifies that resistance. In so doing it asserts its claim to be viewed not as a sequel fated to disappoint, or a partial failure, but as a major work in the Stevenson canon, and illuminating well beyond it.

NOTES

- 1 Scott helps launch this failure by the dismissive comments on his own plotting in the ebullient apologia of the 'Introductory Epistle' to *The Fortunes of Nigel*.
- 2 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* (London: William Heinemann, 1924) Tusitala Edition, XXVII, pp. 4-5.
- 3 *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, Tusitala XXVI, p. 155.
- 4 See John Buchan, *Memory-Hold-the-Door* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), Chapter VIII, iii.
- 5 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits*, Tusitala XXIX, p. 129. Cf. 'The School of Giorgione' in *The Renaissance*: 'the





meaning reaches us through ways not distinctly traceable by the understanding [. . .] as pre-eminently in that song of Mariana's page in *Measure for Measure*, in which the kindling force and poetry of the whole play seems to pass for a moment into an actual strain of music.' Stevenson's use of 'clench' marks, of course, a decisive difference from Pater.

- 6 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped and Catriona*, ed. by Emma Letley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 245-6, henceforth cited in the text.
- 7 "Henry James" in *Notes on Life and Letters* ed. by J. H. Stape, with the assistance of Andrew Busza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 19.
- 8 See the interesting if over-stressed analysis of David's liminal entanglement in adolescence given by Sandison in *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), pp. 204-13.
- 9 It is made explicit that Esmond, and his wife-mother Lady Castlewood, could remain in England untroubled after the failure of the Jacobite conspiracy.
- 10 *Romola* as a historical study in idealism and disillusion might provide a more extended analogue for *Catriona* than I have space to give it.
- 11 *Memories and Portraits*, Tusitala XXIX, p. 113.
- 12 I owe the first suggestion for this point to Mr. Kevin MacNeill.
- 13 Here I am thinking especially of Flora Mac-Ivor's prediction in Chapter LII of Waverley's domestic future, and the acute analysis by Donald Davie of its cultural-historical significance in *Slavic Excursions* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1990), pp. 124-5.
- 14 Menikoff, *Narrating Scotland* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), p. 154.
- 15 Note on Scott's novels in *Pushkin on Literature*, ed. and trans. by Tatiana Wolff (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), p. 275.
- 16 Pushkin was also drawn, like Stevenson, to treat as a historian the field of his major historical fiction; but his two volume *History of Pugachev*, unlike Stevenson's history of the Highlands, got written. There is an English translation in *Alexander Pushkin: Complete Prose Fiction* trans. Paul Debreczeny (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983). The translator notes (p. 532) that he has omitted





Volume 2 which gives Pushkin's source documents, and 'the lengthy and often anecdotal notes to Vol. I.'

- 17 Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), p. 152.
- 18 *Translation and Literature* Volume 17, Part 2 (Autumn, 2008), pp. 254-5, reviewing *The Reception of Walter Scott in Europe* ed. Murray Pittock.
- 19 See e.g. Yvor Winters, *In Defence of Reason* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1947), pp. 419-23; the detailed analysis of the histories of Macaulay, Freeman, Froude in John Burrow, *A Liberal Descent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- 20 Menikoff, pp. 22-26.
- 21 Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific* (Ashgate, 2009), pp. 69-71.
- 22 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson* ed. by Booth and Mehew (New Haven: Yale University Press), Vol Three, p. 129. The surrounding letters (nos. 748, 749, 750, 751) indicate the range and intensity of Stevenson's research, and 755 to Colvin the analytic sweep of the book as planned.
- 23 One might cf. here Stevenson's younger contemporary as travel writer and romantic, Cunningham Graham.
- 24 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Vailima Papers*, Tusitala XXI, pp. 173-4.
- 25 *England in the Age of the American Revolution*, 2nd edn. (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 130-1. One might also cf. the title of, and some of the items in, one of Namier's opuscula, *In the Margins of History* (London: Macmillan, 1939).
- 26 Menikoff, pp. 74-81; cf. pp. 127-32.
- 27 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin; Records of a Family of Engineers*, Tusitala XIX, pp. 155-6.
- 28 Habakkuk 1.13-15. For a stimulating overview of Stevenson's political responses (in a context not least of later nineteenth century Scottish culture), see Christopher Harvie's essay on "The Politics of Stevenson" in *Stevenson and Victorian Scotland* ed. Jenni Calder (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), pp. 107-25.
- 29 Not, as Letley (ad loc) in ignorance of the old Scottish idiom for giving out the text, supposes, chapters 5 and 13 of the Epistle as the subject of the sermon. She is followed in this by Jolly, pp. 125-6.





30 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Further Memories*, Tusitala XXX, pp. 14-15.

31 Chesterton, pp. 42-3.

32 *Further Memories*, p. 15.

33 Jolly, pp. 71-2.





Locating RLS in relation to Brander Matthews's and Walter Besant's theories of literary collaboration in the production of popular fiction

Gordon Hirsch

Students of RLS are likely to know that Stevenson's 'A Humble Remonstrance' was written as a response to Henry James's 'The Art of Fiction', and they may also recall that James's essay was itself primarily a response to Walter Besant's lecture with the same title as James's essay. Besant gave his talk at the Royal Institution in London on April 25, 1884, and it was shortly thereafter published in pamphlet form both in England and America. James's response to Besant's paper was published in the September 1884 issue of *Longman's*, and before the year was out American publishers were issuing the two essays together in one volume.¹

Besant, a popular novelist and, also in 1884, a founder of the Society of Authors, an organization intended to protect the rights of authors to their literary property, had in 1872 begun a ten-year collaboration with James Rice, the editor of the journal *Once a Week*. Their collaboration resulted in more than a dozen novels, the most popular of which – if it was indeed collaborative – was *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882), a novel describing the interaction of members of the middle and working classes in the East End of London.² Because of its sympathetic portrait of working class life in the East End and its optimistic, reformist thesis involving middle class support both for more humane working conditions and for the development of culture among the workers, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* quickly became a huge popular success, although more recent critics have complained about its paternalistic politics.³ Among its early admirers was an enthusiastic Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote to





Besant's publisher, Chatto & Windus, 'What an admirable book is *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*. I have rarely read anything with greater sympathy.'⁴

Stevenson scholars are less likely to be aware, however, that in the early 1890s Besant was also – along with the American man of letters, collaborative novelist, and later professor of literature at Columbia University, Brander Matthews – one of the leading advocates for, and theorists of, the practice of literary collaboration. Matthews's 'The Art and Mystery of Collaboration' was published in 1890, and Besant's response to it, 'On Literary Collaboration', was published in 1892.⁵ RLS's major collaborative efforts with his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, occurring between 1887 and 1893, are roughly contemporaneous with these two essays, and Stevenson knew both men personally as well as being familiar with their work. Reading Matthews's and Besant's writings on the collaborative authorship of fiction reveals how much Stevenson had in common with these other popular collaborative authors and theorists of the novel.

Brander Matthews opens his paper by noting that 'to many of us a novel by two writers is merely a puzzle. [. . .] How is it possible for two men to be concerned in the making of one work?' (p. 157). His answer basically is that 'collaboration is a sort of marriage' (p. 159). It must be 'founded on mutual esteem' and 'the willingness of each to do his full share of the work' (p. 159). The metaphors of marriage (pp. 159-60), divorce (pp. 168-69), and even childbirth (p. 160) – giving birth to a literary work – are recurrent in Matthews and picked up by Besant. Matthews claims that some collaborators are essentially monogamists, likely to work with only one collaborative partner, while others are polygamists, 'ready to collaborate at large' (p. 168). Given this dichotomy, Stevenson is probably best located, if I may be permitted the paradox, somewhere between monogamy and polygamy. In his early career as a writer he collaborated on dramas with his friend William Ernest Henley, and on some of his





early fiction, particularly *The Dynamiter*, with his spouse Fanny, but Stevenson's most important collaborative work was produced late in his career when he collaborated with his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, on three novels, *The Wrong Box*, *The Wrecker*, and *The Ebb-Tide*.

In his essay, Besant notes the collaboration of Stevenson and Henley in writing for the theatre, as well as the collaborative fiction of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, Dumas, Rider Haggard, and Kipling, among others. But Besant insists that two authors must sound like one author: 'the very essence of literary partnership is that the result must appear just as spontaneous, just as entirely individual, as if it had been the creation of a single mind and the work of a single pen' (p. 202).⁶ Besant concedes, however, that 'collaboration has [. . .] limitations. [. . .] Neither in the study of the wanderings and development of the individual soul, nor in the development of character, nor in the work of pure and lofty imagination, is collaboration possible' (pp. 203-04). On the other hand, 'in the telling of a story it may be [. . .] useful, and the mother of better work than either [author] would, or could, do separately' (p. 204). It is significant that both Matthews and Besant defend collaboration only in the production of drama and fiction, not poetry, and both seem to discount the possibility of successful collaboration even in a more poetic sort of fiction writing.⁷ According to Matthews,

collaboration fails to satisfy when there is need of profound meditation, of solemn self-interrogation, or of lofty imagination lifting itself freely toward the twin-peaks of Parnassus. [. . .] [It] succeeds most abundantly where clearness is needed, where precision, skill and logic are looked for, where we expect simplicity of motive, sharpness of outline, ingenuity of construction and cleverness of effect. [. . .] Collaboration may tend [. . .] to sacrifice matter to manner (p. 162).





Collaboration may, indeed, be of greatest assistance ‘wherever technic is a pleasure for its own sake’, where there is ‘a craving for the utmost technical skill’ (p. 162), but this is also its limitation. Again, Besant essentially concurs: ‘Satire, fun, humour, pathos of a kind, all may be exhibited at their best in partnership. But some things cannot be treated at all in this way.’ Besant doubts that Thackeray or Barrie, for instance, would be successful at collaboration because of particular aesthetic qualities in their writing. Authors such as these study ‘the wanderings and development of the individual soul’ and paint portraits rather than tell stories (p. 204). ‘To touch the deeper things one must be alone’ (p. 203).

Both Matthews and Besant focus, then, on ‘the telling of a story’, the pre-eminence of plot and narrative, in successful collaborative efforts – particularly in fictional genres that emphasise such elements, for example in the forms of popular fiction. Matthews, in fact, concedes that ‘no great poem has ever been written by two men together, nor any really great novel. Collaboration has [instead] served the cause of periodical literature’ (p. 162). He also believes that successful collaborative fiction is generally produced by no more than two authors and that ‘combination ventures’ of four, six, twenty-four, or thirty-six authors – he recalls specific examples for each number – ‘are mere curiosities of literature. Nothing of real value is likely to be manufactured by a joint stock company of unlimited authorship’ (pp. 158, 159).

Besant is very much the practical author, as was already evident in his ‘Art of Fiction’ lecture. ‘It is also obvious that in every [literary] partnership one will be stronger than the other in certain qualities. Therefore, the spirit of compromise and the readiness to sacrifice personal vanity’ are essential (p. 204).⁸ Even so, ‘one of the two must be in authority: one of the two must have the final word: one of the two must be permitted to put the last touches. [. . .] One man must finally revise, or even write the whole work’ (pp. 204-05), so that the reader will experience





the same unified response as if there had been only one author. Otherwise, 'every one of the characters [will talk] with two voices and two brains, and [have] two faces. The thing [will be] a horrid nightmare' (p. 205). Besant carries this point so far as to insist that a person might be considered a collaborator even though he or she contributed 'nothing at all in writing' (p. 205) but participated in other ways. For example, a collaborator might provide 'the leading *motif* of the work', or situations, or characters, or turns of the plot (p. 205). A collaborator can be expected to bring all his or her individual life experiences – travel, readings, love, adventures, even follies – into the creation of a work of fiction. For these reasons, 'points of unlikeness' between collaborators can be as valuable as those of likeness: 'Not the saving of labour, but the improvement of the work should be the reason for partnership' (p. 207). One of the most useful functions of collaboration is simply to talk over 'a plot, an incident, a situation, a character' (p. 208) so that the best choices can be made.⁹ In fact, Besant doubts whether in collaboration there is any saving of labour at all, given the time and energy that must be devoted to discussion and conversation. Instead, 'the chief advantage of collaboration is that it is tolerably certain to produce clearness of purpose, a well-defined plot, and distinct characters' (p. 208). Matthews draws attention to the downside of this focus on clarity, worrying that sometimes the 'searching discussion' involved in collaboration may produce 'an over-sharpness of outline, a deprivation of that vagueness of contour not seldom strangely fascinating' in a text (p. 163). A loss of individuality and spontaneity, Matthews fears, may result from such 'over-laboured' collaboration (p. 163). Besant similarly frets about the danger of 'too much distinctness – a loss of atmosphere – not enough left to the imagination' (p. 208).

Both writers insist on the value of collaboration and have rather clear ideas about the contributions of a collaborator and that person's significant role in the creation of a text. Besant dis-





tinguishes between a true collaborator and partner, on the one hand, and a secretary who merely 'hunts up facts' or researches the background of a story, on the other. A collaborator is distinguished as well from a ghost writer, one who pens books for somebody else who gets all the credit of authorship. The sharing of ideas which inform both the project itself and the exposition of the story and its characters is deemed essential for collaboration, regardless of which person does most of the actual writing.

Many of the points Matthews and Besant make are echoed in Stevenson's comments on collaboration in his letters and in Lloyd Osbourne's reflections on their collaboration after his stepfather's death. Responding to his 19-year-old stepson's draft of their first collaborative novel, *The Wrong Box*, Stevenson was plainly delighted and stimulated in ways which Matthews and Besant would have appreciated: 'Lloyd's story was so damned funny and absurd that I lost my heart to it, and am now about half through my version. Lots of the lad's stuff stands; he has a genuine talent of a kind, and a fine idea of fun' (*Letters* VI, p. 125). It seems that Stevenson and Osbourne planned the story of *The Wrecker* together in considerable detail, and passed the drafts of certain chapters back and forth. In a revealing letter discussing his collaboration with Osbourne and written to his cousin Bob late in Stevenson's life (circa 9 September 1894), Stevenson praises his stepson's abilities as 'an impressionist, pure and simple' to capture characters whose originals he has met and known in real life, but he also offers the following stark assessment of Osbourne's limitations:

In our manner of collaboration (which I think the only possible – I mean that of one person being responsible, and giving the *coup de pousse* [finishing touches] to every part of the work) I was spared the obviously hopeless business of trying to explain to my collaborator what *style* I wished a passage to be treated in. [. . .] How could I





tell anyone beforehand what this effect was to be, which it would take every art that I possessed, and hours and hours of deliberate labour and selection and rejection to produce? These are the impossibilities of collaboration. Its immediate advantage is to focus two minds together on the stuff, and to produce in consequence an extraordinary greater richness of purview, consideration and invention. [. . .] You would not believe what [a particular chapter of *The Wrecker*] cost us before it assumed the least unity and colour. Lloyd wrote it at least thrice, and I at least five times – this from memory. And was that chapter worth the trouble it cost? Alas, that I should ask the question!

(*Letters* VIII, p. 364)

In this letter, in other words, Stevenson echoes descriptions of the methods and virtues of collaboration identified by Matthews and Besant, as well as some of their most significant concerns and anxieties.

In a letter from Vailima four years earlier sent to Osbourne himself, Stevenson mentions Brander Matthews's recently published essay on collaboration while describing changes he contemplated making or had already made in the draft of this same novel, *The Wrecker*. The letter also expresses some of the frustrations Stevenson experienced given that Osbourne had gone to England to sell Stevenson's home, Skerryvore, and ship its furniture to Samoa, where Stevenson remained: 'I wish I had your narrative to help me just now for [chapter] XVI. [. . .] I would fain put in some traits; but fear to be in conflict with something good in yours. This is the hell of collaboration half the world away' (*Letters* VII, p. 9). In the same letter, Stevenson praises Matthews's essay as 'good reading and [. . .] excellent good sense' but notes that it 'has an astounding paragraph' where Matthews 'without a smile' at the incongruity lumps some famous collaborative authors (Shakespeare and other Elizabethan playwrights,





Goethe and Schiller, Addison and Steele) together with others who were rather less well known or highly regarded. The thought of the latter group, the not-so-famous or successful collaborators, prompts Stevenson to append to his letter the following bit of doggerel verse:

And may I too, immortal gander,
May I, inimitable Brander,
When death has fired his antiphallic
Be scanned with Paulding, Drake and Halleck;
And while my soul, raw Salamander,
Grills with the devil and you, my Brander –
My name – while all our bones are scalding –
Be famed with Halleck, Drake, and Paulding.
I envy not, O Herald Brander,
The fame of Pye and Alexander;
But will my chance of glory take
With Halleck, Paulding, you, and Drake.
(*Letters* VII, p.10)

Paulding, Hallack, and Drake were, as the editors of Stevenson's *Letters* note, 'minor American literary figures, contemporaries of Washington Irving, and members of the New York 'Knickerbocker' group.' Paulding combined with Irving on *Salmagundi*, and Halleck and Drake collaborated on the satirical 'Croaker' poems (*Letters* VII, p. 10n.). 'Fame' and 'glory' are accorded to (one presumes) Alexander the Great, and to the curiously named (in the context of Henry James's participation in the debate on 'The Art of Fiction') Henry James Pye (1745-1813), who was the first British poet laureate to receive a cash stipend during his laureateship (instead of the traditional tierce of Canary wine) and who is chiefly – if at all – remembered today as the composer of frequently derided birthday odes as well as poems on ballooning. In this foray into verse Stevenson appears





to be contemplating jocularly, and perhaps also a bit anxiously, the possibility that he, along with Brander Matthews, collaborative author and eminent theorist of literary collaboration, might in the end be classed among the lesser breed of collaborative authors rather than among the greater.

NOTES

- 1 For the specifics on the publication of these three papers see *The Art of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and the Practice of Fiction*, ed. by William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 184, 188. Modern critics tend to deprecate Besant on 'The Art of Fiction', the value of which has been so overshadowed by James's remarkable response. Indeed, Besant's paper reads today as the rather staid, prescriptive, and Victorian work it clearly is. Besant argues for an appreciation of novelists as artists – as the equals of the creators of painting, sculpture, music and poetry. The art of fiction should be studied and mastered just like that of the other serious arts, Besant thinks, as it too has certain rules and methods that ought to be followed – such as a careful observation of human behaviour, the judicious selection of materials, fidelity to life, dramatic effectiveness, clarity of characterization, etc. Good fiction, Besant believes, will manifest moral purpose as well as a hearty method of telling a story. He believes that talent is essential for the production of good fiction, but also that some of the principles of fiction-writing can be profitably studied and taught. In response, Henry James expresses his appreciation for Besant's high valuation of the art of fiction and for offering a serious discussion of it, but James insists on the novelist's right to choose his subject, his *donnée*, and to make all other aesthetic choices freely as well. In short, James rejects any preordained formulas whatsoever for the novel as well as Besant's emphasis on fiction as moral teaching. Instead, James defends a subtle, psychological mode of characterization, nuanced in its outlines. Excellent commentary on the differences between Besant's approach and James's may be found in John Goode's chapter, 'The Art of Fiction: Walter Besant and Henry James', in *Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Critical Essays on Some English and American Novels*, ed. by David Howard, John Lucas,





- and John Goode (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 243-81, as well as in Mark Spilka's 'Henry James and Walter Besant: "The Art of Fiction" Controversy', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 6 (1973), 101-119.
- 2 James Rice died in 1882, and there is uncertainty about whether this novel actually was collaborative, though in its original periodical publication it was represented as such, perhaps for commercial reasons. See Helen Small's introduction to *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, by Walter Besant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), x-xxv (pp. xi-xii); and Kevin Swafford, *Class in Late-Victorian Britain: The Narrative Concern with Social Hierarchy and its Representation* (Youngstown, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2007), p. 38. Fred W. Boege contends that in any event Besant always produced most of the actual writing of their collaborative works, and that Rice's role was to suggest story ideas and negotiate with publishers; see 'Sir Walter Besant: Novelist (Part One)', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 10 (1956), 249-80 (pp. 251-65).
 - 3 See, for example, Swafford's criticisms, pp. 19-41. As for the book's initial popularity, John Goode notes that five reprints of the novel were required within a couple of years of its original publication (p. 246); and in her introduction to the novel Helen Small observes that 'by the end of the First World War the novel had sold well over a quarter of a million copies in Britain, while also going through numerous editions – many of them unauthorised – in the United States' (p. xi).
 - 4 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994-96), IV, p. 186. Stevenson's interest in this novel persisted. Nearly ten years later, in 1892, Stevenson requested that it be sent to him at Vailima (*Letters* VII, p. 434).
 - 5 Brander Matthews, 'The Art and Mystery of Collaboration', *Longman's Magazine*, 16 (1890), 157-70; and Walter Besant, 'On Literary Collaboration', *New Review*, 6 (1892), 200-09. Though Matthews's essay was published before Besant's, they concur on many points, and Matthews already notes in his paper that he has previously discussed 'the practice of collaboration with that past master of the art Mr. Walter Besant' (p. 168). In his response, Besant, naturally, alludes to Matthews's essay a number of times. Given the emphasis both place on thorough discussion between





collaborators, perhaps in that broad sense they might even be considered collaborators in their theories about collaboration. Certainly, few disagreements are apparent.

- 6 Matthews makes a similar point, scoffing at the possibility of answering the question, 'what was the part of each partner in the writing of the book? [. . .] Even the collaborators themselves are at a loss to specify their own contributions. When two men have worked together honestly and heartily in the inventing, the developing, the constructing, the writing, and the revising of a book or play, it is often impossible for either partner to pick out his own share; certain things he may recognise as his own, and certain other things he may credit frankly to his ally; but the rest was the result of the collaboration itself, contributed by both parties together and not by either separately' (p. 157).
- 7 One wonders what Matthews and Besant would have thought about the collaborative poetry produced by Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, published for the most part under the pseudonym Michael Field, which was already beginning to appear in the decade before Matthews's essay, though most was published subsequently.
- 8 Cf. Matthews: 'The partners must have sympathy for each other, and respect. Each must be tolerant of the other's opinions. Each must be ready to yield a point when need be' (p. 159).
- 9 Matthews argues, similarly, that 'the main advantage of a literary partnership is the thorough discussion of the central idea and its presentation in every possible aspect. [. . .] When a situation has been talked over thoroughly and traced out to its logical conclusion, and when a character has been considered from every angle and developed to its inevitable end, nine-tenths of the task is accomplished. The putting down on paper of the situation and the character is but the clothing of a babe already alive and kicking' (p. 160).





'Ginger beer and earthquakes' –Stevenson and the terrors of contingency

Roderick Watson

'We live the time that a match flickers; we pop the cork of a ginger-beer bottle, and the earthquake swallows us on the instant' – 'Aes Triplex'

This essay will trace some recurrent tropes of contingency, and even absurdity, in Stevenson's writing to argue for an existential or proto-existential element in his thought.

Recent critical approaches to Stevenson have come to see him in the context of early modernism and even as a writer who prefigures aspects of postmodernism. In his magisterial 1996 study, Alan Sandison signalled Stevenson's 'intense artistic self-consciousness', especially in 'matters of form and metafictional structures',¹ and he argues persuasively for the 'appearance' of modernism in his work.² This essay aims to trace what might be called modernist pre-echoes in Stevenson's work, without claiming him as a fully-fledged existentialist or a postmodernist *avant la lettre*.³ Having said that, of course Sandison's groundbreaking monograph did indeed serve to relocate Stevenson in modernist terms and few would dispute today that the different narrative voices in *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1885), among others, suggest that these tales have as much to say about narrative instability as they do about the more familiar figures of psychological dualism. *The Ebb-Tide* (written between 1890-3) is a proto-modernist / postmodernist text of at least as much significance as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (first published in *Blackwood's* in 1899), while *The Dynamiter* (from 1884-5), which was a precursor to *The Secret Agent* (1907), has a tone that might even persuade us – against chronology – that it is a playful postmodern *response* to Conrad's bleakly ironic text.

In particular Sandison makes an excellent case for re-assessing the modernity of tone in *The New Arabian Nights*, in which





Stevenson adopts a self-consciously modish narrative stance to generate a complex critical irony that plays against the prevailing literary tastes for both aestheticism and moral realism. Sandison argues against Richard Kiely's censure of Stevenson for behaving like a magician who is 'given to exposing his stage-machinery', in the middle of his own act.⁴ On the contrary, Sandison argues, *that is the whole point*, and he cites Barry Menikoff's observation that Stevenson's playing with generic and fictional conventions, would not surprise any reader of 'late twentieth century fiction, like Borges's *Ficciones*, for whom Stevenson's method would appear wonderfully postmodern.'⁵ All of which may take us back to our epigraph and 'Aes Triplex', which was an early essay from *The Cornhill Magazine* in April 1878, published only a few months before the *New Arabian Nights* stories began to appear in the journal *London*. This is Stevenson at his most apparently belle-lettriste – although of course Sandison and Menikoff remind us that this pose of literary ease can be very deceptive.

The reference to 'triple bronze' in the essay's title is to Horace's Third Ode (Book One), in which he worries about the safety of a friend undertaking a sea journey and goes on to reflect on the dangers of the sea and on man's presumption – heroic or hubristic – in setting himself against the winds, the rocks and the monsters of the deep:

*Illi robur et aes triplex
circa pectus erat, qui fragilem truci
commisit pelago ratem
primus*

Oak and triple bronze
encompassed the breast of him whose frail craft
he entrusted to the wild sea
for the first time





Stevenson's point, however, is that we – quite rightly in his opinion – are so caught up with the delights of 'a good meal and a bottle of wine' (p. 78), or a picnic with ginger beer on the slopes of a volcano, that we pay absolutely no heed to the perils of life around us, nor to our own inevitable extinction:

Indeed it is a memorable subject for consideration with what unconcern and gaiety mankind pricks on along the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The whole way is one of wilderness and snares, and the end of it, for those who fear the last pinch, is irrevocable ruin. And yet we go spinning through it all, like a party at the Derby.⁶

– This is hardly the tone of a Camusian existential hero who dares to gaze into the abyss, only to reject suicide and persevere. Yet the echo from Spenser's gentle knight 'pricking on the plain' from the opening lines of *The Faerie Queene* remind us of his battered armour and the passion of Christ – not exactly a picnic at the Derby. In a more overtly serious mood, in his Notebooks from around 1874, Stevenson had already reflected on mortality: 'It is very hard to think that we must cease and not continue to see the wonderful game of the universe played before us, into all eternity'.⁷ The term 'game' is revealing, and a further entry develops his thoughts on the 'impossibility' of death, in terms that Freud would revisit, and Jacques Derrida would come to develop in his discussions of aporia.⁸ Stevenson has own version of an existential aporia:

I do not admit immortality, but I can not believe in death: that is to say, in my own death. I can easily enough understand the death of others; they pass out of my field of vision, they cease to perform their respective antics before me: but how can you destroy that field of vision? How do you expect *me* to *conceive myself* as no longer existent? (my emphasis, p. 179.)





Here, (like the term ‘game’) the reference to the ‘respective antics’ of friends who are merely passing out of his ‘field of vision’ seems to offer a lighter touch, even as it actually recognises a much darker awareness of subjectivity and the ruthlessly selfish demands of the ego.⁹ Harried by ill health all his life, a life that ended at 44 after all, Stevenson may have been more than usually sensitive to such thoughts, and especially the questions they give rise to.

He returned to the theme nine years later, with yet another Horatian reference in an essay written for *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1888. Its title ‘Pulvis et Umbra’ comes from ‘*pulvis et umbra sumus*: we are but dust and shadow’ from Ode Seven in Book Four. Stevenson described it as his ‘Darwinian Sermon’, adding ‘it is true, and I find it touching and beneficial, to me at least’.¹⁰ ‘Touching and beneficial’ are scarcely apposite if you know the essay, except in so far as it does, this time, make an existential commitment to meet the abyss face to face:

And as we dwell, we living beings, in our isle of terror and under the imminent hand of death, God forbid it should be man [. . .] that wearies in well-doing, that despairs of unrewarded effort, or utters the language of complaint. Let it be enough for faith, that the whole creation groans in mortal frailty, strives with unconquerable constancy: surely not all in vain.¹¹

The struggle may not be in vain, but any ameliorating possibility is completely overwhelmed by the sheer crepitating horror of Stevenson’s vision of existence, and most especially by the disgust evinced for matter itself on every page of the text:

We behold space sown with rotatory islands, 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 something called 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. (p. 61)

(‘Pediculous’ means louse-like, so ‘life’ is seen to be seething with atoms as with lice, or with lice like atoms)

In the light of life described as a ‘malady’ and that phrase about our checked breathing, it is not irrelevant, perhaps, to recall that this piece was started – like *The Master of Ballantrae* – when Stevenson was convalescing under the care of Dr Edward Livingstone Trudeau in the sanatorium at Saranac Lake. Stevenson visited Trudeau’s laboratory, with its diseased organs, and its carefully cultured dishes of the tuberculosis bacillus, and was revolted by the experience.¹² Stevenson’s position is ultimately a philosophical one, but it is still possible to wonder what part his own condition played in that significantly over-determined (in the Freudian sense) imagery of disease and disgust by which mankind, howsoever ‘*express and admirable*’, has become a ‘putrescence of the dust’. (I make the Shakespearean reference advisedly, for Stevenson’s text does have echoes of the





prince's jaundiced speech on 'what a piece of work is a man' in Act II, scene ii of *Hamlet*.) Having recognised that intertextual echo, Stevenson goes on to outdo Hamlet and even melancholy Jacques:

What a monstrous spectre is this man, the disease of the agglutinated dust, lifting alternate feet or lying drugged with slumber; killing, feeding, growing, bringing forth small copies of himself; grown upon with hair like grass, fitted with eyes that move and glitter in his face; a thing to set children screaming; (p. 62)

Of course the text goes on to conclude that even in such unpropitious circumstances, in a Darwinian survival of the fittest, surrounded by his own 'organised injustice' and 'cowardly violence', man still somehow manages a modicum of decency, memory and imagination – humble enough, perhaps, but all the more remarkable an achievement for its ghastly origins and its unforgiving context. But it is the terrible context that remains with us, and Stevenson's repeatedly alienated confrontation with what he sees as the horror of materiality (of hair growing 'upon' skin like grass) generates what amounts to a philosophical and indeed an existential nausea as powerful as ever Sartre imagined for Antoine Roquentin in *La Nausée*.

And yet there is also a spark of dark glee in the sheer meaningless energy of the setting:

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. (p. 62)





It is not difficult to trace this figure throughout Stevenson's work, not least in that very telling nautical metaphor,¹³ and several elements in 'Pulvis et Umbra' can be seen to have already featured in his writing only a few years earlier. This is most especially evident in *Lay Morals*, which were produced between 1879 and 1883, but not published until the Edinburgh Edition of 1896, two years after the author's death:

We inhabit a dead ember swimming wide in the blank of space [. . .] Far off on all hands other dead embers, other flaming suns, wheel and race in the apparent void; the nearest is out of call; the farthest so far that the heart sickens in the effort to conceive the distance. Shipwrecked seamen on the deep, though they bestride but the truncheons of a boom, are safe and near at home compared with mankind on its bullet.¹⁴

This trope appears more than once in *Lay Morals* and we shall return to the final implications of this, but first let us trace some examples of the same figure in Stevenson's fiction.

In *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) for example, a significant part of Jekyll's horror comes from his realisation of 'the trembling immateriality, the mist-like transience, of this seemingly so solid body *in* which we walk attired.'¹⁵ Our physical selves, our whole identity, is strangely challenged and objectified if we think of the body as merely clothing. Of course conventional Christian teaching regularly likes to think of the body as merely the material house for an immutable soul. But Stevenson's insight speaks for the independent agency of the purely physical, and indeed for the un-Christian and proto-Sartrean possibility that 'existence *precedes* essence'. So Jekyll's new 'attire' actually grants him 'a more generous tide of blood' and the 'incredibly sweet' sensation of release from all moral and social obligations. And the influence of the purely physical (or





rather the impurely physical), leads to a nightmare vision of the return of the abjected, of bestial energy, and of something 'not only hellish but inorganic':

This was the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices; that the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned; that what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the offices of life. And this again, that the insurgent horror was knit to him closer than a wife, closer than an eye, lay caged in his flesh [. . .] (p. 73)

There are post-Darwinian anxieties in this passage, of course, but the prevailing theme is one of utter nausea at the gross materiality of physical being. The same puzzle engaged Stevenson in Chapter III of *Lay Morals* with a different account of the duality of man, as a kind of being who may be engaged with thoughts of 'America, or the dog-star, or the attributes of God', while his body is busily 'digesting his food with elaborate chemistry, breathing, circulating blood, directing himself by the sight of his eyes [. . .] How am I to describe the *thing* I see? Is that truly a man [. . .] or is it not a man and *something* else?" (pp. 23-4, my emphasis).

Nor is art free from this terror, for the tropes of matter and inconceivable energy that 'no analysis can help us to conceive', also featured in Stevenson's discussion of the nature of fiction and the difficulties of his vocation in 'A Humble Remonstrance', published in *Longman's Magazine* in 1884. In this essay, as part of his debate with Henry James, Stevenson explained why no writing, not even 'realistic' prose fiction, can ever, in James's phrase, 'compete with life'.¹⁶ Yet this is more than a matter of technical skill, as Stevenson sees it, for the 'dazzle and confusion of reality' is nothing less than blinding in a 'welter of impressions, all forcible but all discreet':

To 'compete with life', whose sun we cannot look upon,





whose passions and diseases waste and slay us – to compete with the flavour of wine, the beauty of the dawn, the scorching of fire, the bitterness of death and separation – here is, indeed, a projected escalade of heaven (p. 135).

Lay Morals had made a similar point by comparing life ‘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. (p. 11)

So Stevenson’s ‘humble remonstrance’, speaking as one novelist to another, is that life is both unknowable and uncatchable:

Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant; a work of art, in comparison is neat, finite, self contained, rational, flowing and emasculate. *Life imposes by brute energy, like inarticulate thunder.* (‘A Humble Remonstrance’, p. 136, my emphasis.)

Exactly that ‘brute energy’ had been a key factor in the novella *The Merry Men* published by the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1882. Fanny Stevenson recollected that her husband was not entirely satisfied with the plot, but felt that ‘he *had* succeeded in giving the terror of the sea’.¹⁷ With added elements of romance and mystery, the story centres on the protagonist’s aged uncle, a religiously minded recluse on a remote Scottish island who plunders the ships that come to grief on his shore. But its most memorable aspect is indeed its evocation of the ‘terror of the sea’, by which ‘God’s ocean’ and the ‘charnel ocean’ become one and the same





thing in the demented Calvinistic imagination of the old man, who sees every wreck as God's will – and thrills at the sight. By the end of the story his nephew, too has been vouchsafed a terrifying vision of the sea in the roost of the 'Merry Men':

A world of blackness, where the waters wheel and boil,
where the waves joust together with the noise of an explosion,
and the foam towers and vanishes in the twinkling
of an eye

[. . .]

Thought was beaten down by the confounding uproar; a
gleeful vacancy possessed the brains of men, a state akin
to madness;

[. . .]

I have always thought drunkenness a wild and almost
fearful pleasure, rather demoniacal than human; but
drunkenness, out here in the roaring blackness, on the
edge of a cliff above that hell of waters, the man's head
spinning like the Roost, his foot tottering on the edge of
death

[. . .]

'Eh, Charlie, man, it's grand!' he cried. 'See to them!' he
continued, dragging me to the edge of the abyss from
whence arose that deafening clamour and those clouds of
spray; 'see to them dancin', man! Is that no' wicked?' (pp.
41-2.)

The Merry Men is of interest because, via the Calvinism of the old uncle, the Christian God is closely associated with a 'world of blackness where the waters wheel and roar' which is ultimately the universe, indeed, of our own crowded rotatory island.

I want to pursue this thread a little further. No modern cosmologist would contradict Stevenson's vision of infinite energy and creative chaos, but for Christians, it may well raise questions





about the nature and character of a supposedly benign Creator. Stevenson's complex and contentious relations with his father, and with his father's religious faith are well known, but there was a stark and unforgiving side to Scottish Christianity that was not unattractive to him. We remember, of course, that his nurse Cummy brought him up on tales of the Covenanting martyrs, and that he saw John Knox as a major unifying force in the Scottish nation. Thus in the 'Selections from His Note Book' Stevenson notes with approval that 'all the rose-water theology in the world cannot quench the great fire of horror and terror that Christianity has kindled in the hearts of the Scottish people' (p. 192) and he sees this as no more than a proper preparation for final truths and 'the grim reality that must be faced at last, of a thwarted and painful existence, haunted by vain aspiration after impossible good and fated, generation after generation, to settle down into mournful recognition of the inevitable evil' (p. 192). 'Calvinism is the religion of the strong' he concludes.

This insight is strikingly close to what Stevenson would have Attwater say in *The Ebb Tide*, published eleven years later in 1893:

They think a parsonage with roses, and church bells, and nice old women bobbing in the lanes, are part and parcel of religion. But religion is a savage thing, like the universe it illuminates; savage, cold, and bare, but infinitely strong.¹⁸

In *The Ebb-Tide*, Herrick is initially overcome with the force of Attwater's demented will:

'O, it's no use, I tell you! He knows all, he sees through all; we only make him laugh with our pretences—he looks at us and laughs like God!' (p. 109)

Certainly Attwater's universe, the unmapped, spectral island





where he holds the power of life and death, is a spiritually cold and savage place, and the final force of that brilliant novel is to suggest that this may indeed be a model for the universe, and even a model for God's own relationship with His creation. – Without 'Grace' cries Attwater, on fire with a Calvinist certainty:

'There is nothing here,' – striking on his bosom – 'nothing there' – smiting the wall – 'and nothing there' – stamping – 'nothing but God's Grace! We walk upon it, we breathe it; we live and die by it; it makes the nails and axles of the universe' (p. 88)

But Stevenson's vision of the material world, those 'nails and axles of the universe', where we breathe, what we are made of, and what we stand on, is not, as we have seen, a comfortable one. Nor is Attwater's Christianity convincing, for this is the man who sees grace like a diving suit that lets him kill his workers, plunder the sea, and rise up again with a dry conscience. So the final effect of this speech, is to generate a terrifying vision of nothingness itself, of an existential emptiness already so powerfully invoked in the symbolic blankness of that giant, white, stranded, female figurehead on the shore.

Writing elsewhere, I have argued for the same existential hollowness in *The Master of Ballantrae*, which seems to be establishing the master as a 'devil' only for us (and eventually Ephraim Mackellar) to recognise the futility of such thinking.¹⁹ It was the Master's 'causeless duplicity' that led Stevenson to remark that he was 'all I know of the devil'²⁰ and causelessness and contingency haunt the novel. Thus the Master makes his most serious decisions on the toss of a coin "to express my scorn for human reason".²¹ And the final cause of the fatal enmity between the two brothers is shown to be equally closed to human reason by way of the text's repeated references to the Biblical tale of the twins Jacob and Esau who left the womb already at war with one





another, equally causelessly, but still (presumably) according to the will of God – doubtless the same mad God who presides over the uproar of Stevenson's universe.

I want to close my pursuit of this trope by turning to 'Pan's Pipes', an early text from *Virginibus Puerisque*, first published in the journal *London* in 1878 and hence contemporary with 'Aes Triplex', and only three years before *The Merry Men*. Here, again, we find Stevenson writing about the volcano upon whose slopes we while away our time:

The kindly shine of summer, when tracked home with the scientific spy-glass, is found to issue from the most portentous nightmare of the universe – the great confla-grant sun: a world of hell's squibs, tumultuory, roaring aloud, inimical to life. The sun itself is enough to disgust a human being of the scene which he inhabits; and you would not fancy there was a green or habitable spot in a universe this awfully lighted up. And yet it is by the blaze of such a conflagration, to which the fire of Rome was but a spark, that we do all our fiddling, and hold domestic tea-parties at the harbour door.²²

But here the vengeful Old Testament God of *The Merry Men* has given way to Pan, the god of Nature as a 'goat-footed piper' in the woods, who is the prevailing spirit in a place where 'There is an uncouth, outlandish strain throughout the web of the world [. . .] Things are not congruous and wear strange disguises' (p. 125). 'Strange disguises', indeed, for the tone of this essay is curiously unstable, and indeed typical of Stevenson in this vein. On the surface he plays the sophisticated essayist, conjuring up familiar paradoxes by which beautiful flowers arise from and return to dung, and children make mud pies (as Hamlet reminds us) with Caesar's ashes (p. 125), only to conclude that life is still worth living and that we should embrace 'the charm and terror





of things' (p. 128) in a spirit of giddy exhilaration. The essay certainly celebrates 'the song of hurrying rivers; the colour of clear skies; the smiles and live touch of hands and the voice of things, and their significant look' (p. 126), and yet the tropes of destruction he has called up along the way cannot disown their own significantly contrary force:

In the random deadly levin or the fury of headlong floods, we recognise the 'dread foundation' of life and the anger in Pan's heart. Earth wages open war against her children, and under her softest touch hides treacherous claws. The cool waters invite us in to drown; the domestic hearth burns up in the hour of sleep, and makes an end of all. Everything is good or bad, helpful or deadly, not in itself, but by its circumstances. [. . .] And when the universal music has led lovers into the path of dalliance, confident of Nature's sympathy, suddenly the air shifts into a minor, and death makes a clutch from his ambush below the bed of marriage. For death is given as a kiss; the dearest kindnesses are fatal; and into this life, where one thing preys upon another, the child too often makes it entrance from the mother's corpse. (p. 127.)

In the face of venereal infection and infant mortality, 'Everything is good or bad, helpful or deadly, not in itself, but by its circumstances' may seem like a markedly unhelpful truism, and yet its recognition of the power of context, and its implicit suspicion of any stable definition of 'good' or 'bad', takes us out of the realm of conventional value systems and Christian morality and into the much more ambiguous (Dionysian) realm of the great god of the woods. Stevenson's adoption of the essayist's light touch is equally ambiguous, for although the play of artifice and literary ease would seem to engage and amuse the reader in advance of a comforting conclusion, the end result is rather





different. The terrors recounted are just a little too vividly realised to be entirely balanced by the charm of paradox, while the reciprocal play between the two remains restless and unstable until the conclusion is more of a rhetorical punctuation than a resolution, in a kind of writing whose fluid playfulness may actually be rather disturbing. The effect is not unlike experiencing the wilderness at the end of *The Master of Ballantrae* during the course of a chat at the Savile club.

‘So we come back to the old myth, and hear the goat-footed piper making the music which is itself the charm and terror of things’ (p.128). I would argue that the passages I have been tracing in Stevenson’s fiction and essays suggest that he was haunted by the charm and terror of things in what amounts to a proto-existential experience of contingency, material nausea and absurdity. The essays may adopt a playful tone, as in ‘Pan’s Pipes’, but those serially recurring tropes of shipwreck, complexity, distance, the grossness of matter, terror and accident reveal a significant anxiety about human agency, ultimate meaning and existence itself.

NOTES

- 1 Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism: A Future Feeling* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), pp. 4-5.
- 2 Sandison’s title is not unambiguous, for it suggests both the *arrival* of modernism in aspects of Stevenson, and the fact that elements in his writing may *look* like modernism, without necessarily being so.
- 3 In similar fashion, the seeds of modernism can be traced in the poetry of Rimbaud and Mallarmé, the conclusion to Walter’s Pater’s *Renaissance* and Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* all of which prefigure the shift to what would become a ‘modernist’ sensibility in the next century.
- 4 Sandison, p. 88. Kiely sees this as a fault. See Robert Kiely, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 120.





- 5 Sandison, p. 90. Barry Menikoff, 'New Arabian Nights: Stevenson's Experiment in Fiction', in *Nineteenth Century Literature*, vol 45, 3, 1990, p. 343. Sandison's chapter 'Arabesques' usefully develops this aspect of Stevenson's writing and its critical reception.
- 6 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Aes Triplex', in *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Essays in Belles Lettres*, (London: William Heinemann, 1924), Tusitala XXV, p. 75.
- 7 'Selections from His Notebook' in *Memories and Portraits. Memoirs of Himself. Selections from his Notebook*, Tusitala XXIX, p. 173.
- 8 'at bottom nobody believes in his own death, or to put the same thing in another way, in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality.' Sigmund Freud, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol 4 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 304-5. See also Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying – awaiting (one another at) 'the limits of truth'*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). For a full discussion of 'the impossibility of death' and Derrida's differences from Freud and Heidegger on this complex topic, see Iain Thomson, 'Can I Die? Derrida on Heidegger on Death' in *Philosophy Today*, Spring 1999, especially, pp. 33-4.
- 9 See Jacques Derrida 'Aphorism Countertime 16', on how Romeo and Juliet overcome this 'impossibility', *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 422. If the sophistication of Stevenson's thought is in question, other passages in the Notebooks show a clear understanding of the principles that Saussure would soon be formulating on how language controls thinking and how meaning is a product of context and culture: 'We can never argue on anything beyond the relations between certain words; and if you and I understand by our words a different substrate of thought – if we have different values for the same symbols [. . .] we cannot wonder that we reach different solutions' (pp. 175-8).
- 10 Letter to Sidney Colvin, November 1887, Saranac Lake, in *Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Ernest Mehew (New Haven & London: Yale University Press), p. 353.
- 11 Pulvis et Umbra' in *Ethical Studies*, Tusitala, XXVI, p. 66.
- 12 See Mary B. Hotaling, 'Trudeau, tuberculosis and Saranac Lake', in *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, 4, 2007, pp. 4-19.





- 13 One thinks, for example, of the blood-stained planks aboard ship that have featured in *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *The Master of Ballantrae*, *The Ebb-Tide* and *The Wrecker*.
- 14 'Lay Morals' in *Ethical Studies*, Tusitala XXVI, p. 21.
- 15 *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Tusitala V, p. 59.
- 16 'A Humble Remonstrance' in *Memories and Portraits*, Tusitala XXIX, p. 134.
- 17 'Prefatory Note', *The Merry Men and Other Tales*, Tusitala VIII, p. xiii.
- 18 *The Ebb-Tide*, Tusitala XIV, p. 89.
- 19 Roderick Watson, 'You cannot fight me with a word': *The Master of Ballantrae* and the wilderness beyond dualism' in *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, vol 1 (2004) pp. 1-23.
- 20 Stevenson, *Letters III*, Tusitala XXXIII, p. 171.
- 21 *The Master of Ballantrae*, Tusitala X, p. 57.
- 22 'Pan's Pipes' in *Virginibus Puerisque*, Tusitala XXV, p. 125.





‘Of all men the most clubbable’? RLS at the Savile Club and the *Cornhill Magazine*

Robert Louis Abrahamson

At the Savile Club

One of the iconic images of Stevenson in London during the 1870s has him charming everyone at the Savile Club with his lively and incessant conversation, holding forth in the afternoons, as Wilfrid Meynell recalled, ‘on the arm of a chair in the Savile Club smoking-room’. To Robertson Nicoll ‘he was of all men the most clubbable’.¹ Edmund Gosse asserted that ‘Louis pervaded the club. He was its most affable and chatty member; and he lifted it, by the ingenuity of his incessant dialectic, to the level of a sort of humorous Academe or Mouseion’.²

So much for the popular myth, but there are also hints of something askew. He perches on the arm of the chair in the smoking room: not seated, but quasi-seated, ready to spring up and move around the room, a little on the defensive. Nicholl adds to his description of the ‘clubbable’ Stevenson that many of his fellow Savilians ‘did not estimate Stevenson very highly’ as a writer. ‘The affection felt for Stevenson by his friends was evident, but their critical judgment was qualified and cautious. Of this Stevenson himself was conscious enough at the time’.³ Gosse politely admits that ‘[a]t this time [Stevenson] must not be thought of as a successful author. A very few of us were convinced of his genius; but with the exception of Mr Leslie Stephen, nobody of editorial status was sure of it’, and writing to Graham Balfour, he describes Stevenson’s long stay in London in spring 1879 as ‘about the idlest and silliest part of Louis’s existence’ with the afternoons at the Savile ‘consumed in rather foolish jesting’.⁴

Stevenson was too eccentric, too unstable to be taken seriously. London was the place where Stevenson could let himself go and play freely with other bright, literary people – but he





never quite played it their way, and these English gentlemen did not quite know how to take him.

In one sense, we are looking at the cultural differences between the Scots and the English – or at least at the way Stevenson perceived these differences and explained them in 1882 in his essay ‘The Foreigner at Home’:

Compared with the grand, tree-like self-sufficiency of [the Englishman’s] demeanour, the vanity and curiosity of the Scot seem uneasy, vulgar and immodest. That you should continually try to establish human and serious relations, that you should actually feel an interest in John Bull, and desire and invite a return of interest from him, may argue something more awake and lively in your mind, but it still puts you in the attitude of a suitor and a poor relation.⁵

Stevenson, desperate to ‘establish human and serious relations’, was treated by all but a very few as ‘a poor relation’, with his unconventional clothes and manners and style, a little ‘vulgar and immodest’.

Lloyd Osbourne, writing in the 1920s, suggested something psychological at work here: ‘what we would call now an “inferiority complex”’. Stevenson, he said, always felt inadequate among men who were ‘academic, and steeped in the classics [. . .] Their familiarity with the ancient Greeks and Romans seemed to emphasise his own sense of shortcoming; made him feel uneducated, and engaged in unimportant tasks; put him out of conceit with himself and his work’.⁶ Being ‘out of conceit’, it makes sense that he would deflect attention from what he was saying to the brilliant style in which he said it. And for all its celebrated relaxed friendliness, the Savile Club was also stifling Stevenson. Before we assent, then, to the image of RLS as the most ‘clubbable’, let us also recall that when the Savile Club appears in Stevenson’s fiction, it becomes the *Suicide Club*, in a story written in the Savile Club about an informal and genial club like the Savile, but





whose membership brought with it death.

The clubbable persona was useful for negotiating in this London world,⁷ but Stevenson was aware that, like all masks, it kept him from being fully understood. It is no mistake that failure of communication becomes one of the major themes of the essays in the later 70s and early 80s.⁸ Even a close friend like Gosse was happy to accept the Savile persona and ignore the rest of the man. After several years of knowing Stevenson, Gosse could still be shocked when Stevenson wrote in a letter that he had ‘fallen altogether into a hollow-eyed, yawning way of life’. ‘How is it thou art feeble?’ Gosse replied. ‘It is a paradox, that you, the General Exhilarator, should feel depressed. I take you for my emblem of life, and you talk of feeling lifeless.’⁹ Stevenson is not allowed to be a complex human being; he has to serve as an ‘emblem of life’ for people like Gosse.

At the Cornhill

The clubby feel of the Savile was extended to the *Cornhill Magazine*, with a chosen few regular contributors, many of them members of the Savile Club. Stevenson quickly became one of these chosen (perhaps the youngest of them), and from 1874 to 1882 he published in the *Cornhill* twenty essays, four short stories and one poem. The editor and former Savilian¹⁰ Leslie Stephen seems to have cherished RLS for his elegant rebelliousness against conventional manners. When, for instance, he accepted Stevenson’s essay ‘Apology for Idlers’, a call to follow one’s pleasures rather than the dictates of respectable society, Stephen wrote ‘that something more in that vein would be agreeable to his views’¹¹ and ‘Crabbed Age and Youth’ appeared quickly afterwards. When J. C. Shairp’s biography of Robert Burns appeared in the *English Men of Letters* series in 1879, Lesley Stephen knew he would get good copy from Stevenson. The new book, he wrote, ‘might suggest to you a text for some remarks about Burns which you once told me you were contemplating’,¹² thus cleverly setting





this rebel Scottish writer against the respectable Shairp, at this time both Professor of Humanity at St Andrews and Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and an orthodox Presbyterian. Stevenson produced what was desired: a controversial assessment of Burns and Shairp, written with spirited passion from a radically unorthodox point of view, gently scanning Burns's career of 'random affections' and dismissing Shairp's claims as a biographer because of the very fact that he brought an orthodox bias to his subject.¹³

Although not everything he submitted to Stephen was accepted, Stevenson certainly could feel that he enjoyed a privileged position on the *Cornhill*, one of the most prestigious and best paying popular magazines of the time. The imperiousness we see later in his career – demanding that the text appear just as he wanted it – has its roots perhaps in the way he was indulged during this period. Leslie Stephen might, for instance, pass on to Stevenson detailed suggestions for revisions of 'Will o' the Mill', Mehew says, yet he 'was willing to publish the story as it stood if RLS did not want to alter it. RLS does not appear to have made any changes'.¹⁴ Stevenson's final essay contribution to the *Cornhill*, 'Talk and Talkers II', was accepted and sent to press without Leslie Stephen's even reading it ('I have not had time to read it, but if it is as good as Part I it will be very valuable').¹⁵

In many ways the *Cornhill* was an extension of the Savile Club, and, as we will see in a moment, Stevenson drew upon his Savile persona in the essays he published in this magazine. When James Payn (not a member of the Savile Club) took over the editorship after Stephen left in 1882, the *Cornhill* lost its club-like feel, and, not entirely co-incidentally, Stevenson's contributions stopped. As Fanny Stevenson expressed it to J. A. Symonds, a member of the old *Cornhill* crowd: 'Are you not sorry for the change in the magazine that so long has lived and thriven upon the small handful of names? It cannot be the same any more.'¹⁶ And to Payn himself Stevenson commented that the off-hand treatment of the proofs of 'The Merry Men' 'smacked to me of





the New Pharaoh that knew not Joseph'.¹⁷ (It is interesting that with his usual self-knowledge, he sees his role at the *Cornhill* as that of the precocious but spoiled Joseph of the book of Genesis.) To be fair, Payn entered his editorship faced with falling sales figures and shifted the focus of the *Cornhill* away from essays and serialised fiction to potentially more popular shorter works of fiction. Nevertheless, Stevenson was finished with the magazine. The year after the shift in editorship, he asked his mother to cancel the family subscription: 'The *Cornhill* won't do. Stop it, and let's have the *Century* instead. The *Cornhill* is too much.'¹⁸

'*Virginibus Puerisque*'

A clubbable persona from the Savile Club gave Stevenson's *Cornhill* essays much of their distinctive appeal, especially in their lively conversational style. The problem with this persona, however, as we have seen, is that the 'affable and chatty' performance that Gosse called Stevenson's Savile manner could easily seem 'rather foolish jesting' – a style everyone was happy to call *charming*, and then not take seriously. And yet these essays are not just charming exercises in style but, through the complex interplay of genre and tone and point of view, they attempt to develop an appropriate medium for Stevenson's radical and quite modern ideas about the difficulties of living in the late Victorian culture.

'*Virginibus Puerisque*' (1876) is a good essay to examine for this purpose since it shows both the acrobatics and the absurdities of Stevenson's style, as well as the sophisticated relationship that he establishes with his audience, which, perhaps, was too sophisticated to be properly understood by them. The essay appeared in the August issue of the *Cornhill*. 'Forest Notes' had appeared in May, 'Walking Tours' in June: Stevenson's voice was being heard in the *Cornhill* quite often during these months. '*Virginibus Puerisque*', though, was the first essay to move beyond literary, aesthetic or travel subjects to ethics – considera-





tions of how we should act and what makes us behave the way we do, the subject he confessed to Colvin was his 'veiled mistress'¹⁹

Perhaps because of this shift in topic, this essay stimulated more critical response than Stevenson's earlier pieces. The *Illustrated London News* called it 'a sharp, clever, slightly cynical disquisition on the chances of happiness in wedlock'. *The Graphic* assumed the author must have been Leslie Stephen himself, which pleased Stevenson ('RLS' = The Real Leslie Stephen): 'Mr Leslie Stephen's speculations on Marriage are amusing, and by no means devoid of good sense.' *The Spectator* dismissed the essay as a 'bit of humouristic padding' but in the next week's issue, there appeared an article on 'Husbands and Wives', based on 'Virginibus', which it called 'clever and rather cynical'. *The Spectator* was, as Stevenson told his mother, 'puzzled and (*Scotticè*) affronted by my paper' – that is, embarrassed at having dismissed the piece so quickly the week before. 'It is charming,' Stevenson adds – though whether he is applying the adjective to describe his essay or his delight at having aroused such a response from an important magazine is not clear.²⁰

What seems to underlie these responses to the essay is a polite approval and then a dismissal, as appears most clearly in the man Henley told Stevenson about who 'thought "Virginibus Puerisque" was "a charming article", but he couldn't help laughing at all this sage advice from a boy of eighteen'.²¹ Clearly this reader felt that the persona was wrong: only an adolescent would show off his cleverness in such a way.²²

Stevenson gives us a handle on how to understand this conversational style in his essay 'Talk and Talkers' (1882), one of his final *Cornhill* pieces. The aim of conversation, Stevenson says there, is not to convey any new information but to share each other's company in a game. 'The theme being set, each plays on himself as on an instrument; asserts and justifies himself; ransacks his brain for instances and opinions, and brings them forth new-minted, to his own surprise and the admiration of his





adversary. [. . .] by the laws of the game each accepts and fans the vanity of the other.²³ In other words, the agile conversationalist displays how cleverly he can ornament the subject under consideration. Although this may look like showing off, there is a higher purpose. In the excitement of the participants' battling over the topic ('The spice of life is battle' – p. 72), both parties soar beyond their 'ordinary selves' and finally return to everyday life 'flushed with vanity and admiration'. (This game comes to seem less trifling when we remember the dissatisfaction, even disgust, with the pettiness and painfulness of ordinary life that lies behind all of Stevenson's thinking and writing and the consequent yearning to be lifted to a higher vision of ourselves, even if only temporary, as the only way to make life worth living for another few hours.)

If we see 'Virginibus' as a game of this sort, then the rules ask us to applaud the essayist's performance. But there is more. 'There are always two to a talk' (p. 71). In a conversation we set our own vanity against the other's and engage in a contest of competing vanities; we don't just applaud, then, but we are invited to respond, as the speaker challenges, teases and provokes us. Readers not prepared for this kind of playful response may find the performance charming, but they may also very easily feel 'puzzled' or '(Scotticè) affronted' by this invitation to join in themselves. We are back with the problem that faced the Scot trying to converse with the English, as we saw above in a passage from 'The Foreigner at Home': 'That you should continually try to establish human and serious relations, that you should actually feel an interest in John Bull, and desire and invite a return of interest from him, may argue something more awake and lively in your mind, but it still puts you in the attitude of a suitor and a poor relation.' – Stevenson's style is certain to lead to misunderstanding.

Let's look a little more closely at some of the ways this conversationalist performs in 'Virginibus Puerisque'. The essay begins with the game of treating Shakespearean characters like real





people. 'With the single exception of Falstaff, all Shakespeare's characters are what we call marrying men'²⁴ – a grand assertion, silly in itself but inviting the listener to challenge the assertion with counter examples: 'Surely there are others besides Falstaff who are not "marrying men"?' we may want to ask. 'What about Feste?' Maybe we think of Jacques, but Stevenson is ahead of us there: 'if you turn to George Sand's French version of *As You Like It* (and I think I can promise you will like it but little), you will find Jacques marries Celia just as Orlando marries Rosalind'. – 'If you will turn', 'I think I can promise you will like it but little': who speaks like this? A preacher? A school teacher? A bullying conversationalist, perhaps? An eighteen-year-old pretending to be an older man? A few pages later, this speaker talks more intimately to us when, asking what is the principle by which people marry, he suggests, '[L]et us talk it over between friends' (p. 6).

He wants to speak about the modern man's fear of marriage, and to illustrate this, he parades several examples from modern literature before us, assuming that of course we are familiar with Emile Augier's play *Maître Guérin* from 1864, that we recognise Maxime de Trailles as a character from Balzac's *Deputé d'Arcis* and that, five years after *Middlemarch* first appeared, we have made Rosamund Vincy and Lydgate our close acquaintances. Just for the record, here is a list of the literary allusions we are expected to understand in this essay: Horace (for the title of the essay), several plays of Shakespeare, George Sand, Rabelais, Augier, Balzac, George Eliot, Hannah More and William Goodwin, *The Book of Common Prayer*, the popular poet Martin Tupper, Diogenes, Ouida, William Archer, Goldsmith, Kant, Rousseau, Michelet's *History of France* and the book of Hosea.)

Consider too how the speaker in the essay jumps between different essayistic styles. He can begin in a kind Baconian aphoristic mode ('if you wish the pick of men and women, take a good bachelor and a good wife'), then shift to the relaxed scepticism of Montaigne ('I am often filled with wonder that so many





marriages are passably successful, and so few come to an open failure, the more so as I fail to understand the principle on which people regulate their choice'). Then comes the paradox as he proposes that people do not marry for any 'high passion' like love but because the two people are suited to each other in the little, unromantic things. On the way, we are given short dramatic anecdotes ('A young man was telling me the sweet story of his loves') and more literary examples of why heroic passion is not suited for unheroic marriage, concluding: 'The Lion is the King of Beasts, but he is scarcely suitable for a domestic pet.' – Perhaps it is here that he settles back onto the arm of the chair and awaits our applause.

The diction too becomes a performance for us to respond to. Since, as 'Talk and Talkers' tells us, conversations are 'fluid, tentative, continually "in further search and progress"' (p. 71.) Stevenson's unsettling language ensures that the meaning is often uncertain and fluid. Although Stevenson became celebrated for always finding 'the right word', it is truer, especially for these early essays, to say he sought the not-quite-right word, to keep us from settling at our ease. We too must be sitting on the arm of our chair. What, for instance, does it mean to say that 'The air of the fireside withers out all the fine wildings of the husband's heart'? 'Withers out' is used here in an odd sense not found in the OED. Is 'wildings' a kind of Gallicism Stevenson is affecting? Or some Shakespearean echo? And how can a wilding *wither out*? We know what he means, but, if we are paying attention, we notice that the words are not quite in focus.

Or this statement: 'The woman must be talented as a woman [. . .] She must know her *métier de femme*, and have a fine touch for the affections.' This statement will not stand up to any close scrutiny, whatever sense of *woman* we bring to it. But with what assurance does he speak of that 'fine touch for the affections', as though of course we do understand what he means. Communication here takes place on a level beyond straightfor-





ward comprehension, as explained in 'Talk and Talkers': 'That which is understood excels that which is spoken in quantity and quality alike [. . .] and the speakers imply without effort the most obscure and intricate thoughts' (p. 74). The literal-minded reader will not care for 'implied obscure and intricate thoughts' and will dismiss such a sentence as nonsense. The playful reader, however, will not press for a precise meaning, but give a knowing smile and consent to be swept along as the speaker 'ransacks his brain for instances and opinions, and brings them forth new-minted, to his own surprise and the admiration of his adversary'. This is the lightness of touch that Colvin praised in the essays, as a relief from the likes of Carlyle and Ruskin. Its effect may be, as in a conversation, just to set up a relationship between the writer and the reader. Whether it can carry any serious meaning, however, is not clear yet.

Looking for the principles that can guide 'youths and maidens' (*virginibus puerisque*) towards a happy marriage, he proposes that a good marriage must be based on 'community of taste' (p. 6). 'Community of taste' seems a cynically unheroic way to speak about the great event of marriage, and the duller reader may find this way of speaking of marriage distasteful, not to say irreverent. (Remember that both *The Illustrated London News* and the *Spectator* spoke of the article as cynical.) The reader who enters into the conversational game, however, digging for the meaning, may be alert to 'community of taste' as a translation of Kant's *Geschmack*. (Members of the Savile Club would probably remember Kingdon Clifford holding forth on Kantian ideas.) The playful conversation evokes quite serious Kantian ideas and has now become, for those aware of it, a bit more meaty.

We are no longer talking about marriage but about communication. Community of taste seemed much more unattainable to Stevenson than to Kant. Where can two people find their community of taste? How do we come to some agreement on any subject? (Conversation, for instance, is not about agreement but





contention, even competition.) Then a question that might have come out of the pages of Montaigne: 'How would you have people agree, when one is deaf and the other blind?' (p. 8). The solution? If it is impossible for two people to express fully the way they see the world in such a way that the other will understand and agree, then let them resort to clichés: 'They should be agreed on their catchword in "*facts of religion*," or "*facts of science*", or "*society, my dear*"' (p. 8).

Behind the joke is the sense that our human condition is so hopeless, so caught in isolating subjectivism, that the only way two people can make a life together is to cling to the deadwood of language, the clichés. In a succession of essays over the next years, Stevenson will fight against conventional attitudes and catchphrases, and he always fights for living, not dead, language, but here, for a moment, in the middle of a witticism, is the unspoken question whether, after all, it might just be better to put aside the struggle against conformity and live in a comfortable world of ready-made catchwords. There are times when we may be glad that 'the air of the fireside' has 'wither[ed] out all the fine wild-ings' of our individuality.

But the restless wit prohibits us from lingering with the ideas, and after another paragraph of blithe assertions and far-fetched allusions, Stevenson pauses for breath with a final aphorism, imposing an intimacy on us in its use of the second person: 'You can forgive people who do not follow you through a philosophical disquisition; but to find your wife laughing when you had tears in your eyes, or staring when you were in a fit of laughter, would go some way towards a dissolution of the marriage' (p. 9).

The energy resumes for one further outburst of what Gosse called his 'rather silly jesting', as Stevenson investigates which professions make the best husbands. Don't marry a writer, or a musician, though a painter is better. 'A ship captain is a good man to marry if it is a marriage of love, for absences are a good influence in love and keep it bright and delicate' (p. 10). By this





point, I suspect, even the most benevolent reader grows a little impatient. Do we really want to hear that '[m]en who fish, botanise, work with the turning-lathe, or gather sea-weeds, will make admirable husbands' (p. 10), or that men who do not drink or smoke will make bad husbands? We agree with the Spectator critic: it's just a 'bit of humouristic padding'. We are ready to leave.

But then suddenly we are caught by the final paragraph. It's as if Stevenson knows he has gone too far. He has had his eye on us all the time. 'These notes,' he says, 'if they amuse the reader at all, will probably amuse him more when he differs than when he agrees with them; at least they will do no harm, for nobody will follow my advice' (p. 11). We pause at the door and turn back to see where this is leading. It leads to a shift of tone, as if we have moved from Charles Lamb to Thomas Carlyle: 'But the last word is of more concern.' There is no joking here, as Stevenson no longer half-seated on the arm of the chair, stands, orator-like, for a final flourish – high rhetoric, but, if we attend, it may be more than just rhetoric:

Marriage is a step so grave and decisive that it attracts light-headed, variable men by its very awfulness. They have been so tried among the inconstant squalls and currents, so often sailed for islands in the air or lain becalmed with burning heart, that they will risk all for solid ground below their feet. Desperate pilots, they run their sea-sick, weary bark upon the dashing rocks. It seems as if marriage were the royal road through life, and realised, on the instant, what we have all dreamed on summer Sundays when the bells ring, or at night when we cannot sleep for the desire of living. They think it will sober and change them. Like those who join a brotherhood, they fancy it needs but an act to be out of the coil and clamour for ever (p. 11).





These people are absurdly naïve to think that marriage will effect some deep transformation and solve all their problems, and change them into better people. And yet we are not asked to mock these ‘desperate pilots, [who] run their sea-sick, weary bark upon the dashing rocks.’ Life is so overwhelming and we so desperate for some kind of certainty, that we will seize on anything – even marriage – as a kind of haven. The inattentive reader will applaud the dextrous crescendo here, but a more sensitive reader may be aware of the most important stylistic effect so far: we are being invited to engage our heart now, not just our wits, towards these poor, misguided souls who think marriage ‘will sober and change them’.

‘But this [hope] is a wile of the devil’s,’ he insists. Can we hear Carlyle? This is certainly not the way they speak at the Savile Club. And then the sudden swirl into Biblical imagery and rising rhetorical flourish. Nothing in life, not even marriage, will ensure us a carefree life. ‘To the end, spring winds will sow disquietude, passing faces leave a regret behind them, and the whole world keep calling and calling in their ears.’ And the final word? No blithe adolescent aphorism, but a bleak, compassionate irony: ‘For marriage is like life in this – that it is a field of battle, and not a bed of roses.’ (p. 11.) – ‘A field of battle, and not a bed of roses’? What happened to our wildly playful conversationalist? Do we feel as Gosse did (‘It is a paradox, that you, the General Exhilarator, should feel depressed. I take you for my emblem of life, and you talk of feeling lifeless’)? If life is a field of battle, why has this voice been so playful all this time? By his tone we would have thought life was a charming bed of roses.

But no, marriage, like life, and like conversations, and essays, is a field of battle, ‘the spice of life’, as he said in ‘Talk and Talkers’; ‘the friendliest relations are still a kind of contest’, and the contest we engage in as readers of these essays asks from us more than just applause for this





cynical and charming master of style. (The word 'battle' appears singly and in combination twenty times in the 130 pages of *Virginibus Puerisque*.) We are asked to join battle, and wrestle for the meaning, challenging the ideas and the examples and being alert to what new moves our friendly adversary will make next. In other words, we must play along. Only then will be we prepared for the shift in the final paragraph.

But even then, we must not take the final paragraph as the *moral* of the essay, as though the rest of the essay can be discounted. We will understand this approach better if we remember what Stevenson had said several years earlier about the place of the 'moral' in the modern fable: we can no longer 'append [the moral], in a tag, to the bottom of the piece, as one might write the name below a caricature'. The writer creates 'a logical nexus between the moral expressed and the machinery employed to express it' and so we cannot reduce the piece to 'any succinct formula without the loss of all that is deepest and most suggestive in it'.²⁵ I suggest that we should apply this approach to the essays too. The 'moral' of 'Virginibus Puerisque', then, is not that 'marriage is like life in this – that it is a field of battle, and not a bed of roses'; it is that we contend in this field of battle by playing with ideas, and points of view, and possibilities, on the arm of the chair, ready to shift to the next position, travelling hopefully towards a conclusion, but not concerned if we do not get there.

Not everyone, however, is ready for this kind of reading. Some, the Philistines, expect us to say what we mean;²⁶ these people tended to misread RLS as the sentimental saint of optimism. But others, perhaps like the Savilians, applauded the performance but denied that there could be anything serious behind such playfulness.²⁷ Are such readers playing the Englishman to Stevenson's Scot, in the way 'the contact of mind with mind is evaded with terror'?²⁸





Perhaps we are better able to read these essays today. We have learned to read Long John Silver, James Durie and the other fictional characters not as simplistic boys' heroes but as multi-faceted, complex characters. Why not bring that sophistication to the persona of the essayist? A playful and charming clubman, yes, but also a compassionate moralist, committed to encouraging us in a world filled with failure and misunderstanding and despair, where we can place no trust in social conventions or intellectual abstractions, or even language. The concern with style is not so much an attempt to be pretty or charming in the smoking-room, but a desperate effort to avoid deadening (and absurd) earnestness and certainty. This is not the voice of a clubbable jester, but a defiant cry from someone in immanent danger of shipwreck.

NOTES

- 1 J. A. Hammerton, ed. *Stevensoniana: An Anecdotal Life and Appreciation of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1910), pp. 145, 271.
- 2 Edmund Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats* (London: Heinemann, 1896), p. 281.
- 3 Hammerton, pp. 271-72.
- 4 *Critical Kit-Kats*, p. 281; *Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 vols, ed. by B. A. Booth and E. Mehew (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994, II, p. 320n.
- 5 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (London: Heinemann, 1924), pp. 6-7.
- 6 'Stevenson at Thirty-Two', Preface to *Treasure Island* (London: Heinemann, 1923), pp. xii-xiii.
- 7 Of immediate benefit for Stevenson was the number of important literary figures he met at the Savile. 'Je suis l'intime des rédacteurs,' he boasted to Baxter (*Letters*, II, p. 24). Members of the Savile Club included Kegan Paul, editor of the *New Quarterly Magazine* and publisher of *Inland Voyage*, *Travels with a Donkey and Virginibus Puerisque*; Leslie Stephen, editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*; John Morley, editor of the *Fortnightly Review* and later of the *English*





Men of Letters series (both Stephen and Morley, founding members in 1868, left the club in 1870); Charles Appleton, founder and editor of the *Academy*; Walter Pollock, editor of the *Saturday Review*, as well as other literary figures such as Edmund Gosse and Andrew Lang, and later Henry James and Thomas Hardy. – See P. C. Glubb [Sir Herbert Stephen], *The Savile Club 1868-1923* (Edinburgh: Privately Printed for the Committee of the Club, 1923), pp. 23-24, 101, 102. As Furnas puts it, 'A writer can go a long way, even clear to the top, without such connections, but they do no harm whatever' – J. C. Furnas, *Voyage to Windward: The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p. 101. For still more on the Savile Club, see Garrett Anderson, 'Hang Your Halo in the Hall!' *The Savile Club from 1868* (London: The Savile Club, 1993).

- 8 See, for instance, this aside in 'On Falling in Love' (1877): 'Words and acts are easily wrenched from their true significance; and they are all the language we have to come and go upon. A pitiful job we make of it, as a rule. For better or worse, people mistake our meaning and take our emotions at a wrong valuation' – *Virginibus Puerisque* (London: Heinemann, 1924, p. 27). This theme is taken up at greater length in the companion essay the following year, 'Truth of Intercourse'. *Lay Morals* devotes a considerable amount of time to the problem of how we can ever communicate our true feelings given our imperfect methods of communication. Critical essays like 'Pepys' (1881) admit that we can know others only in part. The 'Preface' to *Familiar Studies* (1881) admits that these short critical studies can make no claim to presenting the truth, but only a partial and falsified impression of men and books.
- 9 *Letters*, II, p. 328, p. 330n.
- 10 Like John Morley, Stephen was a founding member of the club in 1868 but ceased to be a member in 1870 (Glubb, 101, 102).
- 11 *Letters*, II, p. 217.
- 12 *Letters*, II, p. 319n.
- 13 *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* (London: Heinemann, 1924), p. 40. For Stevenson's gently scanning Burns's morals, see in particular his compassionate final assessment of Burns's life: 'He had trifled with life, and must pay the penalty. He had chosen to be Don Juan, he had grasped at temporary pleasures, and substantial happiness and solid industry had passed him by. He died of being Robert Burns, and there is no levity in such a statement of the case; for shall





we not, one and all, deserve a similar epitaph?' (pp. 49-50.) His dismissal of Shairp's claims as a biographer are summed up in two sentences: 'If you are so sensibly pained by the misconduct of your subject, and so paternally delighted with his virtues, you will always be an excellent gentleman, but a somewhat questionable biographer. Indeed, we can only be sorry and surprised that Principal Shairp should have chosen a theme so uncongenial.' (p. 25.)

- 14 *Letters*, II, pp. 221-22n.
- 15 *Letters*, III, p. 340n.
- 16 *Letters*, IV, p. 27. James Sully, whose thoughtful and familiar essays alternated with Stevenson's in the *Cornhill* (he contributed seventeen essays from 1875 to 1887), gives another hint of the club-like (and Savilian) intimacy of the *Cornhill* under Leslie Stephen. 'Although I was [Stevenson's] senior, the fact of our having joined the Savile at about the same time, and still more the synchronizing of our series of contributions to the *Cornhill*, made him seem in a curious way a brotherly companion' – *My Life and Friends* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1918), p. 215. Is it significant that after Payn took over the editorship, Sully's contributions diminished considerably to just three essays in four years?
- 17 *Letters*, IV, p. 40. (Cf. Exodus 1.8: 'Now, there arose up a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph.') One result of the inattention to the proofs of 'The Merry Men' was the appearance of the phrase 'the horror of the charnel brean', which led James Murray, compiling the OED, to write to Stevenson in 1887 asking about 'the meaning and source of the word'. Stevenson replied: 'That proof was never read; hence these tears.' (*Letters*, V, p. 365.)
- 18 *Letters*, IV, p. 154. The *Century* had published a very favourable review of *New Arabian Nights*, and was promoting Stevenson further in America by serialising *The Silverado Squatters* in November and December, 1883.
- 19 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Letters to His Family and Friends*, ed. by Sidney Colvin, 2 vols (London: Methuen, 1900), I, p. 103.
- 20 *Letters*, II, p. 187 and note. The essay also brought Stevenson his first fan from abroad: Arthur Patchett Martin, who had read the essay in Australia. In 1880 Martin wrote an article on Stevenson for *The Melbourne Review*, called 'An English Humourist' – a title that raises further questions about how readers categorised Stevenson's early persona (*Letters*, II, p. 212n).





21 *Letters*, II, p. 179.

22 The essay was written several months before Stevenson met Fanny Osbourne and before he ever seriously considered marriage for himself. Yet he poses as an expert about marriage, the wise older person imparting his experience *virginibus puerisque*, to young maids and boys (though actually his assumed reader is only male). In many other essays at this period he also poses as an older, wiser man, offering advice to young people. In the unpublished essay 'On the Choice of a Profession' (1879), Stevenson explicitly speaks in the character of an older man who has seen the world and is asked to advise a young man. *Lay Morals* (also 1879) is 'addressed [to] any young man, conscious of his youth, conscious of vague powers and qualities, and fretting at the bars of life' (Tusitala 26, p. 1).

23 *Memories and Portraits*, p. 73.

24 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque* (London: Heinemann, 1924), p. 1, henceforth cited in text.

25 'On Lord Lytton's *Fables in Slang*', Robert Louis Stevenson, *Essays Literary and Critical* (London: Heinemann, 1923), pp. 139, 140.

26 'Anybody, it is supposed [by the Philistines], can say what he means; and, in spite of their notorious experience to the contrary, people so continue to suppose.' – 'Truth of Intercourse', *Virginibus Puerisque*, p. 31.

27 Cf. George Moore: 'It is not Mr. Stevenson's brain that prevents him from being a thinker, but his style [. . .] his talent is vented in prettinesses of style. (George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man*, 1888, chapter 10.) Or H. L. Mencken: 'They have a certain external elegance, as of a well turned-out frock or charmingly decorated room, but their ideas are seldom notable either for vigor or for originality. When S wrote them he was trying to set up shop as a young literary exquisite in London.' (H. L. Mencken, in *The American Mercury* 3(2), Nov. 1924, pp. 378-80.)

28 'The Foreigner at Home', *Memories and Portraits*, p. 6.





‘The Suicide Club’: afterlives

Sarah Ames

Reminiscing upon the creation of his *New Arabian Nights* stories, Stevenson wrote to his cousin Bob: ‘Yes, I remember the *enfantement* of the Arabian Nights: the first idea of all was the handsome cabs, which I communicated to you in St Leonard’s Terrace drawing room. That same afternoon, the Prince de Galles and the Suicide Club were invented; and several more now forgotten. I must try to start ’em again.’¹ It is unlikely that, during this moment in St Leonard’s Terrace, Stevenson could have imagined the influence that the infant *New Arabian Nights* was to have. There was, in fact, no need for him to ‘start ’em again’; at least one of the stories, as we will see, never entirely ‘stopped’ – as Arabian Nights tales, of course, they were never designed to. While a number of studies have considered the maze of stories-within-stories of *New Arabian Nights* (1882) and *More New Arabian Nights: The Dynamiter* (1885), this essay focuses on the ‘Arabesque’ events occurring without and beyond Stevenson’s texts, as the fictional suicide club that begins Stevenson’s cycle of stories continued into real life.² Both Stevenson’s Club and the public preoccupation with its ‘real’ counterparts reflect contemporary concerns about the role of the gentleman amidst a consumer culture.

‘The Suicide Club’, the first of his topsy-turvy Arabian Nights tales, was published in 1882, after running in *London* magazine in 1878. Here, Stevenson depicts Prince Florizel of Bohemia and his right-hand-man, Colonel Geraldine, donning disguises to embark upon one of their frequent encounters with the masses. This time, however, a chance encounter with a man giving away cream tarts leads them to stumble across a gentlemen’s club in the heart of London, which they reveal to be a business enterprise, making money by ‘producing’ death. The group of disaffected gentlemen meets every evening to select one of its





members for an untimely end by participating in a card game which, assigning murderer and victim, determines their fate. For a fee of forty pounds, members join this club to have their *own* suicide performed *for* them. Very much tongue-in-cheek, Stevenson therefore begins his satirical take on the eternal Scheherazade tales with a dalliance with death.

Yet the idea of a suicide business did not perish quite as easily as its fictional victims and, in true Arabian Nights style, it continues beyond the initial tale: in the years following the publication of 'The Suicide Club', the newspaper press caught drift of the public intrigue and scandal surrounding such clubs, leading to the sudden circulation of reports about similar suicide clubs and money-making schemes. Some newspapers linked these suicide enterprises directly to Stevenson's creation, noting the relationship between suicide and business ventures – a link that is evident throughout the story itself. As the press made the most of the new interest in suicide businesses and their fictional counterpart, Stevenson was unwittingly placed at the heart of a cycle of supply and demand for both suicide and news. The economic motives that become evident in Stevenson's fictional suicide business were reflected in the real suicide clubs and the newspapers that reported on them at the end of the nineteenth century, as the notion of a burgeoning suicide trade began to flourish.

Victorian attitudes to suicide were complex, ranging from romanticised accounts of female suicides, to comic songs and sensational reports, to disgrace and dishonour.³ Yet Olive Anderson argues that suicide in the Victorian period was widely believed to be related to 'modern living' – the high levels of poverty and poor standard of living associated with industrialisation.⁴ Cities, in particular – over-crowded, heavily polluted and housing mass-poverty – were seen as suicide hotspots: for 'generations', Anderson argues, Victorian suicide has incorrectly been linked to 'the suffering and rootlessness bred by urban industrialism'.⁵ An





article in *Blackwood's* in 1880, for example, associated suicide with the overcrowding found in cities and claimed that 'as these miseries act mainly on the labouring classes, it is natural that the great majority of suicides should be found amongst the poor [. . .] it is approximately the same everywhere': death was seen as the 'natural' escape route from the endless cycle of work and poverty and the most straightforward method of removing such hardships, the article implied, was simply to remove individual existence itself.⁶ Barbara T. Gates even documents examples of the working classes joking about 'their alleged propensity to suicide', demonstrating the widespread belief in this relationship between suicide and poverty.⁷ In a longer study, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (1987), Anderson notes that, in the mid-nineteenth century, reformist politics made the idea of suicide a focal point in debates about class: 'sentimental radicalism fully succeeded in making the suicide of the poor seem part of the wider social problem of poverty, to be remedied through charity and goodwill'.⁸ Suicide was thus rendered understandable through the poor conditions in which many people lived and worked: remove people from such lifestyles, it seemed, and suicide would greatly diminish as a result.

Yet Emile Durkheim's *On Suicide* (1897) became one of the first studies to question this belief, by placing suicide in its sociological contexts: his study considered attributes which might increase the tendency to suicide, including psychological state, season, imitation and even 'race', as well as three social forms of suicide: altruistic, egoistical and anomic.⁹ In the category of 'anomic' suicide, Durkheim argued that poverty did not increase suicide rates, but that other factors, including instability, did:

[E]conomic hardship does not have the aggravating effect often attributed to it [. . .] One might even say that poverty protects. [. . .] So if industrial or financial crises increase suicides, it is not because they impoverish people, since





critical increases in prosperity have the same result; it is because they are [. . .] disturbances in the collective order.¹⁰

The working classes, he implied, 'know their place'; it is a dependency on wealth or status that is more susceptible to economic or social change. In clear contrast with Durkheim's reasoning, meanwhile, Anderson also disputes this presumed link between self-destruction and poverty: rather than linking suicide to this feeling of 'rulelessness', Anderson argues instead that this belief is a result of other factors, including the greater efficiency in collecting suicide statistics in urban areas in Victorian England, as well as the fact that 'for many reasons concealment levels usually fell with social class.'¹¹

While Stevenson's Suicide Club is a product of this nineteenth century sociology, it also anticipates Anderson's still more modern theories. Its 'suicides', for example, are concealed as an accident so that the Club's gentlemen members do not lose their honour in scandalous reports about their suicide – 'how simple! and how safe!' points out Malthus.¹² Like Anderson, Stevenson does not fall into line with the industrialisation theory and the view that suicide is a working class phenomenon, yet his suicide club still remains the product of 'modern living', 'rootlessness' and so-called 'progress': for Stevenson, suicide is a more elite occupation. The untimely deaths in 'The Suicide Club' remain distanced from an industrial vision of London: as a gentlemen's club, the Suicide Club attracts only those from the upper echelons of society, with the time, and money, to participate in such 'leisurely' activities. Members of this club 'do' absolutely nothing: 'Most of the party,' the narrator explains, 'were smoking, and drinking champagne', and this, it seems, is the most active that the group becomes. The group socialises in the usual smoking room where they 'compared and developed their different views of death' (pp. 16 and 17). In this context suicide is the result of a further modern advance: the displacement of a social class





through the rise of business and entrepreneurship that accompanies a consumer-driven economy. The instability that this generates for the position of the gentleman is, in 'The Suicide Club', terminal.

The rise of the self-made entrepreneur, as well as the extension of the franchise, left a whole class of unskilled gentlemen reliant on their waning honour, money and status in late-Victorian society. Arlene Young contends:

As the nineteenth century progresses, the gentleman becomes an increasingly unstable symbol; 'gentleman' becomes a value-laden term that is paradoxically empty of meaning. Gentlemanly types proliferate; there is the gentleman of birth, of wealth, of breeding, of religion, or of education, to mention just a few possibilities. At the same time, the essence of what a gentleman is becomes increasingly indefinable [. . .].¹³

This uncertainty appears to have been felt by the Victorians themselves. Robin Gilmour explains that, while there was confusion about what constituted a 'gentleman', it was this very ambiguity that made the role appealing to outsiders.¹⁴ While suicide was, as we have seen, widely believed to have proliferated amongst the working classes, due to their severe working and living conditions, at the opposite end of the spectrum the leisured gentleman suffered in another way, as his position became confused and increasingly obsolete. Gilmour states that: 'By the end of the nineteenth century the status of gentleman [. . .] was being claimed by those lower down the social scale'.¹⁵ Dependent on a sense of exclusivity (and, therefore, exclusion) the position of the gentleman was under threat of extinction due to the potential existence of *too many* gentlemen. '[E]mpty of meaning', Stevenson's gentlemen, therefore, seek their last hurrah in an organised, and exclusive, death.

The idea of the term 'gentleman' losing its elitist value was





thus double-edged in the mid-to-late Victorian period, as the position was appropriated by the lower orders, while at the same time duelling with the rise of the entrepreneur. Robert P. Irvine uses the example of the extension of the vote in 1867 to all male householders to exemplify this first problem: 'The exclusivity of the franchise had served to confirm the difference of 'gentleman' [. . .] from their labouring brethren. Its loss required conservatives to revisit a longstanding uncertainty about what constituted a 'gentleman' [. . .] to justify the survival of a social difference when there was no longer a constitutional one.'¹⁶ That lower classes were now entitled to the same benefits usually reserved for the gentleman displays an infringement on the terms which made 'gentleman' an exclusive status. The uncertainty to which this led was furthered, meanwhile, by the concept of the self-made man, who gains his wealth not through inheritance, but enterprise. The earliest entry of 'entrepreneur' (in terms of business) in the *OED* is in 1852; this concept of the independent businessman who throws in his lot to market forces was a newly-emergent phenomenon.¹⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, meanwhile, includes 'independent profit-making entrepreneurs' in his new middle class in the mid-Victorian period, and with the lower classes gaining a political voice, the attack on the gentleman was twofold.¹⁸

With the gentleman losing his exclusivity, 'The Suicide Club' portrays a last-ditch attempt at reasserting his status through spending. As Thorstein Veblen argued in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), the Club members focus on leisure to demonstrate their seemingly powerful social position: 'Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure.'¹⁹ Stevenson's Club, however, demonstrates the dangers of this: Durkheim warned that the thirst for 'novelty, for unknown indulgences and sensations that are as yet unnamed, but which lose all their appeal as soon as they have been experienced', quickly becomes 'futile'.²⁰ Stevenson's gentlemen divide





their time and money between a variety of different pursuits, yet have no real purpose behind their choices: with no skills or training the ‘manly accomplishments’ of which the man with the cream tarts boasts are all half-hearted and effeminate, yet they remain evidence of the gentleman’s free-time and indicative superiority – he can play the violin ‘nearly well enough’ to earn money, knows enough French to ‘squander money in Paris with almost the same facility as in London’ and has had a ‘duel about nothing’ (p. 6). None of these ‘skills’, however, are suited to the emergence of the current world of entrepreneurship. Alienated from a new generation of self-made men, Stevenson’s gentlemen must, therefore, retain the remaining dregs of their exclusivity in the only way they know how: clubland.

Gentlemen’s clubs emerged from the coffee house culture of the eighteenth century; yet, while some clubs retained a political edge, the main emphasis of the Victorian gentlemen’s club was on leisure. The rise of the club thus demonstrated a change in the perception of free time. Richard Dennis argues that: ‘indoor, and therefore more private, elite spaces reflected the increasing commodification of leisure – in restaurants, gentlemen’s clubs, concentrated along Pall Mall from the 1820s’.²¹ Leisure and private social meetings were now commodities which the wealthy would pay for, and which distinguished them from their working counterparts. Gentlemen’s clubs offered a home away from the home; a solely male space where food and accommodation could be procured – a gentleman could even, if he wished, live at his club. Membership to London’s most exclusive clubs, such as The Savile (established in 1868), The Athenaeum (1824), the more radical Reform Club (1836), and artists’ hang-out, The Garrick (1831), required both nomination to the club and a high subscription fee once elected. (Stevenson himself was a member of both the Athenaeum and the Savile, yet, unbeknown to his fellow members, needed to borrow money to pay his Savile subscription).²² The Suicide Club, with its shady morals and figures and





somewhat lax selection procedure, no doubt falls at the other end of the spectrum of respectability. Yet membership of a club demonstrated not only that a gentleman had the time for leisure, but that he could *pay* for it.²³

The gentlemen members of the Suicide Club present an early critique of the problems of this newly-consumer-based society and its clubland culture. Both threatened by and dependent on the entrepreneur, Stevenson's gentlemen see no alternative but to make use of the latest product on offer – death. Lisa Honaker argues that: 'Stevenson implies that the late-Victorian gentleman hero, having wasted his capital and time in self-indulgence, has lost his capacity for action, and subsequently, his authority in the world'.²⁴ At sea in the modern world of self-made men, the gentlemen become passive consumers of the amenities that are on offer. Malthus, long-term Club member whose reasons for joining are due to some form of perverse excitement rather than a desire to die, explains that the Club is 'the temple of intoxication' – he attends the Club for leisure purposes, as he would a spectator-sport (p. 20). The first in the story to die, Malthus takes his name from Thomas Malthus, who issued the warning that population growth would eventually outstrip resources and lead to decline, suggesting that there are always those whom progress leaves behind. The gentlemen have the money, but not the ability, so can lead a 'life of indulgence'; and membership to the Suicide Club is 'that last indulgence' (p. 8). Indulging, it seems, is all that the gentleman is good at, and it is this that provides the entrepreneur with an excellent target market. Suicide has become a commodity that the gentleman can consume in order to, illogically, assert his authority. Yet these gentlemen do not even have the capability to kill themselves without assistance, and are happy to pay money for a 'suicide', which is actually murder.

As key proponents of a consumer culture, Stevenson's gentlemen are keen to reclaim their exclusive status through leisure





and excess: the Suicide Club and the product it offers are seen by the Club's members as an example of 'progress' which they can buy in to. '[T]his is the age of conveniences,' claims the man with the cream tarts as he justifies his membership of the gentlemen's club. He continues:

We have affairs in different places; and hence railways were invented. Railways separated us infallibly from our friends; and so telegraphs were made that we might communicate speedily at great distances. Even in hotels we have lifts to spare us a climb of some hundred steps. Now, we know that life is only a stage to play the fool upon as long as the part amuses us. There was one more convenience lacking to modern comfort; a decent easy way to quit that stage; the back stairs to liberty; or, as I said this moment, Death's private door. This, my two fellow-rebels, is supplied by the Suicide Club. (p. 9)

The Suicide Club fills a gap in the market – as the man with the cream tarts notes, there is no easy way of quitting the world. The convenience offered by the Club is likened to the social advances in communications and technology: an easy death, the man claims, is a 'modern comfort'. The President even extends this 'comfort' by providing board and lodging for the Suicide Clubbers, for the accommodation supplied by his business is 'very fair, I believe, and clean, although, of course, not luxurious' (p. 19). With the Club called into existence by the dicta of supply and demand, the President is, arguably, no more a criminal than any factory-owner in the country. The gentlemen's club has entered a capitalist world spiralling around supply and demand, and suicide has become the latest convenience in which to indulge. The commodification of death reinstates the gentleman within an elite sphere of people able to commit their time (death, of course, is not guaranteed *immediately* by the Suicide Club) and money to this 'luxury'.





Yet the Club, which 'supplies' its members with suicide through a card game, remains essentially a gambling joint; a temple to the possibilities that can be created from nothing by the laws of chance, including, ultimately, death. Rather than asserting themselves, the gentlemen are victims of their own inabilities, without the skills or motivation to survive in the current economic conditions, and their club and its card game are a final attempt to maintain an aloof distance from the world. The Suicide Club is, therefore, the anti-gentlemen's club: the Club actually becomes a method of ridding the world of this cumbersome social class. Suicide, here, both produces money and exterminates the inefficiency and excesses of a world dominated by gentlemen. By generating money while providing a desired service and increasing efficiency, this vision of a suicide business in the late-nineteenth century offers an unusual example of progress and advancement.

In fact, the link between suicide and business which Stevenson identified was reflected in the reality of late-Victorian society, for in a capitalist world even death becomes a commodity. In 1884, *The Pall Mall Gazette* cited Stevenson and 'The Suicide Club' as the possible source of a similar money-making scheme:

Perhaps inspired by Mr. Louis Stevenson's Suicide Club, an ingenious American (Americans are always either ingenious or enterprising) recently conceived the idea of opening a hotel for suicides. He proposed to let rooms and furnish board to gentlemen and ladies who contemplated self-destruction, and to furnish all modern conveniences. Each room has to be supplied with a finely ornamented brass hook upon which the guest could get up and hang himself at any hour. And so on. [. . .] Americans are unfortunately possessed of great recuperative powers, and after carefully examining the statistics of suicide it was found that the speculation was not likely to be prosper-





ous. English capitalists with a turn for the eccentric might take the hint. It might indeed be said that our own hotels required no special apparatus.²⁵

The hotel owner, of course, eventually realises that he would be hard-pressed to supply his hotel with enough potential suicides each night to cover his costs. Yet the emphasis on convenience – this hotel usefully enables the option of hanging yourself ‘at any hour’ – is similar to the man with the cream tarts’ comparison of a suicide service to the convenience of trains, telegraphs and lifts. A night in the suicide hotel, we are led to believe, would be an indulgence. Going it alone is not the way to commit suicide in these economic conditions, it seems: suicide must be *supplied* on-tap for the comfort and convenience of the more passive suicidal consumer, so that an appropriate death can be accessed as, and when, it is required. There is the implication that, in these thoroughly regressive operations, a twisted form of progress is somehow being made.

Whether or not Stevenson was really the inspiration for this hotel is questionable. Yet it remains important that, following Stevenson’s invention of a suicide business, the press began to report the existence of such suicide enterprises at all. Prior to the publication of ‘The Suicide Club’, I have been unable to find a newspaper containing any reference to a suicide club. Yet after Prince Florizel’s adventures in *New Arabian Nights* and *More New Arabian Nights*, the press suddenly became aware of such establishments and money-making schemes (or, it seems, invented them). In other words, the concept of a ‘suicide club’ very quickly worked its way into the public lexicon. Whether inspired by Stevenson’s story, or just given more attention as a result of it, these clubs struck a grisly chord with the public and the regular updates on the matter were clearly a hit in the newspapers. Just as the suicide business emphasised convenience and public choice, the press supplied stories to an equally demanding audience. Suicide did not only provide business opportunities for





entrepreneurs; it was a topic that sold newspapers.

The coverage of the suicide clubs appears to have been limited to, what we would now call, the 'tabloid' press. Papers such as the *Pall Mall Gazette*, particularly while under the editorship of William Stead between 1883 and 1889, and the *Illustrated Police News*, were especially keen on such stories, as were regional presses such as the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* - such newspapers marketed themselves on sensation. Anderson explains the importance of suicide and scandal to the newspaper business in *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England*:

A good suicide was almost as gripping as a good murder, and far more interesting than most fatal accidents. If a case involved goings-on likely to incur public disapproval, the individuals concerned naturally tried to conceal them; but their efforts were always likely to be frustrated by the eagerness of reporters to retail precisely such details to their readers. Four different genres of suicide were very familiar: the sad, the wicked, the strange, and the comic. Each was associated with certain stock character types. [. . .] For each type there was an appropriate vocabulary and iconography, conveying, as required, sentimental or charitable pathos, didactic moralizing, prurient or gruesome sensationalism, bizarre interest, ironic humour, or vulgar farce. [. . .] Very often [. . .] the tone of the discussion reflected a decision to regard a particular death as belonging to a particular genre of suicide [. . .].²⁶

Suicide was channelled into other linguistic discourses in order to make its tabooed status more palatable to a sensation-seeking public - it became appropriate to read suicide in terms of genres. Suicide clubs would no doubt fall in amongst the 'strange' suicides of 'bizarre interest'. A further genre, in fact, can be added to the four that Anderson notes: in the midst of the press's Suicide Club fever, the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex*





Chronicle ran an article entitled, 'Singularities of Suicide', in which 'Some Distinguished Suicides' formed its own sub-heading to dwell upon the bounty of this category, which included Thomas Chatterton, who poisoned himself at seventeen years old.²⁷ Like Stevenson's Suicide Clubbers, who drink to 'notable suicides in the past' (p. 17), this publicity lends a certain glamour to suicide, just as suicide added intrigue to newspapers. When we consider that newspaper articles indicate the interests of their readership, the increase in stories about suicide clubs reflects a macabre fascination with sensation held by the Victorian public. Investigative articles such as 'What Hanging is Like', in the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, suggest a morbid interest in details.²⁸

Given the exposure and apparent inspiration that 'The Suicide Club' gave to such clandestine groups, it is not surprising, therefore, that Stevenson's story continued in tabloid form. Indeed, amidst a consumer-driven culture, the ephemerality and disposable nature of newspapers themselves makes them a fitting communication medium for this topic, for they enact a form of suicide themselves. Newspapers are produced only to be immediately consumed and thrown away – they perform the self extinction that their stories describe. Furthermore, by presenting an ever-changing medium, the newspaper somehow *demand*s to be destroyed – halted midway through its story – in order to make way for the next instalment: this 'suicide' is essential to its survival. We might recall that *New Arabian Nights* itself calls on this structure of continual publication, for, as Arabian Nights tales, the stories must be constantly replaced in order to prevent the death of the storyteller – and, therefore, the story itself. Published in *London* magazine in 1878, 'The Suicide Club' began Stevenson's proliferation of Arabian Nights tales, which in turn made way for *More New Arabian Nights* in 1885. The newspaper's role as storyteller is, similarly, to draw out its readers' interest for as long as possible by providing constant updates and additional material.





Keen to gain their readers' attention immediately amidst this disposable way of life, these tabloid Scheherezades initially appealed to public interest through attempts to discover the location of the fictional club. The *Daily News* asked 'who passes the pavement above Trafalgar-square without shuddering at the thought that there the Suicide Club murdered one of its oldest victims?'²⁹ The *Pall Mall Gazette*, meanwhile, narrowed in on the Club's headquarters, printing a front-page piece on the same day with the vaguely decisive claim that: 'Mr. Stevenson's Suicide Club held its meetings in some Soho by-street (we have searched for it in vain).'³⁰ This deliberate confusion of fiction and reality continued as late as 1899, when *The Sketch* published a full-page article claiming to detail the particulars of the President's house, the restaurant where the cream tarts are distributed and various other haunts of Prince Florizel, as well as pondering 'how many of us would not go' to Florizel's cigar shop for a smoke and a chat, if only we knew where it was located.³¹

Clearly unable to track the Club down, most reporters abandoned the search. However, the success of *New Arabian Nights* seems to have alerted them to similar groups which apparently now existed in the real world, and to the public appetite for such stories. Cited as inspiration for an American suicide club, Stevenson's text thus began to work its way into real life. The London *Daily News* went straight to the source and linked a supposed copy-cat suicide club in Bridgeport, Connecticut directly to the availability and influence of pirated copies of Stevenson's text. The newspaper quipped that such groups existed to even the score for authors such as Stevenson:

The Americans may refuse to grant English authors copyright, but the authors are not unavenged. A few months ago an American lawyer of repute went to bed after studying a pirated copy of an English romance. Next day he was found paralysed, but was able to tell what had occurred.





He had dreamed that he was swimming for dear life in a river full of alligators. [. . .] The alligator was just about to snap, the dreamer made a wild plunge, and knocked his head against the wall. He soon expired, and the author was avenged. Now it is Mr. Louis Stevenson's turn. He has done to death four Americans of German origin. Year by year he has culled them like flowers. He wrote an account of a Suicide Club, and those imitative Teutons founded one on his model. Five years ago there were five of them, now there is one. They met, drew lots, and he on whom the lot fell took his own life at the end of the year. [. . .] It should make Congress reflect on copyright. Why circulate cheap editions of English novels, which, by the way, do not cause paralysis and suicide at home? The dearer such volumes are, the better for American readers.³²

Once more, the discourse surrounding suicide clubs relates them to a financial issue; this time, involving the circulation of cheaper texts and the influence that literature has over the (indicatively 'inferior') American public. While Stevenson's short story presents suicide as a business opportunity, the cycle here comes full circle as suicide itself is claimed to be the result of copyright loopholes in the publishing business. Presented as naive victims of copyright laws, American readers are apparently risking their health by taking advantage of the wide availability of accessibly priced, pirated literature. While suicide both aids and signifies productivity in the business ventures we have already seen, here it is a result of it. When we also consider the proliferation of literary suicide clubs that followed Stevenson's invention – two of the most swift-off-the-mark being *The Faith That Kills* (1899), the focus of which is also a suicide club centring around a card game, and the short story 'The Suicide Club', published in *Illustrated Chips* in 1899, in which the protagonist unwittingly joins a suicide club – the danger to readers appears endless.³³

While the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* claimed





that: 'Some famous clubs have had their existence only in the imagination of the projectors. Such are Robert Louis Stevenson's Suicide Club', there was, in fact, a fascination with the mysterious suicide clubs which were now appearing in the public realm.³⁴ The *Pall Mall Gazette* remained a particularly eager reporter of such groups, and followed the various American suicide clubs through their gradual decline. Headlines such as 'Another Victim Selected' kept its readership well-informed.³⁵ The origins of the Bridgeport Suicide Club are somewhat flippantly described in an article entitled, 'A Suicide Club – Extraordinary Story':

Four years ago, five citizens of German birth met on Easter Monday, and feeling low-spirited, owing to meagre wages and consequent insufficiency of beer, they agreed, half in jest, to form themselves into a club for the purpose of committing suicide, one a year. [. . .] Last year member No. 3 cut his throat, and yesterday the President received a note from Wendell Baum's landlady saying he had shot himself at noon. Now the president of the club is the only member left, and a good deal of money will be wagered as to whether he will kill himself or not, next Easter Monday. The general opinion is that he will.³⁶

Lack of money is cited as the actual motivation for this working-class suicide group, which conforms to the suggestion that suicide and poverty were linked; Stevenson's Club, on the other hand, has the opposite problem. Yet for both groups, suicide is a useful exit from the world – for these men it is a way of ending current financial difficulties. Furthermore, the group, like Stevenson's, becomes a distanced form of entertainment on which money can be won and lost, with the public involved in gambling on the outcome. Clearly the subject of great public speculation, 'general opinion' eyed the extinction of its president – and thus the club itself – with interest; yet this bitter-sweet extermination would, of course, annihilate the newspaper's story





as well.

The publicity which suicide clubs were attracting led to more and more bizarre reports to satisfy an intrigued public. The *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* caught drift of a New York club which was a decidedly jovial affair, all things considering:

The club is making preparations for its second annual banquet [. . .] This feast will be preceded by a short street parade, and the members will wear red badges on their coat lapels on which a skull and crossbones are embroidered within a diamond. Before the banquet a drawing takes place, and the man who gets the black ball is pledged to commit suicide within a year. It has been declared that the one who draws the black ball can only escape his obligation to commit suicide by procuring a human skull and presenting it to the club.³⁷

Abounding with cliché, suicide clubs clearly played up to their new status, and the secrecy which Stevenson's Club finds so essential in order to retain a sense of honour and decency was now unnecessary: as we have seen, the exclusivity in which the gentlemen find shelter in Stevenson's Suicide Club had now been appropriated by the working classes, whose very being and status, unlike the gentleman, were not reliant upon honour. Prince Florizel's main objection to the Suicide Club seems to be that it is indecent: 'If a man has made up his mind to kill himself, let him do it, in God's name, like a gentleman' (p. 18), he announces, presumably inferring that a gentleman would be more discreet. Clubs, street parades, banquets and gambling are, however, the ways in which gentlemen and labourers alike seem to kill themselves, in these post-gentlemanly days. The emphasis of both groups on indulgence, meanwhile, is provocative: while Stevenson's Suicide Clubbers throw their money around in an attempt to reassert their authority, this suicide club has also entered a consumerist world and makes a point of spectacle. The





deliberate exhibition that the group makes glamorises its actions to both potential recruits and the newspaper's readership. That this club is so public about its actions also suggests a kind of 'status' in suicide and in membership, and an enjoyment of the publicity surrounding the club's actions.³⁸ Of course, all of this is somewhat futile given that the members must ultimately sacrifice their lives in order to become a part of such festivities. However, these quirky additions provided newspapers with interesting stories; the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, did, nevertheless, seem slightly put out that this club's final member had not yet had the opportunity to carry out his oath and kill himself, after being imprisoned for burglary.³⁹

That suicide clubs were now a glamorous selling point for newspapers is witnessed, perhaps most comically, in the *Illustrated Police News*. All for equality, it seems, the newspaper focuses on a rare club in this world of men, which is for women only. Yet the bizarre manner in which it is presented is slightly more revealing. The article features the useful addition of a slightly unnecessarily large, full-page illustration of a scantily clad woman on a dishevelled bed committing suicide (see Appendix). The only indication in the illustration that this is some kind of suicide club is in the hastily sketched 'rules' on the bedroom wall; the artists' eye for detail having drifted to other particulars. What is more, the caption runs: 'A Ladies' Suicide Club: Young and Beautiful Women Band Themselves Together to Die.'⁴⁰ This club, it seems, is more a product of male fantasy than reality, as the illustration suggests, yet the excess that apparently characterises the club is reminiscent of the Suicide Clubbers' smoking room champagne. Implying that suicide is a privilege normally reserved for the unattractive, the accompanying article demonstrates a genuine confusion that these 'beautiful' women should have any reason or desire to die.⁴¹ The format chosen by the *Police News* to present this group was clearly with the intention of appealing to a public fascinated by scandal: the intrigue of





suicide clubs presented newspapers – and readers’ imaginations – with opportunities to run riot.



© The British Library Board. Illustrated Police News, 30 Jul. 1898, p. 7

A LADIES' SUICIDE CLUB.
YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL WOMEN BAND THEMSELVES TOGETHER TO DIE.

Stevenson's story spun-out in the press long after the *New Arabian Nights* stories themselves appeared in serial form: having inspired newspapers, literature and public imagination, 'The Suicide Club', it seems, may even have prompted the inauguration of tribute clubs themselves. That reports of suicide





clubs appeared after the publication of *New Arabian Nights* and continued for the rest of the century certainly suggests that the interest in Stevenson's text sparked a fascination with similar activities in the 'real' world, where the relationship between suicide and business remains just as clear. Yet it also demonstrates the appetite for sensation in a consumer-driven culture from which both news media and literary fiction were keen to profit. While, in Stevenson's 'The Suicide Club', suicide becomes a commodity for the rapidly-disappearing, passive elite which can be bought and sold, and is reliant on an entrepreneur who provides this service, the newspaper articles we have seen also link suicide to consumerism, business and productivity: death is both a catalyst to and a result of business ventures. What is more, the commodification of suicide provokes a race in the newspapers to discover every possible scandalous detail surrounding the mysterious clubs, in order to swiftly satisfy an intrigued public before the newspaper itself is disposed of. By producing death, therefore, suicide clubs also produced potential newspaper stories: the *New Arabian Nights* stories, based around the idea of prolonging Scheherazade's life through storytelling, continued as a newspaper phenomenon fuelled by death – and ending with it. Stevenson's 'Suicide Club' began further cycles of both money-making and of textual production from the unlikely starting point of extinction, enabling groups of people far and wide to kill themselves with a captivated public audience, 'like a gentleman'.

NOTES

- 1 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth, and Ernest Mehew (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994-5), vol. 3, p. 324.
- 2 In particular, see Barry Menikoff, 'New Arabian Nights: Stevenson's Experiment in Fiction', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45.3 (1990), 339-362, and Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism: A Future Feeling* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 82-144.





- 3 For more on the changing attitudes to suicide, see Olive Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 191-259, and Barbara T. Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- 4 Anderson, 'Did Suicide Increase with Industrialization in Victorian England?', *Past & Present*, 86 (1980), 149-173 (p. 168).
- 5 Anderson, 'Did Suicide Increase with Industrialization in Victorian England?', p. 149.
- 6 'Suicide', *Blackwood's*, June 1880, pp. 719-35 (p. 725).
- 7 Gates, *Victorian Suicide*, p. 50.
- 8 Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England*, p. 205.
- 9 'Altruistic' suicide considers self-sacrifice for the sake of the group, while 'Egoistic' suicide considers those who find themselves excluded from various social groupings; 'Anomic' suicide (meaning 'rulelessness') is related to economic change.
- 10 Emile Durkheim, *On Suicide*, trans. Robin Buss (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 267. Durkheim's study included suicide statistics from countries such as France, Belgium, Italy and the United States, but not from England.
- 11 Anderson, 'Did Suicide Increase with Industrialization in Victorian England?', p. 162.
- 12 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Suicide Club', *New Arabian Nights*, Tusitala Edition (London: William Heinemann, 1924), p. 19. Further references appear in the text.
- 13 Arlene Young, *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel: Gentlemen, Gents and Working Women* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 6.
- 14 Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 3.
- 15 Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman*, p. 183.
- 16 Robert P. Irvine, 'Romance and Social Class', *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Penny Fielding (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 27-40 (p. 27).
- 17 'Entrepreneur', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Accessed 5 Jan. 2011.
- 18 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Abacus,





- 1997), p. 172.
- 19 Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, ed. by Martha Banta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 53.
- 20 Durkheim, *On Suicide*, p. 281.
- 21 Richard Dennis, 'Modern London', *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume III 1840-1950*, ed. by Martin Daunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 95-131 (pp. 120-1).
- 22 His response to his election to the élite club in 1874, having been elected by Colvin, is somewhat blasé: 'I hear I am elected for the Savile, but that to make my calling and election sure I must dub up £10.10: which I can't having lent my all to a needy friend'. *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 22.
- 23 There are many accounts from the nineteenth century detailing the particulars of club life. One of the most wide-ranging is John Timbs, *Clubs and Club Life in London: With Anecdotes of its Famous Coffee Houses, Hostelrys, and Taverns, from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Time* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1872).
- 24 Lisa Honaker, 'The Revisionary Role of Gender in R. L. Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights* and *Prince Otto*: Revolution in a "Poison Bad World"', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 44.3 (2001), 297-319 (p. 302).
- 25 'Occasional Notes', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 Jul. 1884, p. 4.
- 26 Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England*, p. 195.
- 27 'Singularities of Suicide', *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle etc.*, 30 Jul. 1892, p. 9.
- 28 'What Hanging is Like', *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 24 Oct. 1885, p. 5.
- 29 *Daily News*, 24 Jun. 1885, p. 5.
- 30 'Baccarat in Soho', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 Jun. 1885, p. 1.
- 31 'The House of the President of the Suicide Club', *The Sketch*, 4 Jan. 1899, p. 422.
- 32 'Masses v. Classes', *Daily News*, 30 May 1890, p. 5.
- 33 See Emeric Hulme-Beaman, *The Faith that Kills* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1899), and 'The Suicide Club', *Illustrated Chips*, 10 Jun. 1899, p. 3.
- 34 'Queer Clubs', *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle etc.*, 23 Jan. 1892, p. 12.





- 35 'The New York Suicide Club: Another Victim Selected', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 Jun. 1895, p. 7. The *Manchester Times* reported the unusual case of a woman joining this group, the Round Robin Suicide Club, who 'insisted on taking her chances with the rest of us.' 'A Suicide Club', 21 Jun. 1895, p. 8.
- 36 'A Suicide Club – Extraordinary Story', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 Apr. 1890, p. 5.
- 37 'A Suicide Club', *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 24 Feb. 1894, p. 5. This club is also, presumably, the source of another story in which a club member is reported to have gassed himself. Proof that he was a part of the New York Suicide Club comes in the form of papers found on the body, which were 'headed by the Club insignia of skull and crossbones printed in red'. *The Friend of India and Statesman*, 5 Feb. 1896, p. 22.
- 38 In fact, the promotion of suicide clubs became a collaborative affair between the newspapers and the clubs themselves: 'A meeting of the Club has been held at which reporters were present, and the proceedings are published in the New York papers. No speeches were made, but the members drew lots [. . .]. The doomed man showed not the slightest emotion, but quietly retired from the room, the understanding being that he would commit suicide within a fortnight. An immense crowd of spectators, chiefly foreigners, had assembled outside the Club's premises during the meeting.' 'Further extraordinary revelations', *The Friend of India & Statesman*, 30 Jul. 1895, p. 6.
- 39 The report informs the reader that: 'He has not yet committed suicide, but is in gaol on a charge of burglary.' 'A Suicide Club', *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, p. 5.
- 40 'A Ladies' Suicide Club: Young and Beautiful Women Band Themselves Together to Die', *Illustrated Police News*, 30 Jul. 1898, pp. 3 and 7.
- 41 'Most of the women who have killed themselves when ordered have been young and good-looking, and in no case has actual poverty been the contributing cause.' 'A Ladies' Suicide Club', p. 3. While this sustains the sentimental notion that poverty was linked to suicide, evidently age and attractiveness were also deemed competing factors by the *Illustrated Police News*.





Stevenson in the wilderness: California, *Kidnapped* and *The Master of Ballantrae*

Jenni Calder

Through most of the nineteenth century, the European exploration of 'undiscovered' wilderness featured prominently in the public mind. Until well into the century, Scotland itself was relatively unexplored; in the latter part of the previous century a common perception by outsiders of the Scottish Highlands was of an uncharted wilderness inhabited by barbarians. Stevenson absorbed a sense of wilderness, both native and exotic, which permeated his writing, but when he made his first journey beyond Europe the experience of untamed territory intensified. The consequences emerge in his fiction, and are particularly uncompromising in *The Master of Ballantrae*, written after his second visit to the United States, 1887-8. In this novel, wild country is not only a challenge to the resources and resilience of human endeavour, but acquires additional resonance as a metaphor for emotional and psychological wastelands.

Stevenson's first visit to the United States was precipitate and unprepared, following a sudden decision to seek out Fanny Osbourne in California. Shortly after his arrival in Monterey, in September 1879, he had a near-death experience in the Santa Lucia Mountains, documented only in letters he wrote shortly afterwards to Sidney Colvin, Charles Baxter and Edmund Gosse.¹ When he reached Monterey he was already at a very low ebb, both physically and emotionally, after a punishing journey across the continent and the confusion of his relationship with Fanny. Stevenson headed for the wild, perhaps deliberately courting death. His accidental discovery by an angora goat rancher saved him: 'according to all rule,' he wrote to Gosse, 'it should have been my death'.

He had travelled a vast distance in alien territory, observ-





ing the American forests, plains and mountains from inside a cramped and insalubrious railroad car and witnessing some of the effects of frontier country on both native and incomer. 'I do not know if I am the same man I was in Europe,' he wrote to Gosse. He found himself 'over here in a new land, and all the past uprooted with one tug'.² The dislocation of the journey and the apparent ambivalence of Fanny left him feeling numb and dejected. It is not clear what he hoped for when he sought solitude and the mountains, but it left him with an acute sense of human frailty and his own vulnerability in particular.

Stevenson relished wild terrain, and was sensitive to landscape empty of humanity. He himself provided a useful definition of wilderness, in his essay 'Memoirs of an Islet', where he describes the island of Erraid, which would feature so prominently in *Kidnapped*. There, apart from the lighthouse settlement which 'scarce encroached beyond its fences [. . .] the ground was all virgin, the world all shut out, the face of things unchanged by any of man's doings'.³ He would explore the implications of 'the world all shut out' in many different environments and manifestations.

Stevenson's enthusiasm for the Scottish landscape was rooted in his understanding of its organic role in Scotland's past. He shared that with Scott, but unlike Scott he did not present landscape as a picturesque enhancement of historical narrative. And unlike his compatriot John Muir, in California at the same time as Stevenson although on an expedition to Alaska when Stevenson first arrived, he did not see wilderness as a source of spiritual nourishment. (It is intriguing to speculate on what might have transpired had Muir and Stevenson met.) No doubt schooled by the experiences of his engineering family, his response to the harsh realities of Scottish rock, mountain and water was shaped by an understanding of its unforgiving character. At the same time, hills were always for him a place of contemplation, and seas always an invitation to adventure.

When Stevenson headed for the Californian hills it seemed to





be solitude he sought, and perhaps solace – as he had done in the Cévennes – rather than unembellished nature; solitude that might help him to recover his identity. The Cévennes experience was relatively benign, although he was emotionally vulnerable then also. He was, however, able to locate himself in a terrain that was full of historical resonance with Scotland. Whatever his emotional and practical difficulties, and the alienation from his travelling companion, he connects with the territory. Making a connection with America's west coast was more challenging, though at the same time a source of creative stimulus – as indeed was the whole American experience. He was primed by childhood reading to find the 'frontier' a place of adventure, and by adult reading of Hawthorne, Whitman and others to find the United States both interesting and energising, but he was unprepared for the raw reality he encountered. It was characteristic of Stevenson that the very lack of preparation sharpened his perceptions and responses.

In many ways the United States was much more foreign to him than France and the adjustment required was far greater. The America of the imagination he had absorbed through the printed word did not equip him for the confusion and dissonance that marked his landfall on US soil. The city of New York was itself a kind of wilderness, where Stevenson's 'nightmare wanderings' in the rain took him through a series of baffling encounters.⁴ The transcontinental journey that followed was full of moments of misunderstanding and failure to communicate. His 'unfamiliarity with the language' caused many problems and was in itself a challenge to identity.⁵ Although initially he relished the landscape he was travelling through, and savoured the names of states, territories, towns and rivers, the experience palled, especially after the transfer to the emigrant train at Council Bluffs and the crossing of the Missouri. The discomforts increased, and the scale of the plains and desert landscape, unchanging for days on end, offered little that was familiar or reassuring. He began to long





for mountains, and was elated when the train finally reached the pine forests and rivers of the Sierra Nevada: 'I had come home again – home from unsightly deserts, to the green and habitable corners of the earth'.⁶

It is not surprising that, on arrival in Monterey, he felt the need for space where he was free of the effort of communication. It was a first step in locating himself. But the Santa Lucia Mountains, far from being 'green and habitable', were an unequivocal reminder of the dangers of lone sojourn in inhospitable terrain and the limits of self-sufficiency, especially as his physical and emotional resources were so much depleted. When he headed for the mountains again some months later, this time going north, he was newly married to Fanny who had experienced frontier life. After several difficult months he had reconfigured his identity and had, at least to some extent, adjusted to the often contradictory mix of the untamed and the civilised that California offered. He had acclimatised, recovered his health to some degree, and was now the husband of an American and stepfather of American children. He was in a much better state to confront American wilderness, especially the partly natural, partly man-made wilderness offered by the deserted mining camp of Silverado, where they found:

mountain and house and the old tools of industry [. . .]
all alike rusty and down-falling. The hill was here wedged
up, and there poured forth its bowels in a spout of broken
mineral; man with his picks and powder, and nature with
her own great blasting tools of sun and rain, labouring
together at the ruin of that proud mountain. The view up
the canyon was a glimpse of devastation; dry red minerals
sliding together, here and there a crag, here and there a
dwarf thicket clinging in the general *glissade*, and over
all a broken outline trenching on the blue of heaven. The
human impact on the mountain was profound, but in the





end the mountain prevailed.⁷

Stevenson's response to the Silverado wilderness was open and appreciative, and it helped to consolidate his adjustment to America (and possibly to marriage) including the precarious and temporary nature of his life there.

Six years after these experiences Stevenson was writing about a young man's encounter with a hostile landscape, struggling with disorientation, bewilderment, solitude, and a total lack of the skills and understanding needed to survive. An inexperienced youth faces both wild seas and wild lands (mountains less 'green' and less 'habitable' than the analogy Stevenson makes between Scottish mountains and the Sierra Nevada suggests) for the first time. He is rescued by a native adapted to the demands of rugged territory. The status of David Balfour as hero is equivocal. Although he has courage, as the fight in the roundhouse demonstrates, in a desperate situation he does not, like Jim Hawkins, engage in solitary combat or take initiatives on which the lives of others depend. Although presented as another adventure story for the young, *Kidnapped* in fact marks a departure from convention in a way that *Treasure Island* does not. David's reactive pragmatism and Stevenson's irony ensure that *Kidnapped*'s pivotal character is not conventionally heroic. His experience is an education in the nature, in both senses of the word, of a part of Scotland until then unknown to him, rather than a personal test.

David is pragmatic, 'a steady lad [. . .] and a canny goer' as described by his father,⁸ which helps him to survive, but it is not enough to sustain him in the wild. Unlike Alan Breck, he has no sense of identity with it. David set off on from his home village in the Borders, 'overjoyed to get away out of that quiet countryside' and assuming his destination was 'a great, busy house, among rich and respected gentlefolk, of my own name and blood' (p. 4). These seem very limited horizons. But he is never far from less comfortable surroundings. The way he takes is the 'green drove road', apparently benign but with connotations that are less so





(p. 50). There are hints at the outset of trouble to come. In his essay 'Pastoral' Stevenson suggests the wild side of the herder's life:

The drove roads lay apart from habitation; the drovers met in the wilderness, as to-day the deep-sea fishers meet off the banks in the solitude of the Atlantic; and in the one as in the other case rough habits and fist-law were the rule. Crimes were committed, sheep filched, and drovers robbed and beaten; most of which offences had a moorland burial and were never heard of in the courts of justice.⁹

The drove road north from Essendean leads David to encounters with rough habits and rough justice in a series of physically and psychologically hostile environments. He may have had a sheltered childhood in a quiet village, but for much of their history the Borders were notoriously untamed, frontier country outwith the law and beset by dangers. Scott had often evoked its lawlessness, particularly in *Guy Mannering* (1815), and of course Stevenson himself would return there in *Weir of Hermiston*, where the environment is far from benign.

When David struggles onto dry land after the wreck of the *Covenant* he has to face not only wilderness – 'I had never seen a place so desert and desolate' – but distance from humanity (p. 80). Every move he makes on Earraid is a contest with granite, heather and bogs – the landscape resists him, and he resists the landscape. But it is solitude above all that undermines his spirit. 'I had become in no way used to the horrid solitude of the isle, but still looked around me on all sides (like a man that was hunted) between fear and hope that I might see some human creature coming.' His head is 'half turned with loneliness'. The sight of the roofs of Iona across the water is a comfort but also underlines his predicament, 'the horror I had whenever I was quite alone with dead rocks, and fowls, and the rain, and the cold sea' (p. 85). The





conjunction of barren terrain and isolation sets the tone for the whole of his Highland adventure.

The horror of the wilderness stays with David, and his encounters with people and places as he makes his way across Mull and onto the mainland do little to dispel his disquiet. David's Highland adventure is punctuated by episodes of illness and exhaustion. On Earraid he is fevered. After the killing of the Red Fox and his flight with Alan Breck he lies in the 'upper wood of Lettermore' with aching sides: 'my head so swam, my tongue so hung out of my mouth with heat and dryness, that I lay beside him like one dead' (p. 110). On the rock in Glencoe he is tormented by heat: 'There were giddiness, and sickness, and sharp pangs like rheumatism' (p. 130). He and Alan make the grim traverse of Rannoch Moor to Ben Alder. As the troops scour the heather they are at times forced to lie 'as still as the dead...afraid to breathe'. David is faint and aching: 'the labouring of my heart, the soreness of my hands, and the smarting of my throat and eyes in the continual smoke of dust and ashes, had soon grown so unbearable that I would have gladly given up' (p. 143). And in Cluny's Cage David is overcome by fever and 'a black, abiding horror – a horror of the place I was in, and the bed I lay in, and the plaids on the wall, and the voices, and the fire, and myself' (p. 151). These experiences and the black horror they generate are rooted in David's inability to connect with the Highland environment – language and material culture as well as landscape – but there are clear echoes of nightmare and near-death in California. 'Horror' was something Stevenson understood, beginning with childhood nightmares and deepened by adult experience.

Stevenson was of course familiar with a literature of adventure which presented wilderness as an invitation to heroic action. In R. M. Ballantyne's *Young Fur Traders* (1856), for example, Charley Kennedy longs to escape the Red River Settlement, an outpost community in what would become Manitoba, and joins *voyageurs* heading into the far north. Much of the story





involves a demonstration of the skills and character, the practical and emotional self-sufficiency, needed to survive in extreme conditions. But in *Kidnapped* Stevenson shows us a hero who is without the practical skills demanded by the environment and, despite his determination and sense of fairness, limited in inner resources. Stevenson must have been aware that in creating David Balfour he was entering psychological territory very different from Ballantyne's. David is helpless as Stevenson was helpless in the Santa Lucia Mountains. Both were ill-prepared for the experiences they encountered. Both are saved by men of the mountains.

If Jim Hawkins owes much to Ballantyne – *Coral Island* (1858) particularly, of course – and the conventions of sea adventure and pirate tales, David Balfour was born of Stevenson's own encounters with unforgiving seas and lands. In *The Master of Ballantrae* Stevenson returns to the wild and presents a starker and unmediated encounter. When Mackellar and the Durie brothers play out the final scenes of their tortured association there is no friendly native to guide them through alien and aggressive terrain: the irony of the transplanted 'native' Secundra Dass and his attempt to act as guide only emphasises the predicament. The harshness of climate and landscape both exposes and intensifies the naked enmity of the brothers, the ambivalence of Mackellar and the vulnerability of all involved.

But the severity and the exposure have been part of the narrative from the beginning. If the early pages of *Kidnapped* only hint at potential violence, *The Master* is from the start much more ominous. Ballantrae is a wild place and wild things have happened. 'I had tales of Claverhouse as we came through the bogs,' Mackellar remembers, 'and tales of the devil as we came over the top of the scaur.' The 'pretty, sheltered bay' and the house of Durisdeer, 'commodiously built in the French fashion', present an illusion of calm and comfort in a physical and psychological environment which is fractured and menacing.¹⁰ If the landscape





is not hostile in the same way as the Highlands, it is nevertheless the place of division and lawlessness – though not strictly Border country it is nevertheless a frontier, primarily between sea and land, and distant from the centre of government. The Solway Firth, with its treacherous tides, its caves and quicksands, is a source of mysterious arrivals and departures, appearances and disappearances, sights and sounds that challenge explanation. The abbey is ruined and used by the freetraders to store ammunition. Stevenson evokes a territory that is isolated and uncanny. The free traders are active, as they are in *Guy Mannering*, and will play a sinister part in the events that unfold. And the black, frozen night of the duel, ‘dark and still and starless, and exceeding cold: a night the most unseasonable, fit for strange events’ points forward to the even colder and stranger climax of the tale (p. 76).

According to Stevenson’s own account the idea for *The Master* took shape in Saranac with the coming together of a remembered account of live burial in India and ‘the Adirondack wilderness and stringent cold of the Canadian border’ (p. vi). It was clear from the start that the environment in which he spent the winter of 1887-8 was to have a crucial role in the tale, but also that, despite the Indian origin of the burial story, the narrative was to be rooted in Scottish experience. Stevenson himself embodied a link between India, where Balfour uncles had been doctors, and Scotland, but the links of course were strong even without the personal connection. Stevenson did not have to stretch history to make the connections that are represented by the travels of James Durie. The role of Scots in the sub-continent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was prominent and Scotland itself full of the evidence. The Scottish presence in North America was even more striking. In *The Master* Stevenson is drawing on both personal and collective experience of the Scottish encounter with alien territory.

In the Santa Lucia Mountains and again at Silverado





Stevenson communicates the precarious nature of human survival. In *The Master* wilderness is projected as actively hostile. The journey up the Hudson, 'the hills singularly beautified by the colours of autumn', is an illusory prelude, as is Albany itself, a long-established community, one of the oldest in the Thirteen Colonies (p. 158). Stevenson must have been aware that it was named for the Duke of Albany, who became James II and VII, grandfather of Charles Edward Stewart, and probably knew that the area had already in the 1740s attracted Scottish settlement. In this place of Scottish allusion a very Scottish rupture approaches its resolution. Henry Durie nurses feverish expectation of revenge on his brother, his mind 'dwelling almost wholly in the Wilderness' where he conjures up visions of 'the Master's bones lying scattered in the wind' (p. 163). Albany may be the location of recognisable civic institutions and social conventions, but an untamed frontier is not far away.

Henry Durie has instigated a barbaric act which is to take place in wild country beyond the law. He has set the scene in his own mind, and what follows is both a confirmation of savagery and a reversal of his expectations. Once Henry and Mackellar, as part of Sir William Johnson's expedition, leave the civilisation represented by Albany, the forces of nature insidiously take over. Mackellar in particular is susceptible to the land's hostility, intensified by his knowledge of Henry's purpose.

I could never depict the blackness of my soul upon this journey. I have none of those minds that are in love with the unusual; to see the winter coming and to lie in the field so far from any house, oppressed me like a nightmare; it seemed, indeed, a kind of awful braving of God's power; and this thought, which I daresay only writes me down as a coward, was greatly exaggerated by my private knowledge of the errand we were come upon. (p. 164)

Henry Durie and Mackellar carry savage intent with them





as they enter 'savage country'. After a night of 'murderous cold' John Mountain bursts into camp with his tale of the sequence of sinister killings by an unseen pursuer who silently butchers and scalps one member of the party after another (p. 165). (This, incidentally, is a device used in several Westerns where a Native American is cast as a spectral, faceless killer.) Panic leads to flight, flight to the survivors losing their way in the wilderness. Finally, only Mountain and Secundra Dass are alive, and only James Durie's apparent death was from natural causes.

Are a savage country and a savage people the cause of death, or have the intruders generated and imported evil, to find it reflected back by the bleakly alien territory they have entered? Only James Durie seems unaffected by the country's hostility. None of those involved are untainted by violence and greed, whether Sir William Johnson's colonialist force or James Durie's associates described by Mackellar as 'desperate, bloody-minded miscreants [. . .] embarking together without remorse upon this treacherous and murderous design' (p. 166). As Stevenson has Mackellar remark, 'if human nature is even in the worst of men occasionally kind, it is still, above all things, greedy' (p. 175). (It is worth remembering that in *Treasure Island* greed impels all the players, and that in *Kidnapped* greed is the reason for David's abduction.) At the root of colonial conquest is acquisitiveness, whatever other motives are in play, and at every stage of American history the frontier attracted the criminal and the misfit, the freebooter and the degenerate, individuals who chose or were forced to operate outwith the law.

The mission of Johnson's expedition is to 'nip in the bud' Indian disaffection; abandoning the attempt would leave the territory 'open to all the abominable tragedies of Indian war' – and, of course, open to those for whom upheaval means opportunity (p. 177). So he proceeds, although with what success we are not told. But we do know that in the 1750s Johnson personally acquired considerable land holdings in the Mohawk Valley and





helped to push settlement west to the Ohio River: it was to his advantage to tame the natives, and he was himself, albeit with official blessing, an opportunist. In terms of colonial aspirations wilderness represented potential wealth, and the presence of an existing population was acknowledged only as an impediment. One might read Stevenson's tale as the revenge of a faceless population for whom wilderness was a livelihood rather than an obstacle to civilised life. The greed and hubris of the Durie brothers and all who are drawn into their double-edged venture is defeated by the land and those who understand it. Stevenson had already demonstrated in *Kidnapped* that the perception of wilderness depended on the degree of environmental kinship.

In *The Master* there is a total lack of connection between land and incoming people. The intruders are exactly that. James Durie, John Mountain and the others with some wilderness experience are all vanquished if not destroyed, and Johnson's official force appears to have little impact. The Natives dematerialise in the protective landscape, and that ability is an organic feature of 'the horror'. The live burial which worked in a warm climate is fatal in North America's icy ground. The loyalty of Secundra Dass cannot save lives. The wilderness offers no redeeming features and no possibility of redemption. Stevenson takes us into a physical, moral and spiritual wasteland which only intensifies the corrupted sensibilities of those who enter it. In later fiction, notably in *The Ebb-Tide*, he would again explore the influence of wasteland on the weak and greedy, and its relentless exposure of vulnerability.

While he was working on *Kidnapped*, Stevenson broke off to write *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in which he entered another kind of savage territory and explored other features of disconnection. Dr Jekyll's motive is to free himself from subservience to conventional morality. Moral wilderness offers liberation. To achieve this breaking of bonds Jekyll changes shape and personality. In Albany, Henry Durie indulges in unaccustomed





conviviality and returns inebriated late at night: 'a high feverish exultation appeared to boil in his veins, and he stood and smiled and smirked upon the candle' (p. 161). He sings the ballad 'The Twa Corbies', which with its bleak evocation of death, decay and a barren land 'signified the feelings of the singer with barbaric fitness' (p. 162). Henry's drinking (like Jekyll's drugs) highlights the narrow margin between the civilised and the savage, in both thought and action. Later, as he listens to Mountain's narrative, he changes visibly:

There was something very daunting in his look; something [. . .] to my eyes not rightly human; the face, lean, and dark, and aged, the mouth painful, the teeth disclosed in a perpetual rictus; the eyeball swimming clear of the lids upon a field of blood-shot white. (p. 178)

This is a less crude mutation to reveal the beast within than Jekyll's transformation into Hyde, but they are clearly linked. In the wilderness, the un-human is released, but it has always lurked not very far from the surface. From the interior of Durrisdeer, with its illusion of comfort and security, to the shifting and eldritch darkness of the Solway, to the chilling malevolence of the final nightmare journey, Stevenson uses environment to illuminate behaviour and moral ambivalence. James Durie, however, appears immune to the corrosive effects of savage country. He maintains in the wilderness his 'usual gallantry and cheerfulness' (p. 168).

The writing of *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped* and *Jekyll and Hyde* laid the foundations for the metaphorical resonance Stevenson achieves in *The Master*. *Treasure Island* has a landscape that suggests malignity – 'grey, melancholy woods and wild stone spires, and the surf that we could both sea and hear foaming and thundering on the steep beach' – and the island, too, is morally a wasteland.¹¹ Like the Solway coast, the juncture of sea and land suggests ambivalence and uncertainty. In *Kidnapped*





the island of Erraid does the same, while the inland terrain is more actively hostile, more radically resistant to human activity, or at least to David Balfour's perception of what life ought to be. In *Jekyll and Hyde* the liberating wilderness that Hyde represents is a reminder of feral Victorian city streets and the vulnerability of the frontier between decency and degeneracy.

Stevenson did not need a narrow escape from death in the wilderness to make him aware of the moral frailty of humankind, but what is so powerful in both *Kidnapped* and *The Master* is the relationship between moral and physical weakness, and the effects of wild landscape on both. Wilderness is a source of horror – I won't pursue here an analogy with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, although it is interesting to reflect that Stevenson identified 'the horror' in his own country and in North America, both closer to home than the African continent. Wilderness can be anywhere: it is territory beyond the control of humanity, or at least of humanity unaccustomed to its demands. This relationship was in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth an increasing source of fascination, reflected in the many accounts by explorers and adventurers as well as in fiction that examined more familiar and often urban wastelands.

Some half a century after the publication of *The Master of Ballantrae* John Buchan was writing his novel *Sick-Heart River* (published posthumously in 1941). It echoes *The Master of Ballantrae* in a number of ways. It takes its hero on a physical and spiritual journey through the most severe and unforgiving North American territory, but this is a journey in search of redemption not of revenge. Buchan's Edward Leithen travels through a country 'not built on a human scale, a world made without thought of mankind, a world colourless and formless, but also timeless; a kind of eternity'.¹² Like Stevenson, he sees wilderness as an environment on which humankind can make no impact without disastrous consequences. But unlike Stevenson's Durie brothers, possessed by selfish and self-destructive ends,





Leithen recognises that survival in the wilderness demands total concentration; it is the sole focus of life and is only possible on nature's terms. That recognition leads Leithen to self-knowledge, spiritual peace, and an acceptance of his own death. Stevenson allows his characters no such self-knowledge. Wilderness offers no sustenance, no enrichment. It strips away the disguises and subterfuges of 'civilised' life and exposes the stark realities of raw human need. Stevenson survived his Californian ordeal and returns Jim Hawkins and David Balfour to comfortable respectability. There is no hint of comfort for Mackellar, beyond the compulsion to tell the tale in which he is so deeply mired, and justify his part in it. Perhaps Stevenson is suggesting that wilderness is not territory we can enter and leave at will, but is a primal space that inhabits us wherever we are.

NOTES

- 1 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Meheew (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994-1995), III, pp. 12-17.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 3 'Memoirs of an islet', *Memories and Portraits*, (Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing, 1990), p. 91.
- 4 R. L. Stevenson, *The Amateur Emigrant*, in *From the Clyde to California*, ed. by Andrew Noble (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985), p. 110.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 7 R. L. Stevenson, *The Silverado Squatters*, in *From the Clyde to California*, p. 231.
- 8 R. L. Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1989), p. 2, henceforth cited in text.
- 9 R. L. Stevenson, 'Pastoral', *Memories and Portraits*, p. 66.
- 10 R. L. Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae* (London: Dent, 1976), p. 10, henceforth cited in text.





- 11 R. L. Stevenson, *Treasure Island* ed. by Emma Letley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 98.
- 12 John Buchan, *Sick Heart River* ed. by David Daniell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 57.





Stevenson's literary utopia

Nathalie Jaëck

Je n'avais pas du tout de lieu; ça me rendait léger.

Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers*.

'Locating' Stevenson appears to be a critical task – a necessary issue and a highly paradoxical process. Indeed, Stevenson is both over-defined and very evasive. On the one hand, he is easily shelved within specific library sections – the novel of adventure, literature for children, travel literature – and fixed in the canon by two highly-identifiable texts that have become immutable literary references, namely *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Treasure Island*. On the other, he is constantly circulating among and playing with these different genres, invariably experimenting upon and destabilizing them. Both canonical and evading, localized and ubiquitous, Stevenson poses indeed a literary enigma as regards location.

My proposal here is that if it is so problematic to actually locate Stevenson, it is because he is crucially interested in *dislocation*, in constantly finding a way out of the different genres he chooses, and not allowing them to settle in their typical form – this seems to be specifically true for the adventure novel. He remarkably writes in and out of that genre, he comes up with texts that feature among its most celebrated references, and yet that deviate from its typical elements, texts that are thus oxymoronic institutional dissidents. Such bivalence and paradoxical positioning is most obvious in the decisive spaces of beginnings and endings that I will concentrate upon to prove the point: Stevenson consistently elaborates very spectacular processes of delocalisation, as the prefaces and conclusions contradict their official traditional functions, and take the text along lines of escape instead of bounding it.

And the thing is he is not the only one: it seems to be the case





for many of his celebrated literary neighbours, at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly Conrad, Doyle, Stoker, Wells, all canonical writers who seem to give notice, or rather to radically redefine, Realism and Adventure, while they still work within their theoretical frame. It might seem a little artificial to try and assimilate writers whose works are apparently so different: Doyle and Stoker, arguably even Wells, were operating within genre fiction at a time when such fiction would not have been regarded as 'high literature', not in the same league as Conrad's and Stevenson's. Yet, and despite such formal differences, I would like to show that they all seemed to be aware that they were writing in a kind of no text's land, in a transient and liminary period, when Realism was beginning to be contested, and when Modernism was not yet codified – in a period when the aim of literature was to explore new textual ways. It reads as if they had made the collective decision to locate themselves precisely within such a theoretically vacant or 'neutral' space, and to explore the formal possibilities offered by it. Along with Stevenson, and each in their own specific ways and forms, they all seemed to *choose* indeterminacy, transition, imminence and suspension as the perfect historical setting for an ideal literary space. Thus their novels explore their own ability to escape stabilisation, to build forces of deterritorialisation and to invent dislocating forms. As such, it seems to me that they manage to create, at the turn of the century, and squeezed between the literary heavyweights of Realism and Modernism, a furtive yet highly autonomous and original movement, even a kind of literary Utopia that I will try to outline and characterize.



Before dealing with this literary space, it is interesting to note that geography is never quite at rest with Stevenson: locations and places are rarely used to stabilize or situate the action, as is typically the case with the Realist novel. With Stevenson, the décor is invariably ambiguous and mysterious, iridescent and





multiple. In *Jekyll and Hyde*, for example, and as Jenni Calder remarks, 'the setting is London. But the ambiance is without a doubt that of Edinburgh'.¹ Similarly, in the *New Arabian Nights*, initially published in *London*, a journal edited by Henley, the capital becomes a rather fantastic crossbreed city, in between solid Victorian London and exotic Utopia, where identities fluctuate and places are unsettled. In many novels, places are so multiple and their succession is so quick that the privileged setting actually becomes movement itself, as journeys replace settings and directions dislocate positions – in a much quicker and more systematic way than in traditional adventure or even picaresque novels. *Treasure Island* starts in an inn, typically at the crossroads, and then becomes a journey to an unknown place; in *Kidnapped*, after an initial *qui pro quo* about places, and after David has managed to leave a *pseudo* deserted island that was no more than a fantasized mirage, David and Alan keep moving, and three successive chapters are actually titled 'The Flight in the Heather', the actual places coming second (the rocks, the Heugh of Corrynakiegh, the Moor), totally subordinated to the notion of movement itself. In *The Master of Ballantrae*, places actually seem to gain momentum, and the novel accelerates the process of dislocation that characterizes other novels. In the first sentence of his dedication to Percy and Mary Shelley, Stevenson makes it clear that 'here is a tale which extends over many years and travels into many countries', but also that 'the writer began, continued it, and concluded it among distant and diverse scenes. Above all, he was much upon the sea'. The anonymous editor of Mackellar's papers defines himself as 'an exile' in the Preface, and in the Appendix, Stevenson describes his intention this way: 'I was to carry the reader to and fro in space over a good half of the world'.² Quite obviously then, Stevenson admits to being more interested in fluxes than in positions, in dynamic courses than in stabilised situations: the 'to and fro' movement that he favours in *The Master of Ballantrae* speaks for his desire to disorientate the





reader more than to help him get his bearings, as all the reference points are transitory, as the avowed aim is to keep moving, from one unsettled place to another, quite close to Conrad's ideal, who similarly defined his novels as 'free and wandering tales'.³

The same desire to prevent easy localisation is quite apparent in Stevenson's own descriptions of his fiction. Commenting upon his situation within tradition is obviously one of his favourite games, and he regularly returns to it, making sure to cloud the issue. In *Kidnapped* for example, he professes to define where and what his books are *not* – not material for academics: 'This is no furniture for the scholar's library,'⁴ he claims as early as the dedication of the novel to Charles Baxter. Similarly, in the introductory stanzas of *Treasure Island*, intended 'To the Hesitating Purchaser', Stevenson situates himself right within the tradition of typical adventure novels, in the literary wake of Kingston, Ballantyne and Fennimore Cooper: 'And all the old romance, retold / Exactly in the ancient way'⁵ – a position obviously questioned by contemporary critics, who situate the novel in a different place altogether, still undefined, still furtive: 'Needless to say there is no resemblance between Mr Stevenson and any other boys' writer, and his romance is told in anything but the ancient way'.⁶ In *The Master of Ballantrae*, as the lawyer proposes that the editor should make a novel out of the raw material provided by Mackellar's papers, and thus insert his text in a specific and well-codified genre – 'Here [. . .] is a novel ready to your hand: all you have to do is work up the scenery, develop the characters, and improve the style' – the editor insists: 'It shall be published as it stands.'⁷ The result is an unidentified literary object, a multiple, heterogeneous and unclassifiable mixture, 'like a sample card, a display of the writer's best wares', said André Gide.⁸ 'The Suicide Club' offers a final example of such dislocation, both geographic and generic: as we saw, the story takes place in a kind of 'delondonised' London, in a virtual space where improbable oyster bars suddenly turn up for the characters to indulge their taste in 'ways





of life more adventurous and eccentric'.⁹ They explore this virtual space at random and passively – 'One evening in March they were driven by a sharp fall of sleet into an oyster bar' (p. 26) – and the lack of spatial definition brings about generic indecision as well. The text wanders just as much as the characters, it is completely deterritorialised, in between a comedy and a tragedy: 'The farce of the cream tarts began to have very much the air of a tragedy in disguise' (p. 31), as the oxymoronic title inscribes.

Stevenson thus explicitly situates himself in tricky literary territory, on extremely unstable grounds, seemingly ready to be quitted as they are entered. Places perpetually become somewhere else, genres collide into one another or lose their specific characteristics, creating what Schwob called 'un réalisme irréel',¹⁰ or Chesterton, dealing with Florizel, 'a sort of solid impossibility'.¹¹

Such instability and self-deterritorialisation is nowhere more obvious than in beginnings and endings, where Stevenson completely upsets the codes and dissolves the traditional frame, for the text better to wander off its limits. Beginnings and endings are crucial literary spaces in the Realist system: they are stable and necessary forms that bound the text, and organize reality within the closed space of narration, according to a causal and linear pattern, from an identifiable origin to an ending that brings about a sense of closure. Yet Stevenson flagrantly problematises the beginnings and endings of his novels, he gives them explicit theoretical density, as he experiments on diverse strategies to exceed the limits of the text, to create what Derrida calls 'an uncontrollable overflow'.¹² In *La Dissémination*, Derrida analyses the function of prefaces in literary modernity, and he proposes that prefaces should help materialize the exterior of the text, its intimate excess, that it should be an obstacle to the consistency of form, and inscribe 'the wish to find a matter that should no longer have a reassuring form, neither that of a fundamental and totalising principle, nor that of a final instance'.¹³ According to





him, a preface should be ‘an outside-the-text, able to stop the concatenation of writing.’¹⁴ As it is materially necessary that narrations should begin and end somewhere, Stevenson’s ideal formula seems to be to change the nature of beginnings and endings, to *underdetermine* them, and turn them into accidental and arbitrary breaks. In his texts, beginnings and endings are often textual incidents, they unsettle and dislocate the text more than they stabilize or anchor it in a context – and seemingly ‘regular’ ones are more often than not exposed as ironic decoys, as in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

The beginning of the novella – ‘Mr. Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance [. . .]’ – is ‘regular’, it is told by an omniscient narrator through a retrospective and authoritative point of view, and as such it immediately locates the text within the safe bounds of Realist conventions: the central character is introduced, the setting is established, and the text is set, smoothly inserted within its familiar literary context. Yet as is well-known, such obvious positioning does not resist the mutation of the text into something much more mobile, much less localised: the omniscient narrator is ousted from his controlling position, dislodged by Lanyon and then by Jekyll, and the end of the story radically upsets the early narrative positions: the stable third-person narration is replaced by an extremely unsteady first-person narrative, by a wandering ‘I’ pronoun whose grammatical bounds are totally dissolved, until it becomes an empty grammatical function,¹⁵ totally unable to fasten the text to a reliable or even steady standpoint. Instead of bringing the sense of closure that is typically expected of a conclusion, the ending presents itself as unintentional and indiscriminate, indeed as *an ending*, characterized by randomness: ‘I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to *an end*’.

But it is mainly in *The Master of Ballantrae* and in *Kidnapped* that beginnings and endings most explicitly dislocate the text, in two complementary ways: scattering and displacement.





In *The Master*, Stevenson dislocates the text in the sense that he disperses and disseminates it, he shatters the harmonious textual integrity, the linearity and causality that discipline the facts along an established narrative pattern. Instead of writing the 'novel' that is 'ready at his hands' as the dutiful lawyer demands of the editor, he decides to provide the reader with a bunch of loose sheets, with missing pages and additions from different hands. The lawyer's effort to confine the text – 'a packet, fastened with many seals and enclosed in a single sheet of strong paper'¹⁶ – cannot prevent its irrepressibly scattering: the self-contained packet is turned into miscellaneous sheets, into a literary hybrid, a collage of odds and ends that resist the lawyer's wish that a synthesis should be written. The preface becomes an extremely insubordinate demolition site that totally upturns its institutional function, and breaks up the text instead of building its liminal unity.

The very voice of the narration contributes to this sense of dispersion and disfunctioning, as the third-person anonymous voice that is in charge is clearly quite unbalanced and even heavily dislocated. Indeed, the narrator gets mixed up on the focalisation he adopts: at times the reader is presented with a regular third-person narration, at others with a kind of narrative mask that is obviously a first-person narration in disguise – until the whole shaky construction breaks down, and the 'I' erupts as a totally heterogeneous form, breaking a hole in the narrative fabric, 'the editor', 'I' and 'the other' impossibly referring to one and the same instance:

'A great deal better than nothing,' said *the editor*. 'But what is this which is quite in my way?'

'I was coming to that,' said Mr Thomson. [. . .]

'A mystery?' *I* repeated.

'Yes,' said his friend, 'a mystery [. . .]'

'I think I rather heard a more obscure or a more promising annunciation,' *the other* remarked. (p. 8, my emphasis.)





Finally, the preface also illustrates the other meaning of ‘dislocation’, i.e. ‘displacement’, as it encroaches on the function of the conclusion through a dashing prolepsis, and rashly announces the death of the two brothers, thus virtually cancelling the pertinence of the text to come: ‘Yes, the lamentable death of my lord Durrisdeer and his brother, the Master of Ballantrae’ (p. 7). Dislocation is complete: the text is both scattered, and radically displaced.

In *Kidnapped*, the introductory paragraph is unusually usual – ‘I will begin the story of my adventures with a certain morning early in the month of June’,¹⁷ doubly locating the story in time, 1751, and place, Essendean, Scotland – and it thus lulls the reader’s vigilance. Yet, it is here the conclusion that constitutes the privileged site of dislocation. Quite flippantly titled ‘Good-bye’, it keeps its off-hand promise, and confronts the reader to a spectacular decision, as he is dismissed *just before* the actual ending, just before the text has achieved closure and stabilisation, ‘to the very doors of the British Linen Company’s bank’ (p. 219).

In a totally unexpected and disorienting way, David halts just there, in front of the doors of the bank, and leaves the reader stranded just before the advent of the final event, right in the middle of nowhere, in a state of suspension and imminence, on the threshold of a new text to come – a new text that will not come until the publication of *Catriona* in *Atalanta* in 1892, the opening sentence of which takes up where David’s narration ended in *Kidnapped*. The conclusion thus reads as a totally improbable threshold, wide open, and settles in transition and inbetweenness instead of locking the text.

To complete the dislocating process, the narration is then trusted to a hitherto unheard-of ‘editor’, who breaks in the text with a paragraph in brackets, making it clear that a conclusion is in no way a logical and necessary step, but a pure convention, a matter of artistic decision. The conclusion thus merely





‘intervenes’, it happens as an incident, and it indeed highlights its arbitrariness: ‘Just there, with his hand upon his fortune, the present editor inclines for the time to say farewell to David.’ (p. 219) Such is thus the final location of the text: ‘just there’, to emphasize the fact that positions do not matter, they are illogical and capricious, certainly not necessary. The text is thus defined as a course and as a flux, and it should not renounce its taste for permanent ‘becoming’, it should never reach its aim or be localized. Indeed, the temporal mode chosen of the editor is one of projection and becoming, of anticipation and openness: ‘How Alan escaped, and what was done about the murder, with a variety of other delectable particulars, may some day be set forth’ (p. 219). The conclusion opens up the text, it initiates many lines of escape that deterritorialise the present narration and direct it towards a new text to come. The conclusion chooses modality, it replaces typical stable preterit by an abundant use of the modal ‘may’, and this is typically the time of adventure as Jankelevitch defined it, the time of the imminent ‘advent of the event’: ‘Minimal adventure is linked to the advent of the event [. . .] Adventure is the impending event, the present about to happen.’¹⁸ Stevenson indeed endeavoured to imagine a text that would favour perpetual deferring or postponement, a text that would endeavour to remain in a state of *suspension* instead of trying to solve all *suspense*, a text that would refuse to settle in any fixed interpretation, in any stabilized position.

It seems to me that making such a theoretical choice actually situates him somewhere, in a very intense and valid literary space that is still quite fugitive in literary criticism. Along with some accomplices in that deterritorialisation task, Stevenson redefines adventure, takes it closer to its etymology, *res adventura*, a thing about to happen: he thus displaces literature, and settles it precisely in that space of transition and imminence. ‘Here are the crossroads’, as the young man with the cream tarts warns Florizel and Geraldine.¹⁹





George Steiner underlines the fact that the end of the nineteenth century was characterised by a sense of imminence, ‘a hunger for new colours, new shapes, new possibilities of nervous discoveries, to set against the morose properties of Bourgeois and Victorian modes’,²⁰ and authors like Stevenson, Conrad, Wells, Doyle indeed seemed to share the desire to work on an alternative to the Realist movement that dominated the literary scene, and to redefine the link between reality and representation. In that crucial period of incubation and mutation, they expressed the same feeling that they had to exploit the position of imminence History had placed them in, and to come up with a text that would be just as open, just as multiple and unsettled as its historical context of production.

In a letter to Henry James, Stevenson expressed that idea that literature was at the crossroads, and needed to reinvent itself: ‘It seems as if literature were coming to a stand.’²¹ Indeed, the contemporary French critics of the NRF sensed the bright possibility of collective literary renewal on the other side of the Channel – while the French novel was stuck in the ruts of determinist Realism and the proliferation of different short-lived schools, like Bourget’s subjective novel: ‘We need to admit it: the novel we are waiting for will not have that beautiful linear composition, that harmonious causality, that simplicity of narration that have so far been the virtues of the French novel.’²² To them, renewal was located in Britain: though they had a distinct preference for Stevenson, who had been introduced to the journal by Marcel Schwob, they found a family air to British authors, and they defined it as the generic air of Adventure, as developed by Henri Ghéon: ‘Under cover of Realism and human logic, the French writers have exiled the Unexpected from the novel, the Unexpected that is nearly all there is in life, or at least that gives life its flavour, and is the very reason for our desire in life. [. . .] A Dickens, a Stevenson have got a passion for adventure: they





bathe their characters in it, as in a vividly coloured reagent.²³ Adventure, imminence and the unexpected: this is precisely Stevenson's literary agenda as he words it in a letter to his cousin: 'O the height and depth of novelty and worth in any art! And O that I am privileged to swim and shoulder through such oceans! Could one get out of sight of land – all in the blue. Alas not, being anchored here in the flesh and the bonds of logic being still about us. But what a great space and a great air there is in these small shallows where alone we venture!'²⁴ Stevenson's intoxication with that ideal wandering text is echoed by Jacques Rivière: 'It is free space on all sides! Ah! I can't see anything! Yet, it is peopled with my impending adventures; here they are, only two steps away; they threaten me with their invisible smiles; I don't know it yet... A whole future that I very gradually enter.'²⁵

For Stevenson, the aim of adventure was thus no longer to discover those geographical virgin territories that Conrad dreamt about in his childhood,²⁶ and that no longer exist.²⁷ He endeavoured to reschedule adventure elsewhere, in *form* itself: it was *the text* that had to get rid of all the pre-written paths, of all the necessary contents, of the whole writing structure Realism had imposed upon it, to re-become that 'white patch' Conrad described, free and wandering, a space of empirical and nomadic formal exploration. – In that sense, the actual treasure in *Treasure Island* is arguably the Captain's fragmented logbook, a mere succession of nearly white pages, only partially inscribed with dynamic directions and coordinates, latitudes and longitudes, an invitation to randomly explore the text as an open and opaque surface.

It is interesting to note that Dickens proposed, thirty years earlier, the same reduction of the text to its minimal version, with Mr Dick's constant and compulsive return to the blank page in *David Copperfield*. Whereas David manages to write the model realist autobiography, starting with the beginning, 'I am born', the title of Chapter I, and finishing with the end, 'And now my written





story ends', the sentence opening the final chapter, organising all the random elements of his life into a coherent causal pattern through the linearity of language, Mr Dick's chaotic memoir is quite another story. It heavily questions the validity of such an enterprise as David's, and nullifies the key belief that reality can be mastered and ordered through language. As he endeavours to write his own memoirs – in the form of a Memorial addressed to the Lord Chancellor to complain about the bad treatments he received from his family, he can never manage to write a full statement, as the story of King Charles I, obviously a fellow in losing one's head, unexpectedly but consistently intrudes into and collides with his own story. He is thus compelled to start afresh every morning, and the text thus regularly returns to the blank page, as the first-person narration proves so poorly assured, so untrustworthy and insecure a standpoint, as facts are ungraspable, and as language is an active source of deterritorialisation. Any attempt at achieving a totality, a homogeneous and synthetic representation of the self is thus denounced as an illusion, as the narrator becomes a random variable, and his language a delirium. The compact and complete narration of David is thus presented against the blank page of Mr Dick, which heralds the advent of a new modern text, characterized by *casual* exploration versus *causal* linearity, by fragmentation versus completeness, by precariousness versus self-assurance, and by constant rewriting and repetition versus one authoritative version. Trusted to Mr. Dick, language is defined as an active unsettling force and no longer as a passive stable form, it liberates from the facts of life more than it records and fixes them. It centrally refuses to signify, as Mr. Dick insists, 'What does it signify to me?' – it thus confirms Aunt Betsy's reading: 'He is memorializing the Lord Chancellor, or the Lord Somebody or other – one of those people, at all events, who are paid to be memorialized, about his affairs. [. . .] But it don't signify; it keeps him employed.'²⁸

Static *testification* thus gives way to a never-ending process of





textification, and as Mr. Dick inscribes in the text this alternative version of the memoirs, he becomes Dickens's self-contradiction, and marks the solid institutional novel as a much more open literary site of experimentation. Stevenson can be located still more clearly within this context,²⁹ with a desire for dislocation, seeking to write a text that perpetually hesitates on its own edge. To him, writing is writing *out* or writing *away*; he looks for the formation of novelty, for the emergence of formal incidents; writing seems to explore its capacity for precariousness, and to treat each position as temporary, each location as arbitrary. In this way he helped to create a new literary landscape, even although the central theme of that impetus was deterritorialisation itself.

NOTES

- 1 Jenni Calder, Introduction to the Penguin edition to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Other Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 12.
- 2 Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996 (1889), p. 225.
- 3 'It was only then that I perceived that the pilgrim ship episode was a good starting-point for a free and wandering tale' in Joseph Conrad, 'Author's Note', *Lord Jim* (New York and London: Norton, 1996), p. 5.
- 4 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 3.
- 5 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998), p. xxx.
- 6 In the *Graphic*, 1883, quoted in *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981), p. 140.
- 7 Stevenson, *Master*, p. 8.
- 8 Quoted by Adrian Poole in his introduction to *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. vii. Gide actually wrote in his journal, on Nov. 17th, 1913: 'Curieux livre où tout est excellent, mais hétérogène, au point qu'il semble la carte d'échantillons de tout ce où peut exceller Stevenson'.
- 9 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Suicide Club' in *The Complete Short*





- Stories* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p. 25 henceforth cited in the text.
- 10 Marcel Schwob, 'Robert Louis Stevenson', *Spicilège* (Paris : Mercure de France, 1960), p. 73 : 'Autant vaudrait écrire que le réalisme de Stevenson est parfaitement irréel, et que c'est pour cela qu'il est tout puissant.'
- 11 G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), p. 171.
- 12 Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 30: 'un débord immaîtrisable'.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 11: 'volonté de trouver une matière qui ne devrait plus avoir de forme rassurante, [. . .] ni celle d'un principe, fondamental ou totalisant, [ni celle] d'une instance dernière'.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 11: 'ce hors-texte qui arrêterait la concaténation de l'écriture'.
- 15 See Jean-Pierre Naugrette's analysis in *L'aventure et son double* (Paris: Off-Shore, 1987), p. 71: 'une pure fonction narrative vidée de toute identité'.
- 16 *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 7, henceforth cited in the text.
- 17 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped*, p. 7, henceforth cited in the text.
- 18 Vladimir Jankélévitch, 'L'aventure infinitésimale est liée à l'avènement de l'événement. [. . .] L'aventure est l'instant en instance : l'actualité sur le point de se faire', from *L'aventure, l'ennui, le sérieux*, in *Philosophie morale*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1998) p. 828.
- 19 'The Suicide Club', p. 37.
- 20 George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle* (London: Faber, 1971), p. 24.
- 21 In a letter to Henry James in 1893, quoted in *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 142.
- 22 'Il faut s'y résigner : le roman que nous attendons, n'aura pas cette belle composition rectiligne, cet harmonieux enchaînement, cette simplicité du récit qui ont été jusqu'ici les vertus du roman français.' Jacques Rivière, *Le Roman d'aventure* (Paris: Éditions des Syrtes, 2000), p. 47.
- 23 'Sous prétexte de réalisme et de logique humaine, les écrivains français ont exilé du roman l'imprévu, l'imprévu qui est presque toute la vie, et qui est tout au moins la saveur de la vie et la raison





même de notre élan dans la vie. [...] Un Dickens, un Stevenson ont la passion de l'aventure : ils y baignent leurs personnages, comme dans un réactif vivement coloré.' Henri Ghéon, 'L'Histoire de M. Polly, par H.G. Wells', *NRF*, janvier 1912, pp. 126-8 (p. 126).

24 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Ernest Mehew (New Haven & London: Yale Nota Bene, 2001) p. 231.

25 'L'espace est libre de tous côtés ! Ah ! Je ne vois rien ! Pourtant il est peuplé de mes aventures prochaines ; elles sont là à deux pas de moi ; elles me menacent de leur sourire invisible ; je ne sais pas encore [...] Tout un avenir où j'entre peu à peu', in Jacques Rivière, p. 28.

26 'Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all looked like that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there', in Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 21.

27 'By this time, [Africa] was not a blank space anymore. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over', *Ibid.*, p. 22.

28 Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (New York: Signet, 1962), p. 211.

29 In the Epilogue to *The Wrecker*, Stevenson indeed likens his method to that of Dickens in his later work: 'After we had invented at some expense of time this method of approaching and fortifying our police novel, it occurred to us it had been previously invented by some one else and was in fact – however painfully different the results may seem – the method of Charles Dickens in his later work.' *The Wrecker* (London: William Heinemann, 1928), p. 405.





Stevenson's mirrored images or, games of Hyde and seek¹

Hilary J. Beattie

W. E. Henley, in his notorious review of the Balfour biography, observed of Robert Louis Stevenson that he 'could not be in the same room with a mirror but he must invite its confidences every time he passed it [. . .] he was never so much in earnest, never so well pleased (this were he happy or wretched) [. . .] as when he wrote about himself'.² Despite these alleged narcissistic preoccupations, the mirror itself is used rather rarely in Stevenson's fiction as narrative motif or psychological symbol, in fact only in a group of stories from the mid 1880s that embody his 'strong sense of man's double being', namely, 'Markheim', *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and 'Olalla', to which can be added the fragmentary 'Story of the Recluse'.³ The use of the mirror in stories about doubling is in itself hardly unusual. As Theodore Ziolkowski pointed out in his pioneering study of literary iconology, *Disenchanted Images*, the age-old mirror motif, with its centuries of accumulated folklore and superstition, took on new life starting in the era of Romantic subjectivism.⁴ The late 15th century Venetian invention of the flat glass mirror had made possible the development of accurate self portraiture in painting; correspondingly, in literature the mirror came to be used as an autoscopic device to reflect, not so much the soul, as hidden aspects of character, revealing sometimes unbearable truths.⁵ Thus the mirrored image could represent the inexorable workings of both consciousness and conscience. It might also be projected and externalised in the form of an actual Doppelgänger, and when this escaped the control of the protagonist it could leave him no recourse but to kill the other, and thereby himself, in a dark twist on the newly popular myth of Narcissus.

The mirror concept has subsequently been important in the





history of psychoanalysis, which itself has been seen as a by-product of the Romantic preoccupation with the self, especially in its darker, Gothic aspects.⁶ The mirror has been used as a metaphor for the development of a sense of self, as the infant evolves from what Freud conceptualised as a state of primary, object-less narcissism to the creation of a self-representation through identification with responsively 'mirroring' others, initially the mother. Lacan postulated the young child's identification with his own, actual mirror-image as the basis of the self-concept, which is thus from the beginning simultaneously constituted as an 'alter ego'. For Kohut, approval from mirroring caretakers is the foundation both of healthy self esteem and, in some cases, of pathological, narcissistic grandiosity in a self that collapses without constant, external reaffirmation. More concretely, the mirror can be used in rituals and fantasies as an instrument to master fears of loss of others or the self, as well as to reaffirm bodily intactness and identity in the face of traumatic overstimulation and excitement.⁷ By reading Stevenson's double stories through a psychoanalytic lens, I shall demonstrate how he develops the mirror theme sequentially across them, reflecting emerging preoccupations about the body, sexuality, gender and identity. In so doing, he not only plays games of Hyde and seek with the reader but also, I think, foreshadows some major psychoanalytic concepts.

'Markheim,' published late in 1885, is the story of a reckless speculator (his very name alludes to the uncanny dangers of the innermost self) who murders an antiques dealer on Christmas day, on the model of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. It has been seen by most commentators, including Ziolkowski (pp. 187-190), as the drama of a tortured conscience, in the tradition of Poe's 'William Wilson'. This is proclaimed at the outset by Markheim's shocked reaction to the dealer's offer of a small Venetian mirror as a present for a clearly fictitious lady: 'this damned reminder of years, and sins, and follies – this hand-





conscience!⁸ But critical opinion has been divided as to whether the mirroring double that later materialises represents the better or the worse self, superego or id, as it were.⁹ This distinction may be unnecessary if we read the story in more self-psychological terms, as the drama of a fragile, narcissistic ego with an unstable self concept, whose grandiose self depends on repeated affirmation from idealised self-objects, in what Kohut has termed the mirror transference.¹⁰ Stevenson uses the mirror motif in highly complex ways to dramatise the protagonist's shifting emotional states. The claustrophobic enclosure of the shop and the house above it is lined with mirrors like a vast fun-house, a microcosm of the reflecting world, which turns to a nightmare of disapproval and surveillance after the murder that threatens to shatter Markheim's illusions of an ideal self. He is then 'startled to the soul by chance reflections' in 'many rich mirrors' that repeat his face over and over, his own eyes reflecting and detecting him, 'like an army of spies' (p. 93). In his terrified fantasy the mirrors are replaced by a multitude of observing faces and listening ears in the outer world, until he fears that in some reversal of the laws of nature the 'solid walls might become transparent and reveal his doings like those of bees in a glass hive' (p. 98). His panic subsides slightly in the upstairs drawing room where he momentarily reconstitutes his crumbling self with comforting recollections of childhood innocence. Here even larger mirrors, tall pier glasses, reflect him at various angles 'like an actor on a stage', that is, an actor in his own grandiose, Napoleonic drama, impenitently buoyed up by the 'nature and greatness of his crime', which God, knowing his 'excuses', is bound to forgive (pp. 96-99). At this point the vague presence, the 'faceless thing' that has been haunting him since the murder and which he had earlier identified both with the malevolently re-arisen dealer and with 'a shadow of himself', suddenly materialises, as if out of the mirrors, into a personage both commonplace and terrifying (pp. 94-95, 97, 100). This uncanny visitant, a 'wavering' hallucination





that bears a frightening likeness to his unstable self, proceeds to engage Markheim in a casuistic dialogue, a kind of looking glass catechism where everything turns into its opposite. His interlocutor, on the one hand, affirms Markheim's grandiose fantasies of wealth and power by offering to help him find the money and also save himself by murdering the returning maidservant. On the other, he ruthlessly exposes Markheim's weaknesses of character and hypocritical sophistries, disconfirming his persistent illusions that this 'last' crime is merely the means to 'the power and a fresh resolve to be myself', a 'free actor' who will do only good, reviving the innocent ideals of childhood (pp. 101-105). In a sense, the 'other' does continue the role of the dead dealer, who from the beginning saw through Markheim's dishonest pretensions after years of shady transactions, and into whom Markheim repeatedly splits off his own disavowed, loveless, sordid self (pp. 89, 91). Only Markheim's final acceptance of this aspect of himself, in his refusal to commit another reckless crime, enables him to merge his grandiose self into a more realistic self-image, submitting finally, through annihilation, to societal and domestic bonds.

Strikingly, there is no overt sexuality in 'Markheim', whose protagonist's only avowed passion is for money. Other than the fictitious, wealthy fiancée, women are cast mainly in punitive roles, whether the returning maid as 'the gallows itself [...] striding towards' him or the imagined, listening mother, 'still with raised finger' amid a happy family party, all 'prying and hearkening and weaving the rope that was to hang him' (pp. 102, 94). The physical body is presented most insistently in the repeated descriptions of the dealer's collapsed, puppet-like, bloodied corpse, which in Markheim's fearful fantasy is reanimated to become his mirroring pursuer, although it also prefigures his own lifeless, hanged body (pp. 92-3, 96). But one should note that Markheim's own physical sensations are represented only at moments of mirroring, first in the Venetian hand-glass, whose





sight makes him start and shudder, with 'a sudden leap of many tumultuous passions to the face'; then, in his 'tremor of the belly' at the sight of the slain other, which awakens childhood memories of 'famous crimes' and yet further 'nausea, a sudden weakness of the joints'; or later, on the terrifying manifestation of his alter ego, which transfixes and thrills him with 'a flash of ice, a flash of fire, a bursting gush of blood' (pp. 90, 96, 100). Above all, after the shock of the murder, which threatens the unity of his idealised narcissistic self, he plunges into a dizzying state of ego dissolution where the shop itself becomes a mirroring echo chamber to his inner turmoil and sickening fear; the room 'heaving like a sea'; the darkness 'swelling and dwindling as with respiration'; 'the faces of the portraits changing and wavering like images in water'; his own multiply mirrored eyes spying on him; and the ticking clocks that echo his own heart, as well as the one he has just stopped (p 92).

This association of the mirror with physical shock affords a transition to the slightly later *Jekyll and Hyde*, where the mirror plays a much more unusual role, resisting easy categorization. This is perhaps why Ziolkowski omits this story from his otherwise comprehensive discussion of the genre, merely noting (p. 109) that it is about the same phenomenon of 'schizophrenia' as 'Olalla'. Now the multiple mirrors found in 'Markheim' are reduced to one, a full length, movable cheval glass. It is first introduced inconspicuously as part of the furnishings of Dr Jekyll's upstairs cabinet, after Hyde's abrupt and absolute disappearance (he leaves behind no image by which he can be identified) following the murder of Carew.¹¹ Multiple mirroring survives only in the house's numerous reflecting surfaces of glazed presses and polished cabinets, which early on are associated with Utterson's sense of nausea and menace as they reflect the fire burning in Jekyll's entry hall (p. 14). The mirror does not reappear until the climactic 'Last Night' when Utterson and Poole, after breaking into Jekyll's cabinet and discovering the twitching body of Hyde





in Jekyll's clothing, search in vain for the doctor, finding instead only the rusty, broken key to the back door. Baffled, they turn to the mirror itself, as if expecting to find Jekyll there, or else invoking its aid like a magical divining mirror of old. But it refuses to answer, showing them only their own scared faces and, again, the fire, sparkling 'in a hundred repetitions' in the glass presses and leaving its 'rosy glow on the roof'. "This glass has seen some strange things, sir," whispered Poole. "And surely none stranger than itself," echoed the lawyer, in the same tone. "For what did Jekyll" – he caught himself up at the word with a start [. . .] what could Jekyll want with it?" he said' (pp. 45-46). In this final text the word 'did' may be taken as implying Jekyll's death, rather than merely his past activities, but the earlier printer's copy is a little different. It reads: "This glass has seen some queer doings, < sir, > no doubt," whispered Poole. "And none stranger than itself" echoed the lawyer < /in the same tones >. "What did – what did Jekyll do with a glass?" The repeated emphasis here is on Jekyll's active use of the mirror for some perverse purpose. One of the O.E.D.'s early definitions of 'doing' is a euphemism for copulation and the expression 'queer doings', which occurs with increasing frequency in the late 19th century, by then tends to take on sexual or perverse overtones.¹² In other words, here is an allusion to the sexual body that Stevenson chose to suppress in the final version.

The two first-person narratives that follow echo some themes of 'Markheim'. Lanyon, in a role analogous to that of the antiques dealer, has long refused to admire Jekyll and confirm his grandiose scientific ideas. He too therefore has to die, not by outright murder but by his own morbid curiosity that tempts him to witness Hyde/Jekyll's gasping, swelling transformation (p. 55). This erotic-seeming act is something hitherto witnessed only by the mirror (as we later learn) and therefore deadly, like Medusa's face, to the human beholder who sees it directly. In Jekyll's own narrative we see another self-deluded narcissist, whose need for





perfection in the eyes of the world and 'morbid sense of shame' leave him unable to tolerate even minor 'irregularities' that others might blazon. For all his grandiose talk of 'transcendental mysticism' and the 'furtherance of knowledge', these 'faults' apparently have to do with 'undignified' physical appetites that have to be stigmatised as 'evil' (pp. 57, 62). Once they are split off and unleashed, Jekyll, like Markheim, can disclaim all responsibility for this repudiated self. The mirror, unlike in 'Markheim', is initially invoked as ally and protector, placed in Jekyll's cabinet 'for the very purpose of those transformations' (p. 60). First, it is used to confirm the new physical body that is organically released by drinking from a different kind of 'glass' (the text, especially in Lanyon's narrative, repeatedly emphasises the role of the 'graduated glass' in which the potion is mixed, and its contact with Jekyll's lips and hand) (pp. 54-55). Then it serves to conceal that self beyond all possibility of discovery, dissolving it 'like the stain of breath upon a mirror' (p. 63). The nature of Hyde's pleasures is never specified, but a clue is afforded by the contrasting descriptions of the split-off other. To Jekyll it seems younger, livelier and more natural, but to others Hyde always appears 'abnormal and misbegotten,' arousing only a shuddering repugnance (pp. 4, 6, 13-14, 24, 42, 53, 60-61). This sounds rather like the classic Victorian portrait of the chronic masturbator, whose secret, corrupting vice is always betrayed by his visible regression to primitive degeneracy. One medical commentator on the text in 1888 compared Hyde to one of his patients, an 'inveterate masturbator', and Stevenson in earlier drafts has Jekyll refer to himself as the early, secret 'slave of disgraceful pleasures', still unable in adulthood to resist 'the iron hand of indurated habit'.⁴³ Though these tell-tale references were deleted in the final text, Jekyll does still confirm his auto-erotic activities when he notes his compromising efforts to avert the return of Hyde after the murder of Carew: 'No, it was in my own person that I was once more tempted to trifle with my conscience; and it was





as an ordinary secret sinner that I at last fell before the assaults of temptation [. . .] this brief condescension to my evil finally destroyed the balance of my soul. And yet I was not alarmed; the fall seemed natural, like a return to the old days before I made my discovery' (p. 69).¹⁴ Yet these casual acts of self-pleasuring are sufficient to rearouse Hyde, 'the animal within', who suddenly emerges unbidden as Jekyll drowns in the sun on a park bench, prey to sensuous and self-satisfied thoughts (p. 69). This second involuntary transformation reminds us of the first, which occurs in bed as Jekyll drowsily awakens to 'odd sensations' and then is shocked to find on the bedclothes the swart, hairy hand of Hyde, the presumed agent of phallic stimulation and excitement (p. 64). Towards the end, sleep, when the conscious will is powerless to prevent the emergence of erotic fantasy and desire, always results in awakening as Hyde (p. 72).

The role of the mirror is both to 'express' and contain the repeated 'doings' of this newly sexualised self, summoning and releasing it at will, and allowing private contemplation and enjoyment that defy societal control and condemnation. The process is reminiscent of the mirror masturbation rituals found in male adolescence, well described by Freud, whose Rat Man would repeatedly take out and manipulate his erect penis in front of the mirror, in defiance of his deceased father's prohibitions of masturbation.¹⁵ For the insecure adolescent, buffeted by the storms of hormonal and emotional change, an erection is something he is usually anxious to 'hide'. But in front of the mirror, by magically inducing his genitals to take on excitingly alive, enlarged and gravity-defying properties leading to orgasmic merging and recovery, he can unconsciously reassure himself against loss of bodily intactness and even gender identity, as well as fears of surrender and destruction. The repeated ritual may reenact dramas of traumatic overstimulation and threat at the hands of internalised caretakers but its efficacy depends on maintaining control of the process, which is safely objectified





and split off through projection into the mirror.¹⁶ Thus Freud's infant grandson was able to cope with fear of loss of self, following the disappearance of the mirroring mother, by making himself repeatedly disappear and reappear in a mirror.¹⁷ Stevenson, too, recorded a mirror ritual from his childhood, where he would parade around the darkened drawing room with a towel over his head and a candle in his hand, reciting the dirge from Scott's *Ivanhoe*; this performance always ended with a terrified flight downstairs, at the sound of his own voice and sight of his face in the mirror. In other words, when the illusion becomes too real it can lead to depersonalization and identity collapse, as the self's fragile boundaries are overwhelmed by the monstrous, uncanny, mirrored other.¹⁸

Unsurprisingly, Jekyll's repeated evocations of his disavowed, sexualised self only serve to strengthen it. Swelled by 'a more generous tide of blood,' it takes on a 'monstrous' life of its own, violently resisting his attempts at control, banishment, and even symbolic castration (by breaking the back door key) (pp. 65, 63, 68). As it starts to appear unbidden, the window through which Jekyll, 'like some disconsolate prisoner', takes a sad last look at the outer world suddenly turns into the imprisoning, accusing mirror of his once more mutating self (pp. 34-35). The final, orgasmic struggle against identity dissolution and total merging is described even more graphically than in 'Markheim', as Jekyll is forced into permanent, horrifying unity with the split off other, giving the lie to all his fantasies of immaculate power and perfection. Bidding farewell to his own face, 'now how sadly altered', in the mirror, he accepts the death of his own, idealised personality even as he disowns responsibility for Hyde's fate and probable death, in a final, vain attempt to assert their difference (pp. 72-74). Thus, at the end, the mirror is empty, indirectly reflecting only the flickering fires of passion that still haunt Jekyll's house, in its divided entirety a symbol of the body that has left it. One might see the entire, enigmatic narrative as a kind of mirror text





that invites readers to see in it their own reflections, a subversive 'hand conscience' to manipulate and body forth their own vices and desires. As John Addington Symonds told Stevenson, in a letter of admiration and protest: 'Your Dr Jekyll seems to me capable of loosening the last threads of self-control in one who should read it while wavering between his better and worse self.'¹⁹

If masturbation is usually a solitary activity, the fantasies that power and perpetuate it almost always involve an imagined partner. In *Jekyll and Hyde* the object of desire is carefully left unspecified, with women banished to the margins in watching or disapproving roles (as in 'Markheim'). In the almost contemporaneous story 'Olalla,' however, they emerge front and centre. The mirror motif here is at first not obvious. Ziolkowski (pp. 108-109) sees it as a case of 'haunted portrait' imagery, in that the ancient portrait of a cruel and sensual young woman both represents the brooding spirit of the mysterious Spanish residencia where the wounded hero has taken refuge, and prefigures the events whereby the family's degeneracy is made manifest. But the bewitched hero spends hours in front of the portrait weaving exciting erotic daydreams about its subject, whose eyes and features are so vivid that he has the uncanny sense of 'beholding in a mirror the image of life'.²⁰ So, the lively mirror – in a return of the repressed? – momentarily replaces the safely immobile portrait. There is a curious gender confusion here; either the hero imagines his male self in the position of a woman looking at her own reflection, or he becomes in imagination the woman in the portrait.²¹ The woman's deadness affords him no safety, for the imagined act of loving her and participating in their joint crimes seals his 'own sentence of degeneration', and she threatens to come to life in the persons of her descendants, the brutish, Hyde-like Felipe and his beautiful, imbecilic mother. The portrait fantasy is later elaborated when the hero, exploring the dusty upstairs rooms of the residencia, finds the walls lined with family portraits that remind him irresistibly of the repeated





sexual 'doings' that ensure the mysterious workings of heredity (pp. 142-143). An 'ancient mirror' opportunely comes to his rescue, enabling him to recapture his own personal identity by tracing in it the 'bonds' that knit him with his own family, much as Dorian Gray checks his own reflection in the mirror to make sure that it shows no trace of his deteriorating picture.

The old/young woman's image only 'falls lifeless' on the appearance of the beautiful, living Olalla (p. 148). But it now proves terrifying to act out in reality what was previously only imagined in relative safety via the mirroring portrait. The hero's own identity begins to waver, as he instantly loses himself in the mirror of Olalla's great, thirsting eyes, reading and memorizing her image and projecting into it his own feelings. He longs to 'burst the prison of her soul' yet repeatedly retreats back to his own 'strong castle', mistrusting both the family's degeneracy and his own brute attraction (pp. 147, 149, 151). But when Olalla, enacting his own doubts, repeatedly tells him to leave he falls back into a whimpering, childlike helplessness. Her final rejection 'unmans' him 'like a physical void', which is only relieved by the violent climax of bursting through the window glass and thus finally merging both with portrait and mirrored other. What in effect comes back at him from the window/mirror is the monstrous, aroused female double. When the vampire mother bites his bleeding wrist, releasing more 'spiriting [. . .] blood' (for which one could read another kind of bodily fluid) she thereby reflects and punishes his own bestial sexuality, his Mr Hyde, if you like (pp. 154-155).

'Olalla' reminds us that in early development the precursor of the actual mirror is said to be the mother's face which, ideally, reflects and helps define the child's individuality and creativity.²² A major task for the boy is to confirm his maleness by dis-identifying himself from the mirroring, female caretaker. If this has been only precariously accomplished, any later symbiotic merging with the female may threaten masculine potency and





gender identity itself. These dangers seem to be alluded to in a fragmentary story of around this time, 'Story of the Recluse', that incorporates some of the themes of both *Jekyll and Hyde*, and 'Olalla'.²³ Its first-person narrator, an older man with no children 'or none that I saw fit to educate', deplores his own harsh, depriving upbringing at the hands of a minister father 'known for the rigour of his life and the tenor of his pulpit ministrations'. He then describes a misadventure as a twenty-two year old medical student at the University. After a night of drunken dissipation following a huge win at cards he awakens from an amnesiac stupor to a scene echoing the first involuntary transformation scene in *Jekyll and Hyde*. But instead of seeing a dark, hairy hand on the bedcovers he sits up in bed to a tearing noise and discovers himself undressed, clad not in his nightshirt but in a woman's chemise, 'copiously laced about the sleeves and bosom'. This transformation also has to be confirmed in a nearby cheval glass, though in a deleted line in the MS (p. 3) his garment is termed 'no nightgown for a bearded boy', as if he is reassuring himself as to his own gender. The room is the exact counterpart of his own, but with female accoutrements, apparently belonging to 'some young lady' in whose bed he has 'sottishly gone to sleep'. The dark haired woman 'of about [his] age' who enters is evidently his double in this looking glass world, for he (like Alice) is now completely through the mirror, prisoner in a mysterious realm where things turn into their opposites.²⁴ She too 'looks for a while very seriously at her own image' in the same mirror, but is checked by the narrator as she unclasps her bodice, apparently before she can bare the bosom that will confirm their sexual difference. His stumbling explanation emphasises their sameness: 'It seems that your house is built like mine; ~~your room the double~~ that my pass key opens your lock, and that your room is similarly situate to mine.' But to disarm her angry suspicions he swears that he is a gentleman, not a thief, even if he has 'torn [her] night-shirt' (p. 242; MS p. 5). Then, on learning that he is far from home and in





a strange man's house, he implores her help to escape, but the window is too high. It appears there was no escape from the story situation either, for the brief fragment ends right there. Despite its aura of heterosexual, phallic adventure, this odd scene, with its involuntary penetration and aborted defloration, seems to reflect more primitive pre-Oedipal fears and fantasies, attempting both to differentiate the masculine self from the female other as well as to deny female castration. It is reminiscent of R. D. Laing's description, in *The Divided Self*, of his patient David, who compulsively played women's parts in front of the mirror, dressed in his mother's clothes, as the only way to arrest the womanish part that threatened to engulf his entire being.²⁵ In Stevenson's own childhood mirror ritual he was actually impersonating a woman, the damsel Rowena who is lamenting her supposedly dead fiancé. But in 'Olalla' and the 'Recluse', separation and mastery are only possible with the woman's help.²⁶

To recapitulate, Stevenson's compulsive self-scrutiny enabled him to construct some finely observed studies of human psychology, descriptively anticipating aspects of later psychoanalytic theory. In his double stories the mirror is used in novel ways as an instrument for illustrating the duplicity and multiplicity of the male ego, as well as its narcissistic fragility and fear of confrontation and censure, which can lead to avoidance of any real relationship with the other. It also reflects deeper fears over bodily integrity and gender identity in the sexual encounter, where man is lured by his own primitive desire into a dangerous merger with the woman, that threatens to leave him helpless and empty if he tries to resist it, and monstrous if he does not.

NOTES

- 1 I have to thank Caroline Rupprecht, both for her constructive reading of earlier drafts of this paper, and for her very useful discussion of narcissism in the context of literary modernism in *Subject to Delusions: Narcissism, Modernism, Gender* (Evanston,





- Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006).
- 2 W. E. Henley, 'R. L. S.', in *Pall Mall Magazine*, 25:104 (Dec. 1901), p. 508.
 - 3 Stevenson does use images of mirroring elsewhere, notably in his poetry, e.g. 'The Mirror Speaks', or 'Looking-glass River' from *A Child's Garden of Verses*, but this proves to be a topic of such complexity that it will have to be treated in a separate paper.
 - 4 Theodore Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images: A Literary Iconology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 149-163 *passim*.
 - 5 Stefano Ferrari, *Lo Specchio dell'Io: Autoritratto e Psicologia* (Rome: Laterza, 2002), Ch. 3. Of interest in the case of Stevenson is that the mirror also made possible a host of optical technologies, such as reflecting telescopes, lighthouses and searchlights, for which see Benjamin Goldberg, *The Mirror and Man* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), pp. 191-222.
 - 6 See e.g. Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 251-253.
 - 7 For a summary of some of these themes see Leonard Shengold's 1974 paper 'The Metaphor of the Mirror', reprinted in his book 'Father Don't You See I'm Burning?': *Reflections on Sex, Narcissism, Symbolism and Murder: From Everything to Nothing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 61-82.
 - 8 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Markheim', in *The Merry Men and other Tales* (London: Heinemann, 1924), Tusitala VIII, p. 90.
 - 9 For discussions of these issues as well as of some implications of Markheim's (un)heim(lich) German name ('essence' or 'bounds' of home) see Joseph Egan, "'Markheim': A Drama of Moral Psychology", *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 20 (1966), 377-384; also Irving Saposnik, 'Stevenson's "Markheim": A Fictional Christmas Sermon', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 21 (1966), 277-82. A useful recent analysis of the ambiguity of Markheim's double is by Fausto Ciompi, 'Dividuum est Effabile: Dialogue and Subjectivity in Stevenson's *Markheim*', *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, 20 (2005), 125-147.
 - 10 Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systemic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders*





- (Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press, 1971), pp. 105-132 passim.
- 11 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (London: Heinemann, 1924), Tusitala V, pp. 24-25.
 - 12 William Veeder, 'Collated Fractions of the Manuscript Drafts of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*', in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde After One Hundred Years*, ed. by William Veeder and Gordon Hirsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 26. The increasing frequency of 'queer doings' can be seen via Google N-grams viewer, which turns up sexually suggestive quotes from e.g. Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, and Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon*. For the evolving meanings of 'queer', which by 1900 or earlier included 'homosexual', see William Veeder, 'Children of the Night: Stevenson and Patriarchy', in Veeder and Hirsch, pp. 143-144, 159-160.
 - 13 That the vagueness and secrecy of Jekyll's pleasures may allude to Victorian views regarding 'onanism' and 'self-abuse' was pointed out by Dr E. C. Spitzka in 1888, and is cogently discussed by Grace Moore in 'Something to Hyde: The "Strange Preference" of Henry Jekyll', in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, ed. by Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 151-152; see also Mighall, pp. 192-195. The earlier draft citations are from Veeder, 'Manuscript Drafts', pp. 34-35; he further discusses the implications of this toning down of sexual references in 'The Texts in Question', in Veeder & Hirsch, pp. 10-11. For cautionary pictures of the 'masturbator' versus the 'abstainer' see Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2004), pp. 64-65.
 - 14 As Burkhard Niederhoff points out in *Erzähler und Perspektive bei Robert Louis Stevenson* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994), pp. 51-53, referencing this moment in the text, the problem is apparently that even trivial and innocent-seeming sexual acts are seen as leading inexorably to monstrous and evil degeneracy. But this may apply not so much to Victorian notions of sex in general, but to their horror over the supposed effects of self-stimulation or 'pollution' in particular.
 - 15 Sigmund Freud, *A Case of Obsessional Neurosis* (1909) (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), Standard Edition 10, pp. 203-204, 302-303. Pre-Freudian concepts of narcissism, by Havelock Ellis, Paul Näcke,





- Isidor Sadger and others, tended to focus on self-love narrowly defined as erotic self-gazing and/or -stimulation, often in front of a mirror; see Ulrike May-Tolzmänn, 'Zu den Anfängen des Narzissmus: Ellis-Näcke-Sadger-Freud', *Luzifer-Amor: Zeitschrift zur Geschichte der Psychoanalyse*, 4:8 (1991), pp. 57-60, 74-75, 78-79.
- 16 Paul A. Bradlow and Stanley J. Coen, 'Mirror Masturbation', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 53 (1984), 267-285.
- 17 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), Standard Edition 18, p. 15, n.1).
- 18 Letter to W. E. Henley dated late June 1881, in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Meheew (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994-1995), 3:199. This ritual, with ensuing identity collapse and flight, uncannily prefigures a similar scene of masquerade in Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, which, as Andrew Webber points out, in *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 322-323, parallels the monstrous self-alienation represented by Mr Hyde.
- 19 Letter dated 3 March 1886, in *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 211.
- 20 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Olalla', in *The Merry Men and Other Tales* (London: Heinemann, 1924), Tusitala VIII, p. 130. Dead women, or their representations, are not infrequently associated with erotic desire in Stevenson's writing; for other instances see Hilary J. Beattie, 'Stormy nights and headless women: Heterosexual conflict and desire in the work of Robert Louis Stevenson', *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, 6 (2009), 63-80.
- 21 For a more extended discussion of the gender ambiguity and instability discernible in 'Olalla' see Hilary J. Beattie, 'Dreaming, doubling and gender in the work of Robert Louis Stevenson: The strange case of "Olalla"', *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, 2 (2005), 10-32.
- 22 D. W. Winnicott, 'Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development', in *Playing and Reality* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 130-138.
- 23 References are to the version given in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Weir*





of *Hermiston: Some Unfinished Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1924), Tusitala XVI, 239-242, although this, like all other printed versions, renders the title erroneously as 'The Story of a Recluse'. The MS (National Library of Scotland, MSS 3793-4) has it unambiguously as 'Story of the Recluse', the lack of the definite article making it more analogous to *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Roger Swearingen in *The Prose Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson: A Guide* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980), p. 198, dates it to the late 1880s, possibly to Stevenson's stay at Saranac Lake. George S. Hellman, in a prefatory note to the MS, on the basis of the handwriting (in pencil, and often hard to decipher) and the style of the story, suggests around 1885. The fragment also has affinities with 'The Misadventures of John Nicholson', which was written 1885-1886; Swearingen, pp. 102-103.

- 24 That Stevenson knew *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* is proved by the various expanded versions of the final Envoy of *A Child's Garden of Verses*, e.g.: 'From your nice nurseries you would pass/ Like Alice through the Looking-Glass [...]'. See *Robert Louis Stevenson: Collected Poems*, ed. by Janet Adam Smith (New York: Viking, 1971), p. 557; also *The Collected Poems of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Roger C. Lewis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 389. Ziolkowski, pp. 162-163, 216-226, considers the 'penetrable mirror', from Carroll's *Alice* to Cocteau's *Orphée*, to constitute the third major category of mirror imagery (after the 'catoptronic' and the 'doubling' mirrors), representing a mysterious realm of altered reality, eternity or death.
- 25 R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 72-73.
- 26 For Rowena, see Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 468-472. In his 1881 letter (see n. 18, above) Stevenson seems to be conflating this dirge, which implores redemption for the soul in Purgatory, with a somewhat similar song invoking Death in *The Antiquary*. Either way, the association seems to be of sex with guilt and annihilation, a theme that runs through all the stories discussed here. For a more detailed account of sexual/gender insecurity and fear of women in Stevenson's writing, see Beattie (2009), cited in n. 20, above.





'In some shut convent place': the question of Stevenson's poetry

David Miller

But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred 'Yes.' For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred 'Yes' is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers the world.

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part I

For other children, they almost invariably show some intelligent sympathy. 'There is a fine fellow making mud pies,' they seem to say; 'that I can understand, there is some sense in mud pies.' But the doings of their elders, unless where they are speakingly picturesque or recommend themselves by the quality of being easily imitable, they let them go over their heads (as we say) without the least regard. If it were not for this perpetual imitation, we should be tempted to fancy they despised us outright, or only considered us in the light of creatures brutally strong and brutally silly; among whom they condescended to dwell in obedience like a philosopher at a barbarous court.

R. L. Stevenson, 'Child's Play', *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Essays*

The work of Alex Thomson and Penny Fielding has very ably exposed the major critical contours that lie behind the historical failure to 'understand Stevenson's work in its own terms', a failure that has itself now become the site for debates and assessments relating to the significance of secondary commentary in its relationship to the cultural history of the reception of an author. Judgements of reputation rest ultimately on cultural and historical rather than formal categories and no intermingling of these fields will prove decisive in finally settling the endless struggle between literary history, hermeneutics, and poetics, and so it is firmly in the spirit of Thomson's conviction, borrowing from *Treasure Island*, that 'there is still treasure to be lifted' that I conduct these observations on Stevenson's poetry.¹

In a recent study, apparently unable to avoid the irresistible





question of Stevenson's reputation, Fielding makes a case for Stevenson as a 'minor' poet.² This ranks him above the scribblers who produce limericks and the gauche sentimentalists who pen childish verses, but below the major poets. Yet the analysis that follows from her mild justification, moves rapidly beyond the question of due justice to Stevenson's poetry to examine its formal qualities, figural power and conceptual complexity. As Fielding persuasively points out:

These simple poems are in fact *quite* complex, inhabiting a strange and multiple temporality of human experience that John Hollander sums up perfectly: 'a complex dialectic of projected adulthood and recollected childhood'. It is never *quite* clear whether the speakers of the poems are children rehearsing for adulthood, or the adult poet ventriloquising his lost past. There are numerous examples of this doubled stance.³ (The italics are mine.)

In this assessment a composite of time and maturity or naiveté of insight is arranged around a 'dialectic' of simplicity and complexity and is presented as the cornerstone of Stevenson's poetic achievement. These terms and concepts are far from simple or childish and the dialectics of time and experience along with their cognates of memory, loss, innocence, recuperation and so on, have formed the main threads of some of the major modern poetic works from Rilke's *Book of Hours* to Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Fielding's is a rigorous and long overdue defence. But the question that imposes itself at this point is crucial to any assessment of Stevenson's poetry: can the assumed stability and movement of this dialectic be taken for granted? The categories of subject and object and the linear interlocking progress of time and experience that would produce a stable although 'doubled' relationship are precisely the kind of patterns of stable conceptual process that the poems can be shown to resist and evade.





The quiet and disturbing insistence of this question hovers over the analysis of Fielding and Hollander and is embedded in the word 'quite.' The poetry cannot be 'quite' 'dialectical,' the movement of the dialectic would require significant rearrangement for this to be possible and it is entirely plausible that this 'quite' is the marginal surplus that threatens to disrupt the whole edifice of carefully 'doubled' terms and paired concepts. It may prove to be that this 'quite' is exactly what has unnerved the encapsulating categories of standard literary history and sheltered the poems from its classifications all along. It can be shown easily enough in fact that the poems do not *quite* conform to the kind of dialectical relationship that is being allotted to them. In this, as a fractious and cunning child might, they nullify a defining and critical discourse simply by fully accepting and incorporating it, while all the while subjecting the critical burden of the major conceptual categories of this discourse to a playful and equalising accommodation. As Fielding hints in a previous passage, the poems must inevitably be made subject *to* analysis in order for them to enter the field of reputable critical evaluation, but at the same time they 'defy or forgo analysis'⁴ and so in the manner of a fractious bondsman in defiance of a master, they refuse to be the possessed subject *of* the analysis. The poem 'Death' from *Poems 1869-1879* is emblematic in this respect:

Death

We are as maidens one and all,
In some shut convent place,
Pleased with the flowers, the service bells,
The cloister's shady grace,
That whiles, with fearful, fluttering hearts,
Look outward thro' the grate
And down the long, white road, up which,
Some morning, soon or late,
Shall canter on his great, gray horse





That splendid sacred Lord
Who comes to lead us forth—his wife,
But half with our accord.⁵

The poem patterns itself around the traditional topos of the marriage of life and death. The arrangement offers a temporal complication by projecting the unavoidable union of life and death under the suppressed erotics of courtship in which death is the approaching 'bridegroom' and life the welcoming bride or 'maiden'. The inevitable union therefore has to be welcomed rather than merely accepted. The habitual poetic association of death with the pale and fatal woman is inverted and along with it the traditional pastoral conventions of rotting vegetation and still water that signify the decay of time, are here replaced by a series of images that are arranged around the passage from one interior (the 'cloister') to another (a 'quiet household'). Interestingly, the figure of the poet is configured as feminine ('wife') and takes the role of the welcoming and cloistered 'maiden' while more traditionally, death is the approaching 'gray' horseman. On first gloss, the poem appears to achieve its force by a reworking of some familiar cultural themes and tropes in which the pathos of passing time and the inevitability of death constitute the habitual cognates. Yet, as is often the case, this impression belies a deeper figural ambivalence and complexity that constantly threatens to dissolve, or at least interfere with the stable marriage between trope and theme. For example, the opening of the passage from one interior to another appears to be the prerogative of the poem itself, which is thereby outside or at least exempt from the pattern it invokes. The surface pathos so often associated with elegy is here made subject to a deeper and altogether more disturbing constellation in which the subjective responding or perceiving mind is allocated no controlling status, and is made subject to the power of a poetic language it has no power to stall or recuperate. The poem can be seen to thematise





this, as it presents itself as the shelter of the poet as 'maiden', but at the same moment also enacts the figural 'Lordship' whereby this shelter is breached and overthrown. The poem elaborates on its own welcoming of the obliteration in death of determinate consciousness and celebrates non-being in which there is no sense of a heightening towards explanatory clarity. The traditional terms of a philosophy of consciousness that habitually revolve around the binary of outside and inside (perceiving mind and external object) here stand in the service of the poetic language that deploys them and not vice-versa. Here rests a crucial ambivalence and complication that cannot be settled in favour of either innocence or experience (cf. William Blake) and which is emblematic of Stevenson's poetics. The poem seems to establish a knowing language of renunciation over a false or deluded language of dialectical recuperation, but it is precisely the 'knowing' world of adult experience that is renounced. In short, we seem to have a sophisticated poetic discourse that demands its own shaded cloister of *knowing* innocence, an obvious impossibility in anything other than poetry itself.

Certainly this is no 'childish' poem in any conventional sense. As Fielding rightly points out such poems deliberately refuse to 'explain' themselves.⁶ This lack of outward explanatory or justificatory categories shifts the assumed dialectical or doubled relationship between theme and figure towards an undercurrent of playful ambivalence that is by no means innocent. The appearance of childish innocence is belied by the sophistication of the figural language that produces the appearance. Similarly, the expected recuperation of figural errancy of the poetic imagery into a final redeeming moment of higher conceptual insight simply does not occur. Elsewhere, Fielding points out how the title of Stevenson's 1887 collection *Underwoods* relates to the way that poets of this period tended to operate rather more privately with fewer claims to a presence on the national stage as asserted by figures such as Tennyson.⁷ In this sense, the poems seek to enact





a formal shelter or shaded refuge from what Theodor Adorno terms the 'commodification' of culture and the 'objectification' of language.⁸ What may be termed the *infancy* and shaded interior murmur of Stevenson's poetry then, can be extended into a fuller description that attests to the profound resources of their continued survival *as* poetry. This expansive non-representational and seemingly limitless configuration (one hesitates for obvious reasons to term it a 'place' or 'site') is symbolised by the pale blue vault of the endless sky or the glassy surface of water and often by the folds of an involute rumination on absence and loss. One sees this predilection for the non-present in poems such as 'Katherine' from *Underwoods*:

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

(*Collected Poems*, p. 130)

The pattern of reflection implied in the poem does not allow for any crossing over into a realm of concrete experience and neither for a retrieval of experience by memory. The mirroring of the 'pool' is 'wayward', and the image is hovering 'between' states. The poetic image, or better the image in the poetic, is here suspended and it is this trembling suspension that the poem celebrates. Again, we have the sense of a cool and shaded bower in which the progress of time and the moments of transference essential to experience are held in suspended abeyance with a concomitant annulment of all binary logic. The whole notion of the substantial and phenomenal qualities necessary for any





experience whatsoever and the resources of retrieval necessary for proper memory vanish in the liquid 'quiet' ambivalence of the poem that is still 'clear' and free from impressionistic illusions.

The emblems of stable reality are evaporated in a language that offers the recurring and ambivalent intercourse of 'pool', 'mirror', and reflecting 'blue'. Again this 'blue' is left as a predicate without a traditional associated subject – sky, ocean, and so on. This version of reflection is atypical inasmuch as it relinquishes the traditional dialectic of object and reflector and so the poem thereby risks pushing the possibility of stable reading beyond the *tain* of the reflecting mirror.⁹ The *tain* or background that would limit the reflection and render it as a stable conduit for experience is simply abandoned as the 'blue' is taken under the process of reflection. Thus the 'blue' is itself 'reflected' rather than functioning as the conditioning limit of the *process* of reflection. Rather as a child's seemingly innocuous game might, the tropological language interrupts the process of reflection that apparently underpins the poem's content. What occurs then, is that the poem sets in play a series of terms and metaphors that would be conducive to both a burdensome excess or the ruined poverty of stable reflection if it were not for the delicate and hovering ambivalence that forestalls the outright possibility of one or the other. Although apparently less 'real' in any empirical or even dialectical sense, this 'wayward' and 'trembling' language remains more 'true'. This truth can only emerge from the sense of truth as commitment, that is to say, being true *to* a cause – in this case to the figural language of the poem, which then becomes its own ultimate reality 'forever'.

We see here that the sense of an opening or acceptance of a form of poetic language becomes the index of a 'true' commitment to a version of the real that operates within the shaded corners and shadowed zones of linguistic form rather than in any order of experiential categories. This realisation or acceptance of the power of a form of language renders any outright moral or





emotional stance impossible because the terminology and concepts that would govern any such disposition are subject to the same metaphorical power and rendered ambivalent. 'Tears' and 'smiles' are equally lacking in motive force in such a condition and again, what becomes apparent is the serious play of figure over the imposition of any substantive theme. Here poetic figure takes on the role of infant vitality that operates beyond, below and also within the adult world of communicative semantic utility. It is not difficult to show that Stevenson's poetic work remains 'true' to this commitment to rigorous infancy, and that the idea of the child-like so often associated with his poetic work can be rethought under these more propitious and in the end more accurate terms. I want to try and chart some of the ramifications and worth of this procedure.

When infancy is approached in this way, it opens some productive channels of inquiry. In his work *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, Giorgio Agamben explains that 'infancy' is not simply the under-developed, the child, the infant, or the immature. Rather it is an ever-present condition that poses the deepest question of the relationship of 'voice' and language. Agamben writes:

It is significant that the author should have arrived at his inquiry into the human voice (or its absence) precisely through a reflection on infancy. In-fancy, which is this book's subject, is not a simple given whose chronological site might be isolated, nor is it like an age or a psychosomatic state which a psychology or a paleoanthropology could construct as a human fact independent of language.¹⁰

The place and condition of the voice of infancy in its relationship with the language in which it is situated, constitutes the site of a struggle. For Agamben, infancy poses the question of the





limits and stakes embedded in the quest for the experience of the 'voice' in its encounter with language. The opening up of this question by infancy exposes the need to return to crucial issues of *meaning*, writing, and voice. The questions and categories associated with language, writing and voice, are of course crucial for the poet, and we can see that in this pattern of thought, infancy really figures as the site or mode by which that which is *crucial* re-emerges in the realm of language. The exposing of this realm of infancy-in-language necessarily occurs in a realm that is below, outside or inscribed *within* the categories of mature or adult experience. In fact, experience for Agamben, has become a condition that obscures and avoids the questions of voice and language that infancy poses. In other words, 'infancy' is the name given to the *play* enacted within the deep resources of language as the voice attempts to find and question itself. The surface contours of this configuration traditionally appear as a return – the return to a previous state of innocence in which voice and language coincide, but this image of a return to the 'voice' of infancy is again only the surface emblem of what is *always* the question of the limit of language. We can see, then, that the question that infancy poses and insists upon is not simply a return to some childish 'state' of experience, but rather the posing of the whole question of the limit of language that exists continually and endlessly below and *in* the surface qualities of experience as such. Agamben frames these issues in this way:

Infancy is an *experimentum linguae* of this kind, in which the limits of language are to be found not outside language, in the direction of its referent, but in an experience of language as such, in its pure self-reference. But what can an experience of this kind be? How can there be experience not of an object but of language itself? And, if so, without language experienced as this or that signify-





ing proposition, but as the pure fact that one speaks, that language exists.¹¹

For Agamben, the eruption of the ‘play’ of infancy does not seek for mere ambiguity or conceptual destruction and neither for the silence that might exist on the other side of language, but rather the ‘possibility’ of access to the deeper resources and ‘logic’ of language that have become obscured and suppressed by ‘everyday oppressiveness’ and banality of experience (p. 14). These observations on the ‘banality’ and ‘oppressiveness’ of everyday experience should not be taken as a dismissal of the particular life of the person *in* the everyday. Rather, this formulation expresses the *loss* or suppression of the essentially particular in the general categories of social experience in which the ‘individual merely observes’ their own experience (p. 14). The play of infancy is therefore the enactment of attempted retrieval or an exposure of a crucial site in which the possibility of the rescue of particular experience can take place. It is altogether predictable that this should be characterised as ‘childish’ by that realm of experience that assumes itself as mature and therefore as the proprietorial index of meaning. I want to try and show here that Stevenson’s poetry enacts a knowing and double gesture. On the one hand, it sets in play the crucial questions and resources of the ‘infancy of language’ as an intrinsic element in its form and on the other, it attempts to shelter or preserve what Agamben terms as the ‘infancy of experience in language’. This sheltering is visible in the way the poetry wishes to remain hidden or protected in the oblique and hardly-noticed space of the child’s play corner or secret hideaway. This sheltering or cloistering is an attempt to salvage and foster the infancy that would otherwise be disciplined or dismissed by the ‘adult’ categories of habitual social experience.¹²





Whereas infancy is staked on the possibility that there is an experience of language which is not merely a silence or a deficiency of names, but one whose logic can be indicated, whose site and formula can be designated, at least up to a point. (p. 6.)

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe argues a very similar case but stresses the centrality of poetry in his work *Poetry as Experience*. Here Lacoue-Labarthe explains that one should not confuse 'experience' simply with 'living' but rather to view it as the root etymology implies, as a 'crossing through danger' or a moment of opening on to acute existential insight, rather than as the habitual everyday stuff of 'anecdotes'.¹³ For Lacoue-Labarthe, what Agamben writes of 'infancy' is always an essential part of the work of the poet, or more precisely, either covertly or explicitly, intrinsic to the 'experience' of figural work of poetry. Labarthe also follows Agamben in viewing experience as the category that is questioned and re-posed by the 'infancy' of poetry:

Poetry', under this configuration of thought, re-opens the possibility of a world, and paves the way for the improbable, unforeseeable advent of a god. Only this might 'save' us. For this task, art (again, *technè*), and in art, poetry, are perhaps able to provide some signs. At least, that is the hope, fragile tenuous, and meagre as it is.¹⁴

Under this analysis, Stevenson's poetry can be taken as an attempt to name and deploy infancy as the crucial question of language and voice in their relationship with habitual experience and the public sphere. At the same movement the poems shelter themselves in idioms of *infancy* from the communicative forces that would colonise and discipline them. The miniature, the hidden or the hiding, the small and seemingly insignificant, the playfulness of the child-like, all become the occasion, there-





fore, for the opening of profound questions and even profound answers. The 'possibility' of a non-reflected other 'world' opens up, not as immature fancy, but as the other side of the deep resource of a poetic language. The melancholy tone, produced by the fact that the crucial nature of this insightfulness is often simply missed or overlooked, is only the necessary correlate to infancy's fugitive situation. We can clearly see this pattern of a miniature or hidden world in poems such as 'The City under the Table' and 'Block City'. Moreover, the insistence that we learn to take this world in the poems at face value and not translate it into an adult set of categories is made explicit in poems such as 'See How the Children in the Print' from *Moral Emblems I*.

Bound on the book to see what's in 't!
O, like these pretty babes, may you
Seize and *apply* this volume too!
And while your eye upon the cuts
With harmless ardour opes and shuts,
Reader, may your immortal mind
To their sage lessons not be blind.

(*Collected Poems*, p. 416)

The lessons of the fragile meagerness of this world are attuned to the curiously persistent faith *in* poetry that Stevenson never relinquishes and of which his poetry is itself the sanctuary. In 'If This Were Faith', from *Songs of Travel and Other Verses*, Stevenson addresses an absent God in a language pitched at the limit of representational and experiential concepts:

God, if this were enough,
That I see things bare to the buff
And up to the buttocks in mire;
That I ask nor hope nor hire,
Nut in the husk,





Nor dawn beyond the dusk,
Nor life beyond death:
God, if this were faith?

(*Collected Poems*, p. 261)

Here, 'faith' appears as nothing more than a simple insistence on the 'bare' language of the poem itself, as if the figural qualities of poetic language were the last best hope of a veiled or fugitive order of being. This reliance on the bare resources of poetic language is thematised by poems such as 'Bright is the Ring of Words' from *Songs of Travel*

Bright is the ring of words
When the right man rings them,
Fair the fall of songs
When the singer sings them.
Still they are carolled and said –
On wings they are carried –
After the singer is dead
And the maker buried.

Low as the singer lies
In the field of heather,
Songs of his fashion bring
The swains together.
And when the west is red
With the sunset embers,
The lover lingers and sings
And the maid remembers.

(*Collected Poems*, p. 255)

This conjures the enclosing ring of circular timeless motion and the circumscribed world of knowing innocence. No linear progress or conventional 'travel' is described and the poem announces the 'ring' as the call or sing-song music of words,





encountered without due homage to the adult rules of grammar and syntax (the poem itself). Here understood as vicious circle but also as innocent pleasure, we see the 'adult' poems, for want of a better phrase, as completely concomitant with the so-called 'children's verses'. Stevenson simply accepts the power of the irrevocable figural pattern he has initiated. From one perspective, the poem appears sombre and melancholy, from the other it is simply a happy acceptance of the figural power of words to outlive and out-manoeuvre the embodiments we call 'speakers'. Again, circles never really end, only consciousness and growing things die, and there is a sense in which the poem, itself a bright ring of words, will outlast the fragile voices and hands that mouthed and penned it. The empty time of endless circularity is traditionally attached to the featureless blue of the expanse of the sky, god as eternal pastor, and the ever-present spheres of the sun and moon. In the poem 'Summer Sun' from *A Child's Garden of Verses*, we clearly discern the interlocking strands of timelessness, the garden, and the child in a pattern that celebrates that which does not develop or progress, but only that which is. The first and final stanzas run:

Great is the sun, and wide he goes
Through empty heaven with repose;
And in the blue and glowing days
More thick than rain he showers his rays.
[. . .]
Above the hills, along the blue,
Round the bright air with footing true,
To please the child, to paint the rose,
The gardener of the World, he goes.

(*Collected Poems*, p. 401)

The language of both the short sing-song lyrics, and the longer story poems, is often deceptively simple and makes its initial claim





on our attention on the basis of its simple rhymes, easy rhythm, an apparent refusal of complex cognitive demands and seeming lack of metaphysical pretensions. A short review of six of Stevenson's poems that had been set to music that appeared in *The Musical Times* in 1909, praises the way the 'ingenious' musical score uses the 'six charming little poems by Stevenson.'¹⁵ The words 'charming' and 'little' are a part of a group of terms and cognates that suggest the childlike but also the impish or strange. Charm can be dangerous as well as pleasant and 'little' has irritating as well as sentimental connotations (the phrase 'little rascals' carries both of course). In his essay 'Charmed Language', Theodor Adorno explores the temptations and also the fateful nature of lyrical charm. This charm is the result of the attempt of lyric to shelter itself from the 'disintegration of language'. It attempts to achieve this, not so much by appropriating the flowing dissolution of the categorical distinctions necessary for meaning and not so much by erecting metrical defences, but by a quest for the 'sensuous simplicity' of a 'sonorous fragility and boundless love'.¹⁶ Akin to a courtly knight of language, the poet who devotes him or herself to lyric attempts to rescue the deep song of language from itself, to protect it, as in a walled garden or tower, from the everyday world and the general communicative act. Although Adorno cites Hölderlin, Borchardt, and Trakl, in the Anglophone tradition it is Wallace Stevens' celebrated lines from *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven* that most readily comes to mind.¹⁷

Not wholly spoken in a conversation between
Two bodies disembodied in their talk,
Too fragile, too immediate for any speech.¹⁸

For Adorno, the dissolution and uncoupling of language under the power of commodification that such poetry endeavours to disclose is an 'impossible attempt to retrieve that which is irretrievable'. Poetry itself is too tender, too fragile to oppose the 'forces that have exploded the immanence of language'.¹⁹ In Stevenson's poetry we can see a connected but slightly altered





approach – the poetry attempts to protect itself by feigning a lack of seriousness, by taking up in all sincerity, the posture of lightness, the position of the child and the child-like. This will shelter what remains of its sensuous and fragile capabilities by steering clear of the main channels and arenas of criticism and commentary; for who would be vulgar enough to waste their breath by blaming the self-confessed child-like for being immature?

There is something else here that is hinted at by Adorno in the 'Charmed Language' essay. It is the idea that in order to enact a 'charmed' poetry the poet must totally abandon himself or herself to the figural power of language. The result is that far from enforcing an individual identity the poems end by relinquishing to the very poetic form that was taken as its last refuge and shelter. Here the commitment to lyric becomes associated with the proximity and acceptance of death, of absence and self-annulment. In terms of Stevenson this configuration can perhaps be modified so one can see him not so much as utterly assimilated to his poetry, but rather as hiding or sheltering *in* his poetry, like a child in a cupboard or under a bed. Here we may begin to see the significance of poems such as 'Land of Counterpane', 'A Good Play' and 'My Bed is a Boat', in which the poems pattern a speaker out of sight, in a moment oblique to the temporal flow of diurnal concerns, in an enclosed miniature and discrete world - in the folds of the sheets of the sick-bed, or sheltered under the kitchen table or on the stairs:

Let the sofa be mountains, the carpet be sea,
There I'll establish a city for me:
A kirk and a mill and a palace beside,
And a harbour as well where my vessels may ride.

(*Collected Poems*, p. 393)

Occasionally, a poem addresses the reader as a child, coupled with an invitation that the reader take the poem without preju-





dice and refrain from the urge to reduce it to habitual experiential categories – in other words, the poem often pleads its own existence *as a poem*. This is the case with ‘Come, my Little Children, Here Are [. . .]’ from *New Poems*:

Come, my little children, here are songs for you;
Some are short and some are long, and all, all are new.
You must learn to sing them very small and clear,
Very true to time and tune and pleasing to the ear.
Mark the note that rises, mark the notes that fall,
Mark the time when broken, and the swing of it all.
So when night is come, and you have gone to bed,
All the songs you love to sing shall echo in your head.²⁰

The simple meter and rhymes of such poems tends to make us uneasy and the deliberate absence of a subject in the sentence-like title of this particular poem adds to this sense of a lack of substantive qualities. In such instances, it may well be that our reaction of uneasy acceptance is connected to what Adorno, in *Minima Moralia*, characterises as the ‘pathos of metre and rhyme’. Writing of the lyrics of Stephan Georg and Hölderlin, according to Adorno, when a language has ‘abandoned itself to the exhausted flood of communication’, forms of metre and rhyme take on an estranging quality – ‘jutting their alien contours’ in to the newer languages, and ‘standing erect and marooned’ in the general sea of language that is in the process of destroying itself.²¹ Under this analysis, free verse is a last gasp defence or rescue attempt, while metre and rhyme appear as an exhausted sigh, harking back to some pre-modernist condition of language. Again, the idea of lyric song is here curiously bound-up with the notion of return to a previous and child-like state. But the return or rescue attempt can only take place in the very language lyric seeks to avoid, and so pathos is overtaken by irony and this irony opens the way for an ambivalent and inevitably negative





insight. Convinced of our modernity and aesthetic sophistication, we resist the simple rhymes and meters of Stevenson's poetry as naive and even perhaps deluded, while missing the truth that resides inside the outward signs of this pathos – that language is losing its strength. Like old and simple dwellings, guileless phrases, and perhaps dolls and children's games, we condescend to find Stevenson's poems 'charming' but we do not wish to be charmed *by* them. A 'charm' after all, is a spell made in verse designed to circumvent our critical senses by means of a dangerous figural magic. Yet, such poetic language refuses all sentimental reassurance and remains stubbornly present to us simply *as* poetry and as *nothing* else. To fully comprehend such a 'song' of 'faith' would be to destroy its whole grounding in the delicate language of figure. We must simply let it be, and if critical evasiveness and embarrassment is the fee for its continued fugitive existence, then it is a cost we should be happy to pay.

NOTES

- 1 See Alex Thomson, 'Stevenson's Afterlives', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Penny Fielding (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 147-159 and for a more comprehensive study of the vicissitudes of Stevenson's literary reputation see Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp.132-157.
- 2 Penny Fielding, 'Stevenson's Poetry' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, pp. 102-103.
- 3 Ibid., p. 111.
- 4 Ibid., p. 104.
- 5 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Collected Poems* edited with an introduction and notes by Janet Adam Smith (London: Hart-Davis, 1950), p. 66. Henceforth cited in text.
- 6 Fielding, 'Stevenson's Poetry' p. 105.
- 7 Ibid., p. 104.





- 8 In the essay, 'Lyric Poetry and Society', Adorno explains how in a commodity glutted industrial world the main foundations of lyric 'voice' have been shattered, and so its continued survival is an intriguing and ghostly anomaly that attests to the failed aspirations of modernity.
- 9 For a full discussion of the potentialities of this concept of the *tain* see Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).
- 10 Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, annotated edited edition, translated by Liz Heron (Verso: London, 2007), p. 4.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 5. Henceforth cited in text.
- 12 From a literary rather than philosophical point of view, Agamben locates the full emergence of the 'modern' question of the 'crisis in experience' in the poetry of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Rilke. See the section 'Modern Poetry and Experience' in *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, annotated edited edition, translated by Liz Heron (Verso: London, 2007), pp. 41-43. In this respect, it is worth recalling Stevenson's famous admission that *inter alios*, he played the 'sedulous ape' to Baudelaire. See, 'A College Magazine', *Memories and Portraits* [1887], (Serenity: Rockville, 2009), pp. 31-38.
- 13 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, translated by Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 18.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 15 *The Musical Times*, vol 50, 798 (1 Aug., 1909), p. 524.
- 16 Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, vol II translated by Shierry Weber Nicholzen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 193-210.
- 17 The connections are apparently more than simply tonal and coincidental. Jacqueline Vaught Brogan has argued convincingly for some interesting and closer affinities between Stevenson and Wallace Stevens. See 'Stevens and Stevenson: The Guitarist's Guitar', *American Literature*, vol 59, 2 (May, 1987), pp. 224-228.
- 18 Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 465.
- 19 *Notes to Literature*, vol II, p. 198.





- 20 Robert Louis Stevenson, *New Poems* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), p. 75.
- 21 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, translated by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 221.





Locating home

Ann C. Colley

Constantly moving from place to place, Stevenson regularly dwelt in spaces belonging to others. Pondering this nomadic life while confined to bed at 'Skerryvore' in Bournemouth, a house furnished by his father, Stevenson scribbled out a list of 'Places I have slept: France, Italy, England, Scotland.'¹ This whimsical, perhaps anxious, exercise dashed off inside the front cover of his 1884 'Notebook Kept During Illness' should not surprise those who are familiar with Stevenson's wandering existence.

Home was never to be just 17 Heriot Row, Edinburgh – the primary dwelling of his parents. For family reasons, for health, pleasure, necessity, and for love, Stevenson repeatedly changed residences. Among countless other locations, he lived in Swanston Cottage at the foot of the Pentland Hills, Spring Grove School in England, hotels in Germany and London, as well as the inns and the spaces of his travels through the Cévennes. Continuously moving from continent to continent, he stayed in the cottages and spas in Menton, Hyères, Davos, and Saranac Lake where he lingered for months attempting to heal his damaged lungs. Endeavouring to appease his parents and searching for a place to live, he also tried residing in Bournemouth, but that effort lasted less than three years. Before and after Bournemouth, he stayed here and there in California. Later, beginning in 1888, while cruising in the Pacific, there was to be a series of lodgings in Australia, Hawaii, the Marquesas, Tahiti, and the Gilberts, as well as the various sea-going vessels that made a residence of the shifting winds and transported him from one island to another. Indeed, it was not until just four years before his death that at last, after a lifetime in motion, Stevenson settled in Samoa, and built as well as financed his own home, 'Vailima,' a large structure 800 feet above the sea and two miles from the capital, Apia. From this dwelling, only two months before his death in





December, 1894, he declared to an audience of Samoan chiefs: 'I have chosen it [Samoa] to be my home while I live, and my grave after I am dead.'²

For most of his life, in a manner reminiscent of David Balfour in *Kidnapped*, Stevenson habitually would lock the doors of a familiar dwelling (in David's case his father's house) and set out, sometimes feeling estranged, even exiled, to seek yet another setting where he might belong, be stimulated, or survive. Either driven by his illnesses or perhaps, like David, in search of his rightful inheritance, Stevenson was always to be a species of emigrant who moved from place to place, 'out of my country and of myself.'³ Throughout these quests, again like David Balfour, he often referred to Scotland as his home, and, when abroad, like Alan Breck, his alter ego, Stevenson admitted that he was 'weary for the heather,'⁴ most especially when in England, where he found his 'eyes [were] not at home in an English landscape or with English houses.'⁵

As a child of the heather and the wind, Stevenson had vivid memories of Scotland that were to remain poignant and dominant during most of his travels. Although he resisted what he referred to as the 'ghastly romancing about Scotland scenery and manners' (*Letters* 1:47) and did not wish to 'wallow in the pathetic' (*The Amateur Emigrant* p. 111), Stevenson enjoyed 'a strong Scotch accent of mind' ('Foreigner at Home' p. 16). Paradoxically he often clung to recollections of his country's landscape and people. The sound of a home voice on board the emigrant ship or the sight of a Saranac stream that recalled the running water in the Highlands was irresistible. These remembrances of Scotland helped orient him in strange lands, and generally eased his homesickness when amidst 'an unexpected unfamiliarity' (*Letters* 1:66). As a result, when he first reached California and saw pine trees and mountain rivers reminiscent of what he had left behind, he was able to write: 'I had come home again' (*The Amateur Emigrant* p. 137).





It would be easy to stop here and linger on the vibrant and vital memories of Scotland that created a feeling of home – indeed it is a subject I have previously addressed, and it is a reality that others continue to consider.⁶ In this essay, however, I wish to qualify this well-rehearsed understanding. I am proposing, instead, that when Stevenson finally settled in Samoa, this habitual mixture of dominant memories of Scotland intertwining with a sense of otherness underwent a subtle alteration. Indeed, in Samoa quite the opposite happened. The foreign, and not the familiar landscape or tongues of Stevenson's birthplace, became the overriding or more forceful factor in the way he located or defined home. Although Stevenson was never to abandon his love for Scotland, in his last years the seemingly alien culture and setting of the South Seas were to emerge as the more powerfully orienting component of his experience.

In thinking about this shift, I am drawn to Hans Blumenberg's understanding of metaphor, which has helped me consider just how the foreign, rather than the familiar, can become the more dynamic or accessible feature when comprehending something. In Blumenberg's essay, 'An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric,' this twentieth-century German philosopher asserts that, paradoxically, metaphors, rather than finding their strength in the recognizable, seek it in something foreign; that in metaphor, it is the alien and not the familiar, that emerges as dominant or instructive, and is 'more easily at our disposal.'⁷ Examples of this principle are not difficult to find. For instance, in an entry belonging to an early notebook, Samuel Taylor Coleridge draws on a metaphor to describe a detail in the landscape. In doing so, he speaks of 'the chocolate mist around the birch twigs in the spring.'⁸ Such a comparison startles us, for the tenor and vehicle seem quite unrelated; yet, it is the alien presence of 'chocolate,' within the context of birch trees, that actually brings the subject or the sensation of looking at these twigs home to us. The alien dominates and is more easily





at our disposal. It is the foreign 'vehicle' that carries the meaning and instructs us. One might say that meaning relies upon what is outside its scope of reference.

I suggest that Blumenberg's paradigm describes the way in which Stevenson conceives the image of home, especially in Samoa where the foreign emerges as the more enlightening force and tips the previous balance in which familiar references to Scotland had once borne the heavier weight in locating home.

In Samoa, in spite of the fact that Stevenson shipped the furniture, the books, the lead soldiers, the wine, the paintings, the glassware, the fine silver, and the china (much of which broke in passage) from both Heriot Row and 'Skerryvore' to fill his new residence with what one might call a portable Scotland, and that in Samoa he read through his grandfather's diaries and letters, and worked on, among other books featuring Scotland, a sequel to *Kidnapped* (known to us as either *David Balfour* or *Catriona*), it was *not* these retrospective objects or recollections from his past that created the homelike atmosphere.⁹ Rather, for Stevenson, it was the so-called foreign elements that were more instructive and empowering.

Stevenson's wife, Fanny, might not have agreed with this observation, for in her 'Preface' to the sequel to *David Balfour* (perhaps in an attempt to encourage a British readership who thought that Stevenson had deserted them), she strongly implies that Scotland still tended to define his experiences in Samoa. She remarks: 'It might seem a far cry from Samoa to Scotland, and yet in many ways one recalled the other.'¹⁰ In addition to remarking upon the similarities between the Samoan chiefs and the leaders of clans in Scotland, she also proposes that at moments the South Seas landscape recalled that of Scotland. I want to suggest, though, that the soft grey mist she notices on the summit of Mount Vaea and the rushing stream a few yards from their door at Vailima that Fanny believed momentarily transported Stevenson to the landscape of Scotland were pleasant, but only





intermittent points of contact. They were not nearly as enduring as were the pressing immediacy of the people, the culture, and the politics of Samoa, a country that seemed verging on civil war. These issues, not a passing if painfully delightful glimpse of the past, now dominated Stevenson's consciousness, located him and constructed home for him. As he insisted in an 1891 letter to Sidney Colvin, 'I have my life to live here; these interests are for me immediate' (*Letters* 8: 373) – an assertion that possibly also alludes to the various troubles of his family who were living with him.¹¹

More and more entangled in the rivalries among the 'kings' of Samoa as well as involved in the quarrels surrounding the competing consuls from Germany, Britain, and America, not to mention the contentious arguments within the various missionary societies (all of which might have reminded him of the culture battles of Scotland), Stevenson let these multiple factions direct his thoughts. Their currents flowed naturally and audibly into what he was writing. He filled his letters to friends with accounts of these problems. Intrigued by the island's history and culture, the beachcombers and tradesmen, as well as by the Samoans who worked for him, Stevenson not only increasingly featured these people in his fiction, prose, and poetry but also learned as much as he could about the lore and practices of his surroundings. Furthermore in Apia he took on more and more of a public role, served as a chair at public meetings about Samoan affairs, drafted proclamations, wrote letters to the *Times*, and, for a brief moment, imagined that he might be appointed the British consul or Chief Justice. Once he even feared that because of his opposition to certain foreign officials, he might be deported.

There were, of course, still times when he recalled his Scots tongue, showed an interest in tracing his genealogy, selected a Royal Stewart tartan for his staff's official uniform, told J. M. Barrie that his imagination still inhabited the 'cold [...] gray hills' of Scotland (*Letters* 7:412), and wrote longingly to Sidney Colvin





about the warmth of Colvin's home in London. But there were even more occasions when he devoted hours to learning Samoan; with the help of the LMS missionaries he could read and write the language as well as speak it haltingly. Stevenson even knew some Tahitian. He dedicated his days not only to writing but also to running his estate, receiving visitors, organizing a half-caste club, going on outings to other islands with his missionary friends, studying Samoan history, negotiating settlements on every imaginable subject for Samoans who apparently sought his advice, clandestinely visiting prisoners of war, and even teaching Sunday School. These were all immediate and pressing concerns. His activities engaged him deeply. They were a testament to his commitment to Samoa. As Roslyn Jolly points out, Stevenson was proud of these many interruptions to his regular writing routine.¹² He used them to orient not only himself but also the matter of his prose, fiction, and poetry. Now Stevenson spent more time on forms of writing other than those valued by the devotees he had left behind. Moreover, even those novels set in Scotland that appear to revive the old Stevenson, do not really do so. As Roslyn Jolly and others, such as Julia Reid and Barry Menikoff, have noted, the sequel to *Kidnapped*, *David Balfour/Catriona* (written in Samoa) is saturated with political insights grounded in the Pacific. It is 'a different kind of novel from *Kidnapped* ... because of *where* it was written' (as quoted in Jolly p. 120).

In a sense, this predominance over Scotland of things Samoan can be marked by the purchase of approximately 314 acres and the construction of his commodious home, 'Vailima,' upon the island of Upolu. Now what once might have seemed foreign to him and what was certainly still alien to readers and friends in Britain (particularly to Sidney Colvin) was to become more accessible and home to Stevenson. The large piece of indigenous bark cloth hanging in the great dining hall (now displayed in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library), plus the numerous other South Sea objects were not merely ornaments but





rather representations of a shift in consciousness, as was his indigenous staff. The floors of 'Vailima' were made of imported California Redwood, but, significantly, were stained with native dyes. The indigenous finish throughout 'Vailima' reflected a new and radiant meaning of a home that was not entirely dependent upon the domination of things Scottish. 'Vailima' became the seat of Stevenson's new authority and direction – a consequence that suggests that for Stevenson this place could really be home because he had authority here.

The designing and building of 'Vailima' were possible because for the first time in his life Stevenson had become self-sufficient financially (though, I hasten to add that periodically there were anxious moments about money). No longer was he, as several critics emphasise, subsidised and dependent upon his father's favour and financial support. With his father's death on 8 May 1887, he had left England and eventually found his way to the South Seas. In a sense, like David Balfour in *Kidnapped*, he had locked the door of his father's home. And, just as David Balfour at the conclusion of *Kidnapped* ends up at the bank, the British Linen Company, to draw his inheritance and, thereby, come into his kingdom, so did Stevenson: but his kingdom was in Samoa. It was no longer Alan Breck the true Scot who, toward the end of *Kidnapped*, promised David 'I'll find a house to ye.'¹³ Rather it was Stevenson himself, who built his own house and became master of his estate. Donning his splendid red sash (now on display at the museum in Saranac Lake), Stevenson essentially adopted the role of laird of the Shaws. He discovered his authority and legacy away from Scotland. The land of his birth lay at a distance, precious but not pressing. Now, as Roslyn Jolly in *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific* asserts, Stevenson was free to define himself in a way that was not dependent upon ties to the past but to develop his previous interests in anthropology, law, and history within his new context.

In a sense, Stevenson's efforts in clearing parts of the exten-





sive land he purchased and his building of 'Vailima' with all its authority up on the hill (his 'old colonial home' – *Letters* 3:198) composed the true sequel to *Kidnapped*. In this respect, I suggest that it was the building of 'Vailima,' and not *David Balfour* or *Catriona*, which was the more appropriate continuation of *Kidnapped*. Toward the end of the sequel, David fantasises with Miss Barbara Grant about embellishing his family home 'with plantations, parterres, and a terrace' once his uncle dies and he fairly comes into his kingdom.¹⁴ Stevenson in Samoa actually does what David dreamed of doing but on a grander scale. With an inheritance from his father, as well as with his earnings from his writing, Stevenson designs and develops a property or a kingdom that not only displays a pleasantly spacious house but also contains other dwellings, animals, an entire plantation, and a devoted staff. Indeed, he was able to add a second wing with the earnings from *The Wrecker*. Stevenson has become the patriarch (though a beleaguered one).¹⁵

Moreover, 'Vailima' and its estate emerged as the true sequel to *Kidnapped* because Stevenson courageously and definitively established himself there and created a kind of ending which really brought him home. Whereas at the conclusion of *David Balfour/Catriona*, David 'located' home by retreating, in spite of his courageous intentions, into what many identify as a political passivity or a political quiescence, Stevenson did not. He wanted to be more effectual than David. Stevenson at 'Vailima' was certainly not stranded among the geese on Bass Rock, nor did he succumb to those who opposed him. Rather he made a point of directly engaging the opposition, and rarely succumbed to the conservative professional pressures or the competing political forces surrounding him. From his relatively secure and authoritative residence, he chose to challenge these powers and to become active and more radical, especially, as Roslyn Jolly insists, in his letters to *The Times* publicizing the plight of the Samoan people whom he believed should be defended as having a right to choose





their own future.

The shift in Stevenson's consciousness, which allowed him not only to actualise his earlier interests in anthropology and history but also to find home in the foreign, was obviously not sudden. Early on, while voyaging on board the *Casco*, he had experienced moments of 'shame' or feelings of infidelity to his father when he had sensed that he was changing his orientation. In an 1888-89 notebook from that voyage, now at the Huntington Library, Stevenson ruminates: 'these were lovelier than our nights in the north, the planets soft and brighter, and the constellations more handsomely arranged. I felt shame, I say, as at an ultimate infidelity; that I should thus desert the stars that shine upon my father' ('Tropical Night Thoughts August 30'). But previously on July 22 also on board the *Casco*, he had written in the same notebook: 'I became aware that I had been all my life abroad and that here was the true home of man; who is a tropical or a subtropical inhabitant, and can only blossom truly in such climates'¹⁶ Indeed, Stevenson had been all his life abroad.

I want to conclude by suggesting that the shift from a dominant Scotland to a dominant Samoa was not necessarily a radical departure from what Stevenson had already experienced when thinking about home. Stevenson really had always defined home through what was seemingly foreign to it or what was outside its frontiers. Even while living in the land of his birth, Stevenson was sensitive to being in a nation, as he explains in 'A Foreigner at Home,' which is foreign to itself, at war with itself and battling with its internal mutually alien factions – a reality that causes both Stevenson and David Balfour to realise they are perpetual outsiders both to each other and to those who speak a different tongue or belong to a different clan: Stevenson cannot understand a highland shepherd (*Letters* 1:154); David, the lowlander, cannot fathom what is being said when Alan Breck whispers in Gaelic.

Furthermore, foreign elements or fantasies of otherness had





always contributed significantly to Stevenson's sense of well-being, and ultimately, home – whether when a child, at the Manse (his maternal grandfather's home), admiring the exotic shells or the curiosities brought back from foreign lands in the natural history cabinets, or as the fictional child gazing beyond the garden gate and incorporating the foreign into his consciousness. In Stevenson's work this child not only declares that 'The world is quite a foreign place for little children's feet' but also vows that when he is older, he will 'unbar the garden door' and reside in worlds beyond its limits.¹⁷ The foreign had consistently been available, as fantasy or reality, to help him locate himself. For Stevenson there had always been two parts to his metaphor of home. The known and the unknown had typically conversed with each other. In the South Seas, though, and particularly with the building of 'Vailima,' as in Blumenberg's analysis of metaphor, the alien was more easily at Stevenson's disposal. Samoa came to dominate the fireplaces, the fine china, the glassware, and all the other fragments of Scotland he carried with him.

NOTES

- 1 'Notebook Kept During Illness,' HM 2404, Huntington Library.
- 2 'Address to Samoan Chief, Vailima' (New York: S. S. McClure, 1895).
- 3 Robert Louis Stevenson. *The Amateur Emigrant* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 56. Henceforth referred to as *The Amateur Emigrant* in text.
- 4 *Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 Volumes, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994-1995), 2: 319. Henceforth referred to as *Letters* in the text.
- 5 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Foreigner at Home' in *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. 11. Henceforth referred to as 'The Foreigner at Home' in the text.
- 6 See Ann C. Colley, *Nostalgia and the Idea of Recollection in Victorian England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998) as well as Ann C. Colley, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).





- 7 Hans Blumenberg, 'An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric' in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation*, ed. by Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), p. 439.
- 8 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol 1, ed. by Kathleen Coburn and Anthony John Harding (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), item 1783.
- 9 Stevenson's mother found the home objects to be reassuring.
- 10 Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Prefaces to Kidnapped, David Balfour, New Arabian Nights* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. vii.
- 11 Fanny's sickness and jealousies, Joe Strong's addiction to opium and alcohol, Belle's divorce, the responsibility of being guardian to her child, and the running of Vailima were difficult. See Jenni Calder's *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Literary Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) for an excellent sense of these problems.
- 12 Roslyn Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific: Travel, Empire, and the Author's Profession* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 24. Henceforth referred to as Jolly in text.
- 13 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped*, ed. by M. R. Ridley (London: J. M. Dent, 1962), p. 127.
- 14 Robert Louis Stevenson, *David Balfour* in *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, vol 10 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. 269.
- 15 In this role Stevenson almost begins to resemble the father in 'Sophia Scarlet,' a novel Stevenson outlined in Samoa in 1892. (The manuscript is in the Free Library, Philadelphia). The father also cleared land, built his house, and started a plantation. In this work, however, the father, Dan Scarlet, is supposedly based upon an Irish entrepreneur, owner of a vast cotton plantation in Tahiti.
- 16 Robert Louis Stevenson, '1888-89 Notebook,' Huntington Library.
- 17 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Garden Door,' HM 2460 (1882-84), Huntington Library.





Illustrating *Island Nights' Entertainments*: the problem of exotic authenticity

Richard J. Hill

In April 1893, one of Robert Louis Stevenson's less famous creative works *Island Nights' Entertainments* was published in Britain and America. The three short stories contained within it, 'The Beach of Falesá', 'The Bottle Imp' and 'The Isle of Voices', were tales that examined different aspects of the colonial encounter with Pacific Islanders, particularly Samoans and Hawaiians. *Island Nights' Entertainments* contained a total of 27 illustrations by two artists, Gordon Browne (1858-1932) and William Hatherell (1855-1928). Browne (the son of Halbot Browne, or Phiz, illustrator of Dickens's works) had produced illustrations for the first appearance of 'The Beach of Falesá' in six instalments in the *Illustrated London News* between 2 July and 6 August 1892;¹ meanwhile, Hatherell had done the same for the first publication of 'The Bottle Imp' in *Black and White* between March and April 1891, all of which were reproduced in *Island Nights' Entertainments*. 'The Isle of Voices' was originally published in the *National Observer* in February 1893 without illustrations, Hatherell then being employed to add eight illustrations for *Island Nights' Entertainments*.² Of importance to this paper, however, is the unique nature of these illustrations in their purpose and relationship to Stevenson's texts. These illustrations are exceptional in Stevenson's canon, as they are the only illustrations that were meant to inform the reader as well as embellish the printed page; they serve a pedagogical as well as an aesthetic function, and demonstrate a debt to contemporary colonial photography.

From the beginning of his literary career, Stevenson was always enthusiastic for the illustration of his work, both in poetry and prose. Although Stevenson was consciously engaging





with and catering to contemporary popular culture, illustration was never merely a commercial consideration. He understood appropriate illustration to have considerable artistic potential. As early as 1878, he was encouraging the illustration of *New Arabian Nights* by the popular illustrator Randolph Caldecott; he wrote to Sidney Colvin on 9 December, 'Here is my scheme. Henley already proposed that Caldecott should illustrate "Will o' the Mill". The "Guitar" ["Providence and the Guitar"] is still more suited to him; he should make delicious things for that. And though the "Lie" is not much in the way for pictures, I should like to see my dear Admiral in the flesh. (I love the Admiral; I give my head, that man's alive.)'.³ Throughout his career, he highly valued any illustration that depicted key moments of dramatic tension or incident, not so that the illustration would detract from text, but rather that it should pique a reader's interest and draw them *into* the text. An example of illustration that Stevenson valued is the French artist Georges Roux's illustrations for the first illustrated edition of *Treasure Island* in 1885 (figure 1).

Such illustrations as these depict key moments of action or intrigue from the text. The illustrations of which Stevenson approved concentrate on moments of action or tension, or on rendering specific characters as closely as possible to their textual descriptions. Stevenson was always consistent in his attitudes towards dramatic illustration. For example, writing to E. L. Burlingame from Samoa in 1892 about W. L. Metcalfe's illustrations to *The Wrecker*, Stevenson leaves no doubt as to his displeasure at what was produced (figure 2). He writes:

Doubtless Metcalf is an excellent black and white artist; but as an illustrator of my books, let me [have] no more of him. All the points in the story are missed. The series of little pictures of chance interviews in rooms might have illustrated any story (or nearly any story) that ever was written. The different appearances (all wrong) that he





Fig. 1: Georges Roux, frontispiece for *Treasure Island* (London: Cassell and Company, 1885)

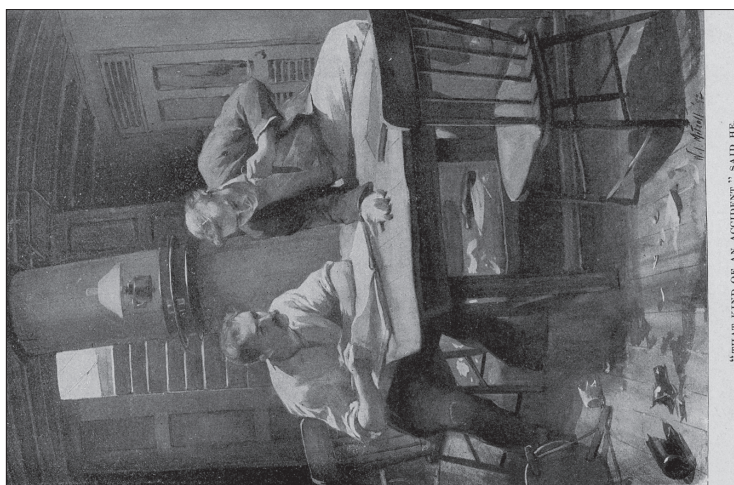


Fig. 2: W. L. Metcalfe, "That Kind of an Accident," said he', for *The Wrecker* (London: Cassell and Company, 1892)





has given to my Captain Wicks would make [the head] of any reader spin. The same remark applies to the unhappy Dodd.⁴

He goes on in this letter to complain of specific pictures as being too general, irrelevant to the incident of the text, or inaccurate in rendering character. This demonstrates that Stevenson was absolutely concerned with the quality and content of the imagery being published with his work. One artist who did win his qualified approbation as an illustrator was Gordon Browne. So happy was Stevenson with Browne's rendering of Wiltshire and Case for 'The Beach of Falesá' that he not only personally wrote to the artist to express his admiration, but he also strongly pushed Colvin to have him illustrate *The Ebb-Tide*. This did not come to pass, as the first edition was published in Jerome K. Jerome's journal *To-day* with illustrations by two syndicated illustrators, Alfred Brennan (who had illustrated American editions of Stevenson's novels in previous years) and a 'W. H.' (whom I've yet to identify). These illustrations were *not* what Stevenson expected, and received short shrift in an April 1894 letter to Charles Baxter: 'See most carefully to prevent any of Brennan's cursed illustrations ever appearing again. The same remark applies to the unhung ruffian who made a public ass of himself in *To-day*, or whatever it is called'.⁵

This begs an obvious question: what *did* Stevenson expect from illustration other than moments of drama and accurate renderings of his characters? The immediate answer can be deciphered from his correspondence and his critical essays, especially his 1882 essay, 'A Gossip on Romance.' I have analysed this issue elsewhere, but a brief answer can be supplied in the following lines that discuss the ideal qualities of romance writing: 'The threads of a story come from time to time together and make a picture in the web; the characters fall from time to time into some attitude to each other or to nature, which stamps the story home





like an illustration. Crusoe recoiling from the footprint, Achilles shouting over against the Trojans, Ulysses bending the great bow [. . .] each has been printed on the mind's eye for ever'.⁶ Before he left Europe, this equation defined the ideal illustration for Stevenson: any illustration should delineate moments of drama to the backdrop of an impressive setting, not simply to elaborate the text, but to draw the reader into the story. Although it should serve a narrative function, its primary purpose was aesthetic.⁷ However, this equation became more complicated when, in 1887, he left Britain forever with his family, and began his travels to and around the Pacific. As Roslyn Jolly has convincingly demonstrated, 1887 was a crucial turning point in Stevenson's life and in his creative imagination.⁸ As Stevenson's horizons and subject matter expanded to incorporate the peoples, cultures and topography he encountered, the further he grew away from the knowledge base and expectations of his European and American audiences, who adored him as the author of escapist romance and horror stories. The main problem Stevenson faced was one of the exotic. The idea of the exotic is defined, and problematised, by location, by otherness. What is exotic to a Scotsman in winter in Edinburgh is precisely opposite to what is 'exotic' to a born-and-raised native of Hawai'i. Stevenson's Pacific writings were inevitably fettered by American and European reader expectations and preconceptions of the exotic, which had been fuelled by travel photo-journalism, illustrated missionary literature, and colonial adventure stories such as Herman Melville's *Typee* and *Omoo*, and R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral island*. Stevenson articulated the precise problem he faced in a letter of 28 September 1892 to Colvin regarding 'The Beach of Falesá':

You will know more about the South Seas after you have read my little tale, than if you had read a library. As to whether anyone else will read it, I have no guess [. . .] there is always the exotic question; and everything, the





life, the place, the dialects [. . .] the very trades and hopes and fears of the characters, are all novel and may be found unwelcome to that great, hulking, bullering whale, the public.⁹

Stevenson's art had shifted in its function with his move to the Pacific. He always wanted to entertain – this he felt was the primary responsibility of the artist – but with material that was unfamiliar to his reading public, and about which he had a social conscience, his art also now had to instruct or educate too. The trick he had to pull off was educating his public while also entertaining them. His Pacific stories were written to achieve a certain disillusionment about the colonial encounter, while also bowing to the oldest rule of authorship: the need to sell books. He could not achieve the latter while alienating his readership, and the result was a complex series of narrative forms in *Island Nights' Entertainments* that mixed Western narrative techniques with Polynesian heroes, motifs and inflections.

It was imperative, therefore, that the illustrators to these stories not undermine this project by producing generic imagery that conformed to the stereotypes Stevenson was attempting to undo. However, any image of a Pacific subject in the nineteenth century was inevitably going to be informed by, or compete with, a heavily stereotyped discourse of the exotic. Stevenson's primary goal as a writer was to puncture this imperial, mostly racist discourse, bringing home the realities of the behaviour of the colonisers as well as the colonists.¹⁰ Any illustration had to play its part, and an illustrator to his creative work had an awkward line to walk between rendering of the dramatic moment of the text, truth to the depictions of Stevenson's characters, and faithfulness to the exotic subject matter at hand. Here is where life became challenging for the illustrators of Stevenson's Pacific works, especially if, as was always the case, they were based in New York or London. If an illustrator resorted to bland or stereo-





typed images of the Pacific and its people, he was undermining the whole ethos of Stevenson's pedagogical project. This clearly presented a problem to illustrators: how could they be true to Stevenson's ethnographical and topographical intentions when they had never encountered anything remotely similar? How do you illustrate the exotic 'authentically' when you haven't experienced it? Of course, Stevenson's texts themselves would provide some of the detail, but not idiosyncrasies of landscape, flora and fauna, ethnic physiologies, or even light effects. The odds were stacked against an illustrator who had to 'fill in the blanks' where the texts were silent, particularly regarding landscape and Polynesian physiognomies.

Stevenson's answer to this was to direct illustrators, through Baxter, Burlingame, and Colvin, to photographs. Sometimes he would send the photos himself, other times he would direct them to collections of photographs he found to be reliable images of the topography or people he had in mind. For example, in attempting to recruit Gordon Browne to illustrate *The Ebb-Tide* in a letter of 25 April 1893 to Colvin, he wrote, 'if Gordon Browne is to get it, he should see the Brassey photographs of Papeete. But mind! The three waifs were never in the town; only on the beach and in the calaboose. By George, but it's a good thing to illustrate for a man like that!'¹¹ The photos referenced here were published in a travel narrative entitled *Tahiti* (1882) by Lady Brassey. This letter is interesting for several reasons. First, it demonstrates Stevenson's loyalty to illustrators like Browne, who he felt understood his work and their tasks as illustrators to the written word (he was also loyal to Will H. Low and William Hole); secondly, it demonstrates his insistence on faithfulness to the narrative ('The three waifs were never in the town'); third, he is insistent on authenticity to the topography and ethnic idiosyncrasies of the subjects; and lastly, it demonstrates the fact that Stevenson was conscious of directing illustrators towards visual material he felt to offer reliable depictions of Pacific subjects. Most importantly,





Fig. 3: Gordon Browne, “Will you know what was in his heart?” cries he, for “The Beach of Falesá

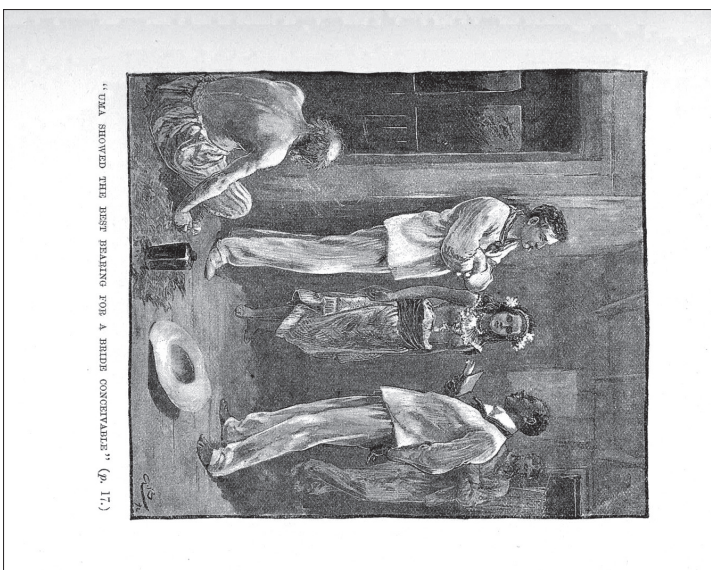


Fig. 4: Gordon Browne, ‘Uma showed the best bearing for a bride conceivable’, for ‘The Beach of Falesá’



though, it establishes a thoroughly modern approach to illustration: in the search for authenticity, photography was informing illustration.

However, before I over-emphasise Stevenson's insistence on authenticity, it's important to note that he was to an extent realistic about how accurate he could expect his illustrators to be. On the whole, he was happy with the quality of the illustrations to *Island Nights' Entertainments*, with reservations. Browne, for example, received high praise for his renderings of Case and Wiltshire. Stevenson wrote in September 1892 to thank and congratulate him personally (figure 3):

So few can illustrate a story, or apparently read it. You have shown that you can do both and your creation of Wiltshire is a real illumination of the text. It was exactly so that Wiltshire dressed and looked, and you have the line of his nose to a nicety. His nose is an inspiration [. . .] The general effect of the islands is all that could be wished, indeed I have but one criticism to make, that in the background of Case taking the dollar from Mr Tarleton's head—head, not hand as the fools have printed it—the natives have a little too much the look of Africans.¹²

However, in an aside to Colvin a month earlier in August 1892, he qualifies this praise considerably, writing about another illustration (figure 4), 'In the picture, Uma is rot; so is the old man and the negro; but Wiltshire is splendid, and Case will do'.¹³

Such mixed reflections demonstrate Stevenson's resignation to the realities of his position: writing from Samoa through agents in New York and London, he only had so much control over what illustrators would and could produce. Browne represented the best case scenario; he was adept at identifying appropriate moments of the text to illustrate, and at rendering the main European/American (white) characters, and did a passable job in





UMA.

Fig. 5: Gordon Browne, 'Uma', frontispiece for
Island Nights' Entertainments



"IN A WIDE SHALLOW WATER, BRIGHT WITH TEN THOUSAND STARS, AND ALL ABOUT HIM WAS THE RING OF THE LAND, WITH ITS STRING OF PALM TREES" (p. 253).

Fig. 6: William Hatherell, 'In a wide shallow water, bright with ten thousand stars, and all about him was the ring of the land, with its string of palm trees', for 'The Isle of Voices'





rendering the different ethnic characters. However, Stevenson's bone of contention was the presentation of Uma. Figure 5 shows the frontispiece of *Island Nights' Entertainments*, and it is easy to understand Stevenson's complaint. Compare this image to the first highly-sexualised description we have of her from the text: 'She had been fishing; all she wore was a chemise, and it was wetted through [. . .] She was young and very slender for an island maid, with a long face, a high forehead, and a shy, strange, blindish look, between a cat's and a baby's. She had a wide mouth, the lips and the chin cut like any statue's; and the smile came out for a moment and was gone'.¹⁴ Browne here has undermined Stevenson's text by resorting to an exotic, erotic stereotype of the available sexualised Pacific female, which appears to conform to accounts of the very first contact with Polynesian cultures, as well as contemporary photographic imagery. As if Wiltshire's description was not erotically charged enough, Browne has depicted Uma topless, which she remains in all the illustrations. He has also seemingly not paid attention to the 'high forehead' and 'wide mouth' in favour of an image that satisfied certain male preconceptions of island maids, preconceptions that have lasted in one form or other well into the 21st century. Uma, of course, appears emblazoned in gilt gold on the front cover. As much as this may have interfered with Stevenson's desire for authenticity, he also had to understand the power of the preconceived exotic to move books.

Hatherell, who illustrated 'The Bottle Imp' and 'The Isle of Voices', did not receive the praise that Browne did, but Stevenson again seems to have been generally satisfied with his work – to a point. Hatherell's subject matter was Hawaiian, not Samoan. To non-Pacific islanders, and to a general cosmopolitan public, the difference between these two island chains would seem to be negligible. Stevenson acknowledged as much in a December 1892 letter to Colvin: 'I am greatly pleased with the illustrations. It is very strange to a South Seayer to see Hawaiian women dressed





like Samoans, but I guess that's all one to you in Middlesex. It's about the same as if London city men were shown going to the Stock Exchange as *pifferari* [Italian mountain musicians]; but no matter, none will sleep worse for it'.¹⁵ This is an indication not only of the level of familiarity with the richness and diversity of Polynesian cultures Stevenson had attained through his observations of Pacific regions, but also of the difficulty in expressing such diversity to a European audience who held entrenched preconceived notions of race and savagery amongst the South Sea islanders. He could only reasonably expect so much ethnographical accuracy from a Western illustrator, and Hatherell's efforts largely achieved Stevenson's vision. However, as with Browne, certain aspects seemed to grate. He wrote again to Colvin in June 1893 of Hatherell's illustrations: 'Down to the post office, where I find [. . .] six copies of *Island Nights' Entertainments*. Some of W. Hatherell's [illustrations] are very clever; but O Lord! the lagoon! I did say it was 'shallow' but, O dear, not so shallow as that a man could stand up in it!' (figure 6).¹⁶ However, for the most part, Hatherell's images avoided the author's wrath, in part due to their highly impressionistic style which helped to blur some of the more challenging ethnographical and topographical details, while making sure that his Hawaiian characters were at least ethnically authentic.

Stevenson's insistence on authenticity of illustration begs another obvious question: why not simply use photographs? After all, he was taking photos to illustrate *A Footnote to History* and his unfinished *South Seas*.¹⁷ The answer is complex, and lies partly in Stevenson's ever evolving understanding of the potential of different visual media to work in very different ways with the texts they are illustrating. It is also defined in part by the complex relationship of literary illustration and photography, particularly in this case regarding the photography of ethnically diverse colonial subjects such as South Sea islanders. Critical work on photography and fiction by Nancy Armstrong has revealed the





subtle and multifarious ways in which photography had altered how Victorians understood not only their own environments, but that of the imperial subjects who existed on the peripheries of empire.¹⁸ Armstrong argues that the invention of photography in the 1840s, and the rapid development of the technologies that helped disperse photographic imagery throughout Europe and the empire in subsequent decades, actually resulted in a catalogue of visual 'types' from which reality (the exterior world) was then interpreted by the viewer. Such types particularly referred to the idea of the individual. Photographic imagery, Armstrong argues, helped to encode and reinforce visual signs of class, wealth, gender, and most importantly for this paper, race. Discussing ethnographical photography of African tribal types by Désiré Charnay from 1863, Armstrong points out that the dissemination of photographs that purported (and indeed intended) to provide objective imagery that defined what a particular African type looked like in fact resulted in that African individual losing any notion of individuality, and instead being subsumed into a 'type' of ethnic individual.¹⁹ This view is supported in an article by Richard Eves for *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, which discusses Methodist missionary photographs of Pacific peoples.²⁰ In the photographs, the white missionary photographers make a genuine attempt to humanise their ethnic subjects, often by appearing with them in the image, and occasionally even posing in friendly poses with them. However, as Eves points out, these images only serve to reinforce racial differences and hierarchies: the blinding white clothes and skins of the colonisers set off the darker skins of their subjects, and their poses betray a friendly but distinctly paternalistic relationship, in which the missionaries assume a parental role to the 'child' who has been dressed and presented to the public as emblems of 'teachable' natives.

American and European notions of the Pacific and its inhabitants were inevitably formed by such photography. Stevenson, as Ann Colley has argued, was certainly familiar with this imagery,





and indeed was prone to taking such photographs in his own efforts to record, preserve and decipher Pacific cultures. As the publication of Fanny Stevenson's journal and photographs of *The Cruise of the Janet Nichol* demonstrates, Stevenson's use of photography was in part ethnographical, in ways that echo the benevolent intentions of the contemporary missionaries.²¹ However, Stevenson understood that the discourse of ethnographic photography grated on the *narrative* function of a literary illustration. He did not want the unflattering realism of photography to puncture the romance of his narrative. In fact, the prevalence of photography as a documentary medium helped to heighten the romance, or fictionality, of a painter's illustration. While not sacrificing certain details of ethnology or topography, an artist's rendering of a fictional scene allowed Stevenson's readers to suspend their disbelief in what they were reading. To demonstrate the difference, a quick glance at Browne's illustration of the wedding (fig. 4) reveals how an artist's illustration can draw elements of narrative together in a way that is difficult to reproduce through photography. While ethnographical authenticity is important in the depiction of Jack, Wiltshire and Uma, the artist is able to emphasise narrative through composition and technique: Uma stares seductively at us, while Case is almost indistinguishable in sinister shadow behind the scene, assuming a demonic presence over an abominable marriage. Thus this illustration borrows from both the discourse of contemporary ethnographical photography and narrative painting: the ethnographical types and costumes are rendered as they were recognisable to European and American consumers from photography; meanwhile, the educated viewer is asked to decipher the symbolism and narrative according to the discourse of narrative painting, which draws the reader into the dramatic tension of the story.

As Armstrong and Eves reveal, ethnographical photographs were only one type of image through which the public became





familiar with Pacific peoples and landscapes. Armstrong points to a very popular format of photographic reproduction and perpetuation called *cartes-de-visites*, which helped more than any other medium in the 1850s and 1860s to fix social and racial types. Through this and other media, such as tourist guides, newspapers and monthly magazines, images particularly of island girls in various states of undress were disseminated, perpetuating another (disingenuous and racist) type, that of the sexually provocative and available native. Figure 7 shows such an image of a Hawaiian hula dancer.²²



Figure 7. James J. Williams, 'Studio portrait - hula dancers,' in Hawaiian Historical Society Historical Photograph Collection.²³





Photographs like this one purported to serve ethnographical functions, but in fact they served the dual purpose of fixing the sexualised hula dancer 'type' while simultaneously robbing the individual of her identity. More importantly here, however, it sexualises the subject for the male colonial gaze: the girl is objectified, sexualised and racially stereotyped in a way a white female nude model could not be. In other words, she is made sexually exotic. It is from precisely such an image from which Browne drew his depiction of Uma. Compare this photograph to Browne's Uma. Browne's frontispiece (fig. 5) is actually taken from a photograph that is held in Edinburgh's Writers' Museum. Consequently, Stevenson's attempts to achieve a certain ethnic authenticity actually leads to Browne's 'failure' to portray Uma as she is presented in the text: Browne's recourse to a stylised photograph of a native girl means that the artist is taking his visual cue from the photographic image, and not the written text, and in this way the 'truth' of Uma's character is lost to the 'truth' of the photographic type. This, presumably, is why Browne's Uma bears no facial resemblance to Stevenson's description. Stevenson may have been correct to complain of Browne's depiction, but by suggesting the artist follow photographic models, he only had himself to blame.

Therefore, the illustrations to *Islands Nights' Entertainments* are unique in Stevenson's canon. They were the only illustrations that had to perform a dual role of dramatic representation and ethnographical authenticity. The authenticity Stevenson strove for had already been partially and generically encoded by photographic documentation of Pacific islanders, and therefore the illustrations to his Pacific stories were inevitably shaped by this photography. In certain ways, photography undermined the success of the illustrations because in the case of Uma, the photographic model could not represent character, but only a visual type. However, Stevenson's qualified praise of Browne's and Hatherell's pictures mean that in visual terms, the illustrators





had come close to achieving the author's vision. These two artists had, as far as possible, risen to Stevenson's challenge of breaking beyond the stereotypical imagery of paradise and its inhabitants (either nubile Europeanised nymphs or terrifying cannibals) and at least attempted to make the imaginative leap to the real Pacific, aided by contemporary photography and Stevenson's prose. The subsequent failure of the *Ebb-Tide* illustrations was clearly a source of irritation to Stevenson, as they took a step back towards the stereotypes he was seeking to explode. Stevenson's insistence on the depiction of important moments of action or drama never wavered from one end of his career to the other; however, with the illustrations to *Island Nights' Entertainments*, these moments became imbued with a certain authenticity that was designed to anchor stories of magic and the exotic to very real locations and peoples. For this reason, these illustrations remain exceptional in illustrating Stevenson's fiction, and crucial to the texts they illustrate.

NOTES

- 1 Roger Swearingen, *The Prose Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson: A Guide* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980), p. 153. For a detailed bibliographic study of the genesis and publication of 'The Beach of Falesá', see Barry Menikoff, *Robert Louis Stevenson and 'The Beach of Falesá': A Study in Victorian Publishing with the Original Text* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984).
- 2 Roger Swearingen, *The Prose Writings*, p. 179.
- 3 Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mayhew (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 8 vols., 3:34.
- 4 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Letters*, 7: 340-41.
- 5 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Letters*, 8: 266.
- 6 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, ed. by Jeremy Treglown (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1999), p. 175. For a full discussion of Stevenson's understanding and use of illustration, see Richard J.





- Hill, 'Robert Louis Stevenson's Davos studio: author and art in 1882', *Scottish Studies Review* 2, no. 2 (Glasgow: 2011).
- 7 For recent discussions on Stevenson's views on art as entertainment, see *Robert Louis Stevenson: Writer of Boundaries*, ed. by Richard Ambrosini and Richard Dury (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin, 2006); in particular papers by Stephen Arata, R. L. Abrahamson and Stephen Donovan.
 - 8 See Roslyn Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific: Travel, Empire, and the Author's Profession* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009).
 - 9 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Letters*, 7: 161.
 - 10 For a discussion of Stevenson within the colonial and missionary cultures of the Pacific, see Ann Colley, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).
 - 11 *Letters*, 8: 70.
 - 12 *Letters*, 7:375-6.
 - 13 *Letters*, 7: 364.
 - 14 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Island Nights' Entertainments* (London, Paris & Melbourne: Cassell and Company, 1893), p. 8.
 - 15 *Letters*, 7: 460.
 - 16 *Letters*, 8: 89.
 - 17 Ann Colley discusses the Stevensons' experiments with photography in *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination*.
 - 18 Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
 - 19 Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, pp. 215-217.
 - 20 Richard Eves, "'Black and white, a significant contrast": Race, humanism and missionary photography in the Pacific', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 29 no. 4 (2006), pp. 725-748.
 - 21 Fanny Stevenson, *The Cruise of the Janet Nichol among the South Sea Islands: A Diary by Mrs Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Roslyn Jolly (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2004).
 - 22 Although I have not been able to ascertain the precise date of this photograph, it is from the studio of J. J. Williams (1853-1926), a court appointed Honolulu photographer who took pictures of King Kalakaua and Robert Louis Stevenson, among other





notable Hawaiian royals and visiting dignitaries. Williams was commissioned by the king to promote the islands through photographic enterprise; he published the *Tourist Guide* in 1882, and established the monthly magazine *Paradise of the Pacific* in 1888 (the year of Stevenson's first visit to Honolulu). This magazine continues today as the *Honolulu* magazine.

- 23 James J. Williams, 'Studio portrait – hula dancers,' in Hawaiian Historical Society Historical Photograph Collection, Item #6790, <http://www.huapala.net/items/show/6790> (accessed May 28, 2011).





Seeing in Time: visual engagement in Stevenson's idea of Edinburgh, considered in the light of paintings and photographs by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson

Sara Stevenson

Within the decade before the birth of Robert Louis Stevenson, Scotland discovered the art of photography and seized upon it with knowledgeable enthusiasm. The key figures to make an impact on the history of Scottish and, later, world photography were the photographer, Robert Adamson, and his partner the landscape and *genre* painter, David Octavius Hill. Robert Adamson arrived in Edinburgh in May 1843, and set up his studio there on the south-facing slope of Calton Hill. He was the first professional photographer in Scotland to use William Henry Fox Talbot's calotype process. This, the British invention of photography, was unlike the shiny and precise little polished mirror of the French daguerreotype, in that it was a negative / positive process, based on drawing paper, and, as Hill said, was expressively generalised or 'failing in details'.

Adamson's arrival coincided with a revolution in the Church of Scotland, which is nowadays regarded as Scotland's principal nationalist and, (at least in terms of church governance), democratic movement in the nineteenth century. Hundreds of the established ministers left the Church of Scotland and set up the independent Free Church. Many people were greatly moved by this act, which was notable for its professional and personal sacrifice.¹ Amongst the witnesses was D. O. Hill, who so admired the action that he determined to paint a grand historical painting in celebration. He was persuaded to consult with Robert Adamson to secure the hundreds of portraits needed for the painting. Very rapidly, however, they began to enjoy the wider possibilities of photography, and they entered into partnership. In less than five





years, before Robert Adamson's early death, and working with a difficult process that required sunshine both to take and to print the images, they managed to take well over 3,000 photographs. In their work, they discovered the potential of photography as an art form. Their photographs influenced the progress of the art in the nineteenth and in the twentieth centuries; Edinburgh in the 1840s saw one of the first and one of the most significant flowerings of photography.²

My attention was first caught by the possibility of a connection between the writing of Robert Louis Stevenson and the paintings and photography of D. O. Hill and Robert Adamson, on reading Stevenson's lyrical essay on Colinton Manse, and considering a small group of calotype photographs.³ The first two of the photographs may have been taken early on in the partnership, in 1843, and show the Rev Lewis Balfour, his wife, Henrietta, and daughter, Jane (figure 1).⁴ The other photographs are landscapes, and are perceptibly more mature works. Two of these offer us the Manse itself, taken across the Water of Leith from the grounds of Colinton House (figure 2). They are accompanied by at least two more woodland sketches, one of which Hill called 'The Fairy Tree at Colinton' (figure 3). From the evidence of a letter, written on behalf of Lady Dunfermline, wife of Lord Dunfermline the owner of Colinton House, Hill and Adamson may have taken these on 17 October 1846.⁵ Neither the circumstances nor the motivation for taking the photographs is entirely clear. It may be significant, in relation to the family group, that Hill and Adamson photographed another member of the family, James Balfour of Pilrig, on a number of occasions.

The landscape photographs, specifically the pictures of the Manse and The Fairy Tree, are evidently concerned with light. They are taken in October, when the leaves would have fallen from the trees and the sunlight would be sharply angled. They look downwards into water from a high viewpoint, on a north-south axis, and the water becomes the source of light within





the picture. The sun bouncing from the moving water gives a complex pattern of racing energy, scattering and increasing that light, which physically makes the photograph.

Hill referred to one of the woodland photographs, in 1849, in the context of a large group of pictures he had sent to a collector. Since this is one of the very few letters in which he offered a critical comment on the calotypes, it is worth quoting three paragraphs here for the context. It may be broadly said, from the evidence of the letter, that his intention was aesthetic, exploratory and based in personal affection:

The four calotypes you name[?] are firm favourites of mine and the subjects of these possess to me more than ordinary interest. The three children fishing are grand nephews & a grand niece of mine. The very comely sprouts from a very comely vine, with whom when you and Mrs Henry come to Scotland I shall be very glad to bring you acquainted, & promise you that you will like them... The Boy on the Grass is Master Hope Finlay - the same as in the angling group - and I really think it is about the best. The rocky stream is "Burnside" the youthful haunt of my amiable friend Robert Adamson, who assisted so largely in the production of these calotypes. The wood scene is a nook of Lord Dunfermline's grounds at Colinton.

The rough surface & unequal texture throughout of the paper is the main cause of the calotype failing in details before the process [or 'precision'] of Daguerrotypy - & this is the very life of it. They look like the imperfect work of a man - and not the much diminished perfect work of god. Hence I think one[?] great charm for I think you will find that the calotypes like fine pictures, will be always giving out new lights of themselves, and thus by showing themselves gentlemen of varied qualifications and acquirements contriving to be agreeable companions in a house.⁶





Stevenson may never have seen Hill and Adamson's photographs; certainly, he was not born at the time they were taken. He was very interested in and critical of both the aesthetic and the grasp of reality in the illustrations that were produced for his own writing, but he apparently came late to the realisation that photography could be a viable art form, which might relate to his own work. For much of his life, Stevenson's idea of photography connected most evidently to elementary and commercial studio practice, and, in that time, his letters suggest that he knew it essentially as a disappointing medium. It is not until 1887, that he wrote, in response to the gift of photographs from the San Francisco Amateur Society of Photographers: 'I was knocked on the head with wonder. I never guessed photography could rise to be an art.'⁷

There is one evident, creative connection, which has been made between Stevenson and Hill and Adamson. It was undertaken after Stevenson's death by the British-American photographer, Alvin Langdon Coburn. He came to Edinburgh in 1905, and took a group of photographs which pay conscious tribute to Hill and Adamson and which respond to Stevenson's *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes* (figure 4).⁸ This was ultimately published in an edition of Stevenson's book, in 1954. Coburn perceived a sophisticated relationship between the early photographs and Stevenson's writing, and was himself inspired by that combination. In writing of D. O. Hill, he said:

I have visited his old studio on the slopes of Calton Hill in Edinburgh and inspected various pieces of his cumbersome apparatus, and I have been struck with wonder how, with the facilities at his command [. . .] he was able to achieve his results. The strong, clearly cut profile of the 'Self Portrait' gives one a clue to the man's character. It is a determined face, as well as an artistic one, showing the fine blend of dreamer and worker so necessary for





accomplishment in art. And often in the twilight I have walked up to the crest back of his old studio and imagined how Hill must have done so many times while he lived. I can picture him brushing his fine locks back from his forehead as he looked out over the Edinburgh that Stevenson celebrates in his *Picturesque Notes*. It spreads out before one, and as the dusk gathers, 'the plan of the city and her suburbs is mapped out upon the ground of blackness, as when a child pricks a drawing full of pinholes and exposes it before a candle; not the darkest night of winter can conceal her high station and fanciful design; every evening in the year she proceeds to illuminate herself in honour of her own beauty.' Thus Hill comes to be associated in my memory with Edinburgh and Stevenson, and I can think of no happier trio to muse over as the fire crackles on the hearth of a winter's evening.⁹

Coburn made a direct connection between Hill and Adamson and Stevenson, through the calotypes of Greyfriars Churchyard (figure 5). Hill and Adamson took around 50 photographs in the churchyard – an impressive number for a laborious and conscious photographic practice. They were presumably built up into a series, and have an evident intention. The Free Church of Scotland expressed its reforming tendency, its desire to throw off patronage and reclaim independence for the church, in terms of a return to the historical standards of the Covenanters in the seventeenth century. Greyfriars' Churchyard was a focal point of Covenanting history, and it was here that the Covenant was signed, and here that the Covenanters were imprisoned after their defeat. The photographs are designed to include figures, often with Hill himself, who are learning or contemplating that history, drawing or taking notes. They are the landscape counterpart of Hill's grand painting of the founding of the Free Church.

Stevenson felt a deep melancholy in and even a distaste for





Greyfriars:

As you walk upon the graves, you see children scattering crumbs to feed the sparrows; you hear people singing or washing dishes, or the sound of tears and castigation; the linen on a clothes-pole flaps against funereal sculpture; or perhaps the cat slips over the lintel and descends on a memorial urn. And as there is nothing else astir, these incongruous sights and noises take hold on the attention and exaggerate the sadness of the place.¹⁰

This is evident in Coburn's response (figure 6). By contrast, Hill and Adamson achieve something more positive: a focused reflection and admiration rather than a dissipated melancholy. Stevenson was, however, moved, as Hill was, by the memory of the Covenanters:

the martyrs' monument is a wholesome, heartsome spot in the field of the dead; and as we look upon it, a brave influence comes to us from the land of those who have won their discharge and, in another phrase of Patrick Walker's, got 'cleanly off the stage.'¹¹

Stepping back from these specific pictures, it is possible to follow a broader idea which relates to inspiration and perception in both Hill's and Stevenson's art. The argument that follows is designed to explore a coincidence of approach, which may make a conceptual connection between Stevenson, the painting of David Octavius Hill and Hill and Adamson's photography.

Edinburgh is remarkable for its topography, perched and sprawled round its hills and on the defensible spine of rock which runs between two volcanic plugs – the hills of the Castle Rock and Arthur's Seat, where Holyrood Palace stands. From its other surrounding hills and from tall buildings, the city offers





an extraordinary opportunity to see the outlying countryside and the sea, in conjunction with the curious interlocking levels of the townscape. The high points offered a common focus for the Romantic imagination, which invested the city with dark and pregnant weight. J. M. W. Turner's watercolour of the prospect of the city from Calton Hill has this sense of sublime exaggeration.¹² Turner painted this for Walter Scott's publication, *The Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*, and Scott wrote in the text:

The point which Mr Turner has selected for the view is precisely that upon which every passenger, however much accustomed to the wonderful scene, is inclined to pause, and with eyes unsatisfied with seeing, to gaze on the mingled and almost tumultuous scene which lies before and beneath him.¹³

His particular viewpoint is just above the building, which became Hill and Adamson's studio; in effect, they could stand in their garden, and view a Romantic prospect painted by Turner and approved by Walter Scott.

It is no coincidence that the idea of the panorama was first devised on Calton Hill, by Thomas Barker in the late eighteenth century.¹⁴ Stevenson's account of the view from Calton Hill is expressed in terms of the panorama, and evidently with a knowledge of the public performances that were common in his youth:

Look a little farther, and there is Holyrood Palace, with its Gothic frontal and ruined abbey, and the red sentry pacing smartly to and fro before the door like a mechanical figure in a panorama
[. . .]

These are the main features of the scene roughly sketched. How they are all tilted by the inclination of the ground,





how each stands out in delicate relief against the rest, what manifold detail, and play of sun and shadow, animate and accentuate the picture, is a matter for a person on the spot, and turning swiftly on his heels, to grasp and bind together in one comprehensive look. It is the character of such a prospect, to be full of change and of things moving. The multiplicity embarrasses the eye; and the mind, among so much, suffers itself to grow absorbed with single points. You remark a tree in a hedgerow, or follow a cart along a country road. You turn to the city, and see children, dwarfed by distance into pigmies, at play about suburban doorsteps; [. . .] At one of the innumerable windows, you watch a figure moving; on one of the multitude of roofs, you watch clambering chimney-sweeps. [. . .] or perhaps a bird goes dipping evenly over the housetops, like a gull across the waves.¹⁵

Stevenson's response to the view here also relates to another form of optical entertainment, the camera obscura. As a child he is likely to have been taken to the camera established by Maria Short, in the tower just below the Castle. Here, the lens looking at the world outside is rotated to cast the light, moving image into a large bowl. Details of the view can be focussed more precisely, and the surrounding audience can reach out and, by putting their hands between the projected image and the bowl, pick up individual people or carriages on their hands.¹⁶ In his description, Stevenson was doing with his eye, his attention and his mind, what he did as a child in reality.

It is arguable that Edinburgh itself can persuade us to feel the use our eyes almost as though they were optical instruments – such as the telescope, or the camera. The metaphor is reinforced as the view shifts from a close to a long focus, from dark and obscure to a brilliant light, or things are seen framed suddenly, demanding specific attention. The city's, often disconcerting,





character may break the logic of comfortable seeing – there are places, for example, where the view from the street we are standing on, knowing it to be the ground, is still downwards to other streets below. The near view suddenly opens out to the distance. Stevenson describes this:

the place is full of theatre tricks in the way of scenery. You peep under an arch, you descend stairs that look as if they would land you in a cellar, you turn to the back-window of a grimy tenement in a lane:- and behold! you are face-to-face with distant and bright prospects. You turn a corner, and there is the sun going down into the Highland hills. You look down an alley, and see ships tacking for the Baltic. (*Picturesque Notes*, pp. 66-67.)

Stevenson's writing and Hill and Adamson's photographs, possess a kind of emotional optics, a heightened awareness of seeing, that goes beyond the immediate surface and is expressive rather than factual. Again, one of Stevenson's passages, from his chapter on the new town of Edinburgh, offers the long view, a telescopic view of the country extended beyond common human sight and even impinging on a moral or religious ideal:

For the country people to see Edinburgh on her hill-tops, is one thing; it is another for the citizen, from the thick of his affairs, to overlook the country. It should be a genial and ameliorating influence in life; it should prompt good thoughts and remind him of Nature's unconcern: that he can watch from day to day, as he trots officeward, how the Spring green brightens in the wood or the field grows black under a moving ploughshare. I have been tempted, in this connexion, to deplore the slender faculties of the human race, with its penny-whistle of a voice, its dull ears, and its narrow range of sight. If you





could see as people are to see in heaven, if you had eyes such as you can fancy for a superior race, if you could take clear note of the objects of vision, not only a few yards, but a few miles from where you stand:- think how agreeably your sight would be entertained, how pleasantly your thoughts would be diversified, as you walked the Edinburgh streets! For you might pause, in some business perplexity, in the midst of the city traffic, and perhaps catch the eye of a shepherd as he sat down to breathe upon a heathery shoulder of the Pentlands; or perhaps some urchin, clambering in a country elm, would put aside the leaves and show you his flushed and rustic visage; or a fisher racing seawards, with the tiller under his elbow, and the sail sounding in the wind, would fling you a salutation from between Anst'er and the May. (*Picturesque Notes*, pp. 67-68.)

Balancing Stevenson's approach to the landscape, which was strikingly involved in active visual perception, Hill's landscape paintings and photographs of Scotland were redolent of narrative: history, fantasy, oral tradition and literature. Paradoxically, the writer may be understood as a visual artist, and the visual artist as responding to the written word. Hill was particularly influenced by the writings of Scott and Burns, and it was said by the bibliographer and librarian John Taylor Brown that 'his knowledge of Shakespeare and Scott was greater than of any man I ever knew'.¹⁷ Significantly, one of Hill's most successful works was a series of fifty landscape paintings, which he published as *The Land of Burns*, with text by Professor John Wilson, 'Christopher North'. Moreover, Hill's most poignantly emotional relationship to the real landscape may be seen in the two pictures he painted of Calton Hill and the Newington area, where his only daughter, who had recently died in childbirth, had lived her short life.¹⁸ His reference in the letter quoted above to the calo-





type, *Burnside*, is invested with the same emotion; his partner, the young Robert Adamson, had died only the year before. The photograph contains a part of his childhood memory.

Hill and Adamson's Edinburgh landscape photographs do work in this narrative and personal sense, but, for an elementary reason, these human aspects are not always obvious. This is simply because photography in the 1840s was not yet capable of capturing movement. The earliest photographers had either to persuade people to stay still for seconds or even minutes at a time, as in the Greyfriars' photographs, or live with landscapes peopled only by a series of passing smudges. So, the lively population of Hill and Adamson's photographic landscapes is sometimes invisible, as it is in the grand photo panorama they attempted to construct from the Castle, somewhere between 1844 and 1845 (figure 7).

In this case, it is clear that Hill found the result wanting. He used the photographs as the basis of a painting of Edinburgh from the Castle (figure 8), which is dominated by a sense of the 'moment', which we might think of as photographic.¹⁹ There is, for example, a brisk wind blowing from the west, causing the smoke from the chimneys below the castle to stream sideways and the royal standard to crack at the mast. The sky is full of broken cloud, and the sunlight briefly illuminates important aspects of the scene, such as Greyfriars to the South and Allan Ramsay's house on the north slope, below the esplanade. There are numberless figures, groups and individuals in the foreground painted from other, coherently posed photographs, disappearing down to tiny people, marked with a simple stroke, in the far distance between half a mile and a mile away. The painting makes it evident that for Hill, as for Stevenson, the city was a living space, an accumulation of history and a human habitat. It is the actual, natural geological structure, the historic architecture and the animation of the scene, both the stones and the people, which are the keys to the picture.²⁰ As in the Greyfriars' photographs,





the idea of narrative takes the painting beyond its own place and time – a veteran soldier with a wooden leg reading a newspaper on the battlements gives the painting a subtitle, ‘News from India’; in the middle ground, a guide is telling the history of the place to a country group; as a modern counterpoint, a train steams through the tunnel in the valley below.

This way of relating human life to the geological and the architectural structure of the city articulates the sophisticated ideas of time and history found both in Hill’s painting and in Hill and Adamson’s photography; it may well connect to Stevenson’s writings on the subject, and the way in which he talks of the stories and the oral traditions of the city as inherently alive and connected to the actual, modern place, specifically in his chapter, ‘Legends’ for *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*:

The character of a place is often most perfectly expressed in its associations. An event strikes root and grows into a legend, when it has happened amongst congenial surroundings. Ugly actions, above all in ugly places, have the true romantic quality, and become an undying property of their scene. To a man like Scott, the different appearances of nature seemed each to contain its own legend ready made, which it was his to call forth: in such or such a place, only such or such events ought with propriety to happen; and in this spirit he made the *Lady of the Lake* for Ben Venue, *The Heart of Midlothian* for Edinburgh, and the *Pirate*, so indifferently written but so romantically conceived, for the desolate islands and roaring tideways of the North. The common run of mankind have, from generation to generation, an instinct almost as delicate as that of Scott; but where he created new things, they only forget what is unsuitable among the old; and by survival of the fittest, a body of tradition becomes a work of art. So, in the low dens and high-flying





garrets of Edinburgh, people may go back upon dark passages in the town's adventures, and chill their marrow with winter's tales about the fire: tales that are singularly apposite and characteristic, not only of the old life, but of the very constitution of built nature in that part, and singularly well qualified to add horror to horror, when the wind pipes around the tall *lands*, and hoots adown arched passages, and the far-spread wilderness of city lamps keeps quavering and flaring in the gusts. (*Picturesque Notes*, pp. 45-46.)

Hill and Stevenson were both intense and engaged observers of the City of Edinburgh and there are parallels in their thought and approach. This might be the expression of simple coincidence. But it is, at the very least, an interesting coincidence based on a closely related cultural standpoint, and one that may provoke some thought on the visual aspects of Stevenson's writing.

This article began and ends with the Colinton photographs. It proposes a connection in art or artfulness with Stevenson's writing and experience, which goes some way beyond the simple, or even extraordinary coincidence. The photographs of Colinton Manse, with the weir and the mill are not straightforwardly rustic or picturesque. As Stevenson points out, the water is polluted by the mills – its energy is man-made and industrial. The photographs could well be used to illustrate Stevenson's adult recollection, but the beauty of the photographers' vision is achieved even before the child comes to stand there and to gaze. The calotypes are taken above and opposite to the view seen by the boy Stevenson. Hill and Adamson are, it could be said, looking down on a child not yet thought of, and pre-figuring his response. The picture and the text are parallel and should be considered together.

Stevenson wrote:





I have named, among many rivers that make music in my memory, that dirty Water of Leith. Often and often I desire to look upon it again; and the choice of a point of view is easy to me. It should be at a certain water-door, embowered in shrubbery. The river is there dammed back for the service of the flour-mill just below, so that it lies deep and darkling, and the sand slopes into brown obscurity with a glint of gold; and it has but newly been recruited by the borrowings of the snuff-mill just above, and these, tumbling merrily in, shake the pool to its black heart, fill it with drowsy eddies, and set the curded froth of many other mills solemnly steering to and fro upon the surface.

Or so it was when I was young; for change, and the masons, and the pruning-knife, have been busy; and if I could hope to repeat a cherished experience, it must be on many and impossible conditions. I must choose, as well as the point of view, a certain moment in my growth, so that the scale may be exaggerated, and the trees on the steep opposite side may seem to climb to heaven, and the sand by the water-door, where I am standing, seem as low as Styx. And I must choose the season also, so that the valley may be brimmed like a cup with sunshine and the songs of birds; - and the year of grace, so that when I turn to leave the riverside I may find the old manse and its inhabitants unchanged.

It was a place in that time like no other: the garden cut into provinces by a great hedge of beech, and over-looked 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 children²¹

—With the photograph of *The Fairy Tree*, which offers a fore-knowledge of Stevenson’s dancing spunkiest, it may be interest-





ing to put the last paragraph of his text alongside, and to offer a more tenuous or perhaps subtle connection – using the idea of emotional optics, and returning to the further ideas of a present intelligence containing history.

Photography may be defined as an art peculiarly tied to time and the immediate place of its making, tied to fact or actual representation. In Hill and Adamson's hands it was employed as a more expansive art – they engaged with imagination; constraints were overridden or ignored; history was encompassed within the present. The Fairy Tree is not just printed in light, it is constructed in light; it is not a solid reality. The tree is a bare and possibly dead branch, the flickering lights might be leaves, but could well be reflections from the water below. It is worth repeating the thought that Hill wrote about the calotypes, in the letter quoted at the beginning of this article: 'they will be always giving out new lights'. In saying this, he was well aware of the power of the natural metaphor and of its real and arguably empowering connection to the art, but he had already discovered the more extraordinary and emotional potential of a photograph to change in meaning through time. History, visual realisation and meaning could shift through and beyond the focal standpoint of the artist to a different and denser meaning.

Stevenson's text ends in talking of his grandfather, the minister, and discussing the issue of genetic inheritance. In the course of this passage he makes the extraordinary leap of placing himself where his ancestors had been in history, the ancestors who had made his grandfather as well as himself, and he tracks the idea right back to its logical origin:

I know not which is the more strange, that I should carry about with me some fibres of my minister-grandfather; or that in him, as he sat in his cool study, grave, reverend, contented gentleman, there was an aboriginal frisking of the blood that was not his; tree-top memories, like





undeveloped negatives, lay dormant in his mind; tree-top instincts awoke and were trod down; and Probably Arboreal (scarce to be distinguished from a monkey) gambolled and chattered in the brain of the old divine.²²

It is a proposal common to Hill and Adamson's pictures and Stevenson's writing; the emotional focus of place contains time: personal, historical and imaginative. It is extraordinarily interesting that, in the Colinton photographs, they could unwittingly set the stage for two aspects of the future: for the wide-eyed boy of the 1850s and for the imaginative memory of the grown man.



figure 1





figure 2



figure 3



figure 4



figure 5



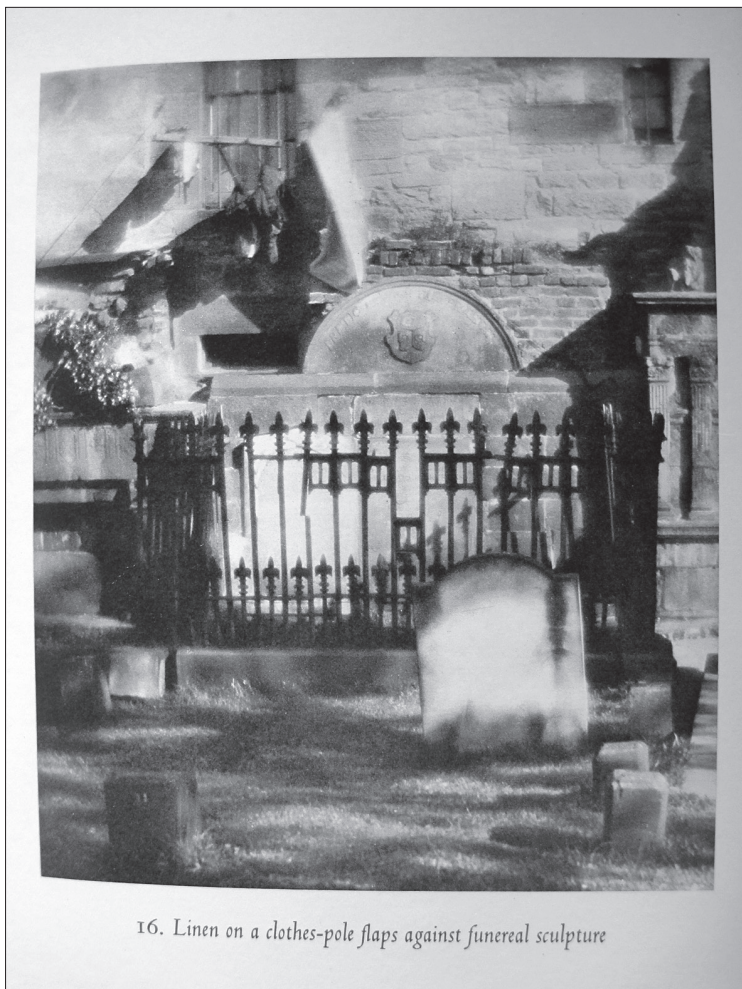


figure 6





figure 7



figure 8





NOTES

- 1 In expressing dislike of the Free Church and other dissident sects of the Scottish church, Stevenson was writing more than 30 years after this event, and with no direct understanding of the intelligent enthusiasm and generosity behind the original movement. The Rev Lewis Balfour was not one of the dissident ministers, and Stevenson's background experience, which he also repudiated, would have been more conventionally Church of Scotland.
- 2 See Sara Stevenson, *The Personal Art of David Octavius Hill*, (Newhaven and London: Yale, 2002.)
- 3 R. L. Stevenson, 'The Manse', first published, *Scribner's Magazine*, May 1887, *Memories and Portraits*, republished in The Skerryvore Edition, vol XXV (London: William Heinemann, 1925), pp. 62-69; Sara Stevenson, *David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson: Catalogue of their calotypes taken between 1843 and 1847 in the collection of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery*, (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 1981), Glasgow University website.
- 4 The argument for an early date is partly based on the size of the image, made with the smaller of the two cameras commonly used by the partnership, which seems to have been used less often after the first year.
- 5 R. Abercromby to D. O. Hill, written from Colinton House, 16 October 1846, 'I have seen Lady Dunfermline since my return home, & she has requested me to say that she agrees to the arrangement we made together this afternoon, & that she therefore hopes, should the weather in the morning prove favourable, to have the pleasure of receiving you and Mr Adamson here, as proposed.' Ms in a private collection.
- 6 D. O. Hill to Henry Bicknell, 17 January 1849, George Eastman House Collection, manuscript AC H645 acc 830.
- 7 Robert Louis Stevenson to Dora Norton Williams, ? late March 1887, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), vol 5, p. 372.
- 8 They were published earlier with an article by Archibald Henderson, 'Old Edinburgh', *Harper's Magazine*, no. 713, October 1909, pp. 705-718. In this, Henderson pays tribute to 'the magic commentary





- of Robert Louis Stevenson', *op. cit.* p. 705.
- 9 A. L. Coburn, 'The Old Masters of Photography', *Century Magazine*, vol 90, October 1915, pp. 909-910.
 - 10 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, with photogravures by A. L. Coburn (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 56.
 - 11 *Ibid*, p. 63.
 - 12 Made for Walter Scott's *Provincial Antiquities and Picturesque Scenery of Scotland*, c. 1819, He sketched a panorama of nearly 180 degrees and contracted it to include the whole sweep within half the real proportion. Illustrated in Katrina Thomson, *Turner and Sir Walter Scott. The Provincial Antiquities and Picturesque Scenery of Scotland*, (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1999).
 - 13 Quoted in Gerald Finley, *Landscapes of Memory: Turner as Illustrator to Scott*, (London: Scholar Press, 1980), p. 61.
 - 14 It should be emphasised that a panorama, a 360 degree picture taken from a commanding viewpoint by someone sketching while turning round on the spot, is not, as it may sound, a simple proposal. Recreating this overview is a demanding exercise in perspective, depending on a control of horizontal curves combining with vertical curves, which requires both an optical command of accuracy and the manual ability to create a contrived optical illusion. See Anon, 'The Panorama: with Memoirs of its Inventor, Robert Barker, and his son, the late Henry Aston Barker,' *Art Journal*, New Series, 1857, p. 46; see also, Ralph Hyde, *Panoramania! The Art and Entertainment of the 'All-Embracing' View* (London: Trefoil 1988), and Sara Stevenson, 'The Hill View: 'the eye unsatisfied and dim with gazing'', *History of Photography*, vol 30, no. 3, Autumn 2006, pp. 213-233.
 - 15 Stevenson, *Picturesque Notes*, pp. 79-82, henceforth cited in the text.
 - 16 John H. Hammond, *The Camera Obscura, A Chronicle* (Bristol: Adam Hilger, 1981).
 - 17 John Taylor Brown, *Dr John Brown. A Biography and Criticism*, London 1903, p. 70.
 - 18 One of these, *In Memoriam: the Calton*, is in the collection of the Edinburgh City Art Centre, the other is still missing.
 - 19 We regret that the reproduction of these delicate old images has not done justice to them. The oil painting in figure 8 loses a lot in





monochrome.

20 As Secretary to the Royal Scottish Academy, Hill was concerned that a professor of geology should be appointed to lecture on landscape, in parallel to the Professor of Anatomy who lectured on the human figure. He was a personal friend of the geological collector and journalist, Hugh Miller, and tried to promote him for such a post. Miller believed in the close interrelationship between the structure of the land and the character of the people.

21 Stevenson, 'The Manse', *Memories and Portraits*, p. 62.

22 Ibid, pp. 68-9.

Figures

figure 1 David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, *Rev Lewis Balfour, Mrs Balfour and Miss Jane Balfour*, calotype photograph, c 1843, National Galleries of Scotland

figure 2 David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, *Colinton Manse and Weir*, calotype photograph, probably taken in October 1846, National Galleries of Scotland

figure 3 David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, *The Fairy Tree at Colinton*, calotype photograph, probably taken in October 1846, National Galleries of Scotland

figure 4 Alvin Langdon Coburn, *A tree in Greyfriars*, photogravure used as plate 12 in Stevenson, for *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, London 1954

figure 5 David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, *The Artist and the Gravedigger*, Greyfriars' Churchyard, c 1845, calotype photograph, National Galleries of Scotland

figure 6 Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Linen on a clothes pole flaps against funereal sculpture*, photogravure used as plate 16 in Stevenson, *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, London 1954

figure 7 David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, part of a panorama of Edinburgh from the Castle, c 1844-5, positive from a calotype negative, Glasgow University Library, Special Collections.

figure 8 David Octavius Hill, *Edinburgh from the Castle: the News from India*, 1846-7, oil painting, National Gallery of Scotland.





Jay Bland, *The Generation of Edward Hyde. The Animal Within, from Plato to Darwin to Robert Louis Stevenson*. (Oxford, Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2010), 366pp, ISBN 978-3-0343-0135-0, £43.00.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, the work by Stevenson most cited and discussed by literary critics, has been studied with the help of a remarkably wide range of interpretative approaches. Apparently, like Dr Chasuble's sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness, it 'can be adapted to almost any occasion'. The book itself encourages interpretation right from the title, which suggests two opposed characters, easily interpreted in terms of any opposed concepts. A series of embedded texts are (ineptly) interpreted by Utterson up to the last two chapters: interpretation here is left to the real reader, reading alongside Utterson, his double. Literary critics (not indifferent to the institutional advantages of the text's brevity) have gallantly taken up the challenge.

In a sense, the academic paper reflecting on *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* may be reflecting upon itself, not only because Stevenson's is a text about interpretation, but also because its narrative structure may find an echo with a typical interpretative strategy. Such at least is suggested by a story that Katharine Eisaman Maus (of the University of Virginia) tells about a fellow English major at Cornell University in the mid-1970s who combined a time-consuming interest in the stock market with excellent grades. When asked for the secret of his success, he replied:

'Well, I don't agonize over writing papers. What I say is always pretty much the same. First I wonder "What's the main thing in this book?" and then I wonder "What's its opposite?" When I write my paper, I claim that these two things, though they seem different, couldn't exist without the other, even that they are aspects of the same thing. [...] Near the end of your paper, you have to say that your





two things [. . .] are “locked in an unstable but mutually constitutive relationship”. Profs just love that.’

Maus comments that her friend –

had discovered [. . .] one of the archetypes of academic writing in the humanities [. . .] Naked babes and cloaks of manliness, heterosexuals and homosexuals, dominant and subaltern groups, centers and margins, originals and simulacra, orality and writing, generalities and details, literal expressions and metaphors, life and art; in every case, what is spurned, hidden, declared secondary or subordinate turns out to be powerful and determining, irresistibly explanatory and often indistinguishable from its opposite.¹

Jekyll and Hyde, ‘locked in an unstable but mutually constitutive relationship’ – the phrase seems made with the two of them in mind – can, it would seem, be easily mapped onto many another cultural configuration. All this helps explain the different ‘feel’ of Bland’s book. First of all, it is centred on Hyde alone (Jekyll gets no separate index entry), hence the temptation to map analysis of two opposed characters onto ready-made oppositions is deftly avoided. Then its approach is unusual: a study of sources and analogues. Bland puts Hyde in a ‘Wild Man’ tradition that includes ancient and medieval texts, Swift’s Yahoos, Spenser’s Wild Man and Kingsley’s Doasyoulikes—a larger intellectual tradition that has been overlooked in the general critical concentration on Darwinism.

Many readers will have already stopped reading at this point – it sounds just too unfashionable. Recent interpretations, after all, though many and varied, have taken noticeably different routes. They have concentrated on historical and cultural contexts, seeing the text as a product of anxieties of the time about





the modern city, degeneration, sexual perversion, criminality, substance abuse, race and class; or of specifically Scottish cultural anxieties. Others place it in the context of the history of ideas, in particular the evolving psychological theories of the 1880s. Another popular approach is in terms of the author's own anxieties: the relationship with his father, or Stevenson's anxieties concerning the new professionalisation of authorship. Also popular are analyses through current models of psychoanalysis, socio-economic evolution, or of dominant textual ideologies and cultural discourses. Then there are narratological approaches, highlighting in particular on the text's complexity and indeterminacy and the story's focus on interpretation. Or studies in terms of literary genres: especially the gothic tale, and the mystery and detective story. The text, as I said before, invites interpretation.

Bland's approach is different to these approaches and will appeal to those who are interested in the work's mythical dimension and use of archetypes. It has defects, but most of them would have disappeared if the publisher had insisted on all republished theses being reduced by at least one third. Reduction would have removed the weaker arguments and merely tangential matter and the long summaries of the works discussed.

Bland's study has the merit of showing three major world-views (Platonism, Judeo-Christianity and Darwinism) that are combined in the presentation of Hyde and arguing that Hyde needs to be interpreted with reference to all three. (Psychological and sociological interpretations of Hyde are not considered here.) In particular, the Platonist case is well made by tracing a tradition of Platonist thought in English culture up to the Victorian Platonic revival. The examination of early literature shows how the ugly body was conventionally seen, in a Platonic way, as the expression of an evil soul. Deformation as an indication of an evil soul therefore has a longer tradition than that I myself supposed when I wrote in a previous study, 'It was a melodramatic and Gothic convention that the evil person is physically deformed'.²





Another main thread of the thesis, for me one of the most original parts, is the pre-Darwinian history of ideas concerning man's relations to beasts. Man's animal nature and relation to the ape was always 'a matter of unease and inquiry' (p. 40). In Plato's theory of metempsychosis, the degraded soul would be reborn and inhabit the body of a lower creature. In the later theory of the Great Chain of Being, Man could degrade to the ape, the creature next below him. Bland clearly shows in this way that fears of degeneration are not exclusively post-Darwinian. There is a good accumulation of evidence of ideas of 'degeneration' from the late eighteenth-century onwards (pp. 176-8, though examples are unfortunately not in strict chronological order).

The long tradition of the Wild Man (traced from fifteenth-century romances and Spenser) is a particularly interesting contribution and allows us to see Hyde as an emblem for evil in a complicated intellectual tradition: Wild Man, Darwinian expression of persisting ancestral traits, ugly Platonic expression of an evil soul, and Biblical devil. However, the Wild Man is a pan-European character – a fact not mentioned here: after a sketch of the phenomenon in ancient civilizations the tradition is traced in works of English literature only. It is interesting that The Incredible Hulk, whose creator was inspired by Hyde, and the Hulk-inspired Hyde of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, share Wild-Man characteristics of great size and rapid change from tranquillity to rage when provoked.

Bland correctly sees the interpretation of Stevenson's text as teasingly multiple: he does not make the common mistake of claiming to have found the key of interpretation: 'the biblical and the Darwinian dance about each other, each coming centre-stage in turn' (p. 314) – and others would add at least two more dancers deftly interweaving to the metaliterary music, namely the psychoanalytic and sociological. The example of *The Water Babies* shows how in another author the ideas of the Bible, Platonism and Darwinism were blended.





All these studies (though, in the indulgent way of the thesis, some are over-extended) allow the author to make revealing glosses of many passages in Stevenson's novella: Hyde as the Platonic 'expression [. . .] of lower elements in my soul', Hyde gaining in stature as the evil soul is more exercised, Hyde as a Wild Man (hairy, with heavy stick, outbursts of anger and of great strength) in the surgical theatre of the aptly-named Denman, Hyde associated by Jekyll with 'slime', both ancestral (Darwinian) and infernal (Biblical), Hyde judged by Utterson as 'troglodytic' (where the author notes the contemporary use of the word not only for cave-man but also for the great apes), features of Hyde (pale face, hoarse voice, small stature) that were identified as apelike in Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature* (1863).

In this way, Bland shows how Stevenson, as he says in his essay on 'Style', 'takes up [. . .] two or more elements or two or more views of the subject in hand, combines, implicates and contrasts them'.³ Stevenson's weaving and plaiting make simple analysis impossible. In this tale of apparent opposites where antithetical meanings seem temptingly easy to assign (from the 'good' and 'evil' of the Hollywood tradition onwards), we must not overlook the playful Stevenson who, in the same essay, promises the reading pleasure of 'an element of surprise, as, very grossly, in the common figure of the antithesis, or, with much greater subtlety, where an antithesis is first suggested and then deftly evaded'.⁴ By tracing, with no particular hierarchy, how three or four world-views and literary traditions are reflected in the text, Bland helps to give us this idea of Stevenson's typical alternation and implication of 'views of the subject in hand'.

Richard Dury
University of Edinburgh





NOTES

- 1 Katharine Eisaman Maus, 'Why it's fun to be smart' [review of M. Garber, *Academic Instincts*], *TLS*, 25 May 2001, p. 24.
- 2 Richard Dury (ed.), *The Annotated Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, second edition (Genova: ECIG, 2005), p. 95.
- 3 Robert Louis Stevenson, 'On Style in Literature: Its Technical Elements' (often published with the title from the Edinburgh Edition, 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature'), paragraph 7.
- 4 *Ibid.*, paragraph 5.





European Stevenson, ed. by Richard Ambrosini and Richard Dury (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 287pp, ISBN 978-1-4438-1436-2, £39.99.

Who or what is a 'European' Stevenson? After reading the articles in this collection I must conclude that is as difficult to answer that question as it is to define 'European' without offending one nation or another included under its rubric. Indeed, I wondered how Stevenson would feel about being called 'European' himself, since he was as much a product of the British tendency to feel that the channel was about as wide as the Pacific when it came to defining Scottish culture in relation to other countries. Admittedly he often strove to find commonalities in landscape and culture with the countries to which he travelled within Europe and beyond, but the inclusiveness of the title *European Stevenson* belies what a loose, baggy monster the term 'European' can turn out to be when one tries to pin it down.

The editors of the collection, Richard Ambrosini and Richard Dury, have gamely tried to give the collection coherence through its divisions into Parts: Part I: European experiences; Part II: French travel narratives; Part III: European influences and reception; and part IV: European translation. However, the collection could have been sliced and diced many different ways, and some essays seem to have more in common with other sections than the ones in which they are located. This is not meant as a criticism but more an acknowledgment of the range and diversity of essays included in this collection and the difficulty of assigning them to a single category, and I face the same dilemma in reviewing *European Stevenson* as they did in coming up with their own organizational structure. I could go through the article essay by essay and review the arguments according to the organizational method of Ambrosini and Dury, but this would be tedious both for the writer and reader. Instead I shall reorganize the collection along the lines of what I see as commonality of approaches, while





giving a brief account of the subject matter of each essay.

Stevenson and travel

Roslyn Jolly in 'Stevenson and the European South,' Ann C. Colley in 'Stevenson and the Davos Winter Landscape' and Morgan Holmes in 'Donkeys, Englishmen and Other Animals' all in interesting ways focus on the movement of Stevenson's body through the landscape. Jolly in analyzing the essay 'Ordered South,' *Travels with a Donkey* and the short story 'Olalla' argues that 'embodiment is a focus in all three texts' (p. 19) and goes on to argue convincingly that Stevenson's 'Scottish body' (p. 25) is the basis for a meditation between identity, memory and landscape. Ann Colley uses a parallel argument to examine Stevenson's lack of a response to the Alpine scenery and that the experience of 'movement of his body through landscape' (p. 54) was essential to his aesthetic; the lack of movement and possibility he found in Davos cramped him to the point that he could not appreciate his environment. Holmes traces the more metaphorical relationship of what we might term Stevenson's 'English body' to that of the donkey Modestine as a challenge to the 'myth of the English as kindly to animals' (p. 110) which is subverted by his beating of the defenseless creature. In typical English fashion, he blames his conduct on the pernicious influence of the French.

R. L. Abrahamson 'Of Some use to me afterwards: Stevenson's Pivotal Experience in Mentone' and Laurence Davies in 'The Time of his Time' take a more biographical approach, as do the editors in their introduction as they trace Stevenson's exposure to French culture, reading his stay in Mentone in November 1873 as a 'turning point' in his career as a writer (p. 2). Abrahamson too sees the Mentone sojourn as 'an important pivot in his emotional and professional development' (p. 37), and goes on to compare the 'before and after' of this period in his life. Davies analyzes Stevenson's autobiographical writing as meditations on the experience of time, with some interesting remarks on





Stevenson and train travel (p. 75).

Adaptations, translations and retellings

A translation, an adaptation or an appreciation by another writer are all in their different ways and to different degrees acts of interpretation. To render a text into another language or into another medium must force choices and selections, no matter how minor, and a writer inevitably sees a predecessor through a distorting lens. The rest of the essays deal in different ways with the act of interpreting Stevenson either in translation, in a different medium, or in selective appreciation.

Joachim Hemmerle in 'A Yiddish *Treasure Island*: Translation and its Cultural Background' examines the challenges of translating the text from English to Yiddish, looking in detail at how the translator dealt with individual words and phrases that had to be explained to people who did not share Stevenson's range of cultural references (pp. 234-5). Richard Ambrosini in 'The Miracle: Robert Louis Stevenson in the History of European Literature' uses very broad brush strokes to show how Stevenson fits into a tradition of adventure stories, how Stevenson rehabilitated the genre in the nineteenth century, and how various writers after him were influenced by, and adapted the genre of the adventure story for different eras and cultures (p. 137). On a smaller scale, Lesley Graham in 'I Have a Little Shadow: travellers after Stevenson in the Cevennes' examines how certain writers have been compelled to retell *Travels with a Donkey* in ways that 'modifies our understanding of the original account,' each appreciation of Stevenson inevitably reshaping the original text according to the writer's preconceptions (p. 91).

Guy Barefoot in 'Lost and Found in Translation and Adaptation: Walerian Borowczyk and *Docteur Jekyll et les Femmes*' argues that the film remains faithful to the original text in some ways, but that it also highlights aspects of the text that Stevenson could not, such as sexual violence (p. 244). Borowczyk claimed that we





has being faithful to the original at the same time as he exploited the possibilities of changing sexual mores. Similarly Sara Rizzo in 'Twopence Coloured: The Translation of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* into Comic-book text' examines retellings of the story in graphic novels and their use of setting and the visual text to proclaim the 'independence of the graphic novel as a medium' even as they adapt it as an act of homage (p. 264). In a playful essay, Jean-Pierre Naugrette in 'The Strange Case of Doctors Haekle and Jaeckel' muses on how onomastics and puns might be used to analyze the text and uncover unexpected genealogies between Stevenson, Ernst Haeckel, and Sigmund Freud, when Freud quotes from Ludwig Jekels on split personalities (p. 178).

A number of essays address how different authors were either adapted by Stevenson, or how they adopted Stevenson as a model for their own writing. Cinzia Giglioni in 'One of Stevenson's Most Important French Encounters: Michel de Montaigne' traces continuities between Montaigne's *Les Essais* and Stevenson's essay in terms of war metaphors (p. 201), rhetoric (pp. 202-3), and education (p. 204). Alan Sandison examines Proust's appreciation of Stevenson in 'Proust and Stevenson' arguing that memory and landscape are crucial for both writers (p. 147) in their explorations of subjectivity (p. 151). Michela Vanon Alliata in 'Stevenson, Calvino and All the Devils in Italy' sees a commonality between the two writers in terms of children, play and fantasy, arguing that in his portrayal of Pin, an orphan boy, Calvino 'reveals his debt to Stevenson' (p. 217), but with the difference that the view of childhood here is much darker than in stories such as *Treasure Island*. Vincent Giroud in 'Cocteau and Stevenson' sees humour and irony as the essential common ground between the two authors (p. 186) and traces the influence of *Jekyll and Hyde* on such films as *La Belle et la Bête*, *Le Sang d'un Poète*, and *Le testament d'Orphée* (p. 189).

Finally, at the end of the process of reviewing this collection of





essays, I find I must paraphrase Dr. Jekyll; science may ultimately determine that Stevenson was not a single person but instead 'a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous, and independent denizens' given the extraordinary range of interpretations of a single author to be found in these pages.

Martin Danahay
Brock University
Ontario





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 gives public talks on Stevenson, most recently on the voyage of the *Casco*, to a National Trust audience, and, at Amherst College, a talk on St Gaudens' medallion of Stevenson. 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*.

Sarah Ames is a second year PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, writing her thesis on Stevenson and kinship groups. She is Research Assistant at the centre for Scottish Writing in the Nineteenth Century (SWINC), where she is currently working on the New Edinburgh Edition of the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson. Sarah is particularly interested in forms of secrecy and secret societies in the nineteenth century.

Hilary Beattie is a psychologist and psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City, and is on the faculty of the Columbia University Department of Psychiatry as well as the Columbia Psychoanalytic Centre. Among her research interests are psychoanalytic approaches to literature and the Scottish contribution to psychoanalysis. Her publications on Stevenson include three earlier papers in this journal (2005, 2007, 2009), as well as a psycho-biographical essay, 'Father and Son: The Origins of Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'.

Jenni Calder has written extensively on various aspects of English, Scottish and American literature and history, including *RLS: A Life Study* (Hamish Hamilton 1980), numerous articles on Stevenson and several Stevenson editions, *Scots in Canada* (Luath Press, 2003) and *Scots in the USA* (Luath Press, 2006) and *Frontier Scots: The Scots Who Won the West* (Luath Press,





2010). She is currently working on *Lost in the Backwoods: Scots and the North American Wilderness* for Edinburgh University Press.

Ann C. Colley is a SUNY Distinguished Professor, and her most recent critical work is *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime* (Ashgate, 2011), and *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination* (Ashgate, 2004). Her main interest is in Victorian literature and she has published essays in many of the leading journals in this field as well as monographs on *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), *Edward Lear and His Critics* (1993), *The Search for Synthesis in Literature and Art* (1990) and *Tennyson and Madness* (1983).

Lesley Graham is *maître de conférences* at the Université Bordeaux Segalen in France. Her research interests focus on the accounts of Scottish travellers in Europe in the nineteenth century. Her recent publications include several articles related to Stevenson, his family and the followers in his footsteps. She is currently editing a volume of essays for the forthcoming New Edinburgh Edition of Stevenson's works.

Richard J. Hill is a lecturer in English literature at Chaminade University of Honolulu, Hawaii. Hill's research into literary illustration is cross-disciplinary with the history of art and the history of the book. He has published articles and lectured on Scott and James Hogg, and is the author of *Picturing Scotland through the Waverley novels: Sir Walter Scott and the Origins of the Victorian Illustrated Novel* (Ashgate, 2010). He is now examining the lifetime illustrations of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Gordon Hirsch is professor of English at the University of Minnesota. He is co-editor of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde After One Hundred Years* (1988) and is currently writing about the collaboration between Stevenson and his stepson Lloyd Osbourne. He is also reading cognitive neuroscience and considering its applications to the study of nineteenth-century literature.





Nathalie Jaëck is a Professor of British XIXth century literature in Bordeaux 3-University, France. She specialises in adventure literature, with a specific interest for narrative structures and philosophy. She has written many articles on Conan Doyle, Stevenson, Conrad, Dickens, Wells, as well as two monographs: *Charles Dickens: L'écriture comme pouvoir, l'écriture comme résistance* (Paris: Ophrys, 2007), and *Les aventures de Sherlock Holmes: une affaire d'identité* (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2008).

Stuart Kelly is the Literary Editor of *Scotland on Sunday* and the author of *The Book of Lost Books* (Polygon, 2010) and *Scott-Land: The Man Who Invented A Nation* (Polygon, 2010).

Donald Mackenzie is Lecturer in English Literature, University of Glasgow. His publications include *The Metaphysical Poets* (1990); Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies* (ed. for World's Classics, 1993); co-edited, with Andrew Hook, *The Fair Maid of Perth* (Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels, 1999); articles on various authors, including Greville, Bunyan, Lawrence and Ford Madox Ford; articles on 'The Psalms' and 'Biblical Paraphrase and Translation' in, respectively, vols 2 and 3 of the *Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*.

David Miller is Lecturer in 19th and 20th Century Literature at the University of Stirling with a research and teaching interest in poetry, critical theory and trauma and literature. He previously taught at the universities of Rome and Edinburgh and has published on poetry, critical theory and allegory. He is the general and founding editor of the *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* and is currently working on a longer study of Carlyle's and Arnold's ideas about the role of the poet in modern industrial societies.

James Robertson is a poet, editor, writer of fiction and essayist. Born in 1958 in Kent, from the age of six he grew up in Bridge of Allan, Stirlingshire. He studied history at the University of Edinburgh and has lived in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Lanarkshire,





Fife and now Angus. His fiction includes two collections of short stories and four novels, *The Fanatic* (2000), *Joseph Knight* (2003), *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) and *And the Land Lay Still* (2010). He is also a co-founder of Itchy Coö, an imprint established in 2002 specialising in books for children in Scots, and is the imprint's general editor and a contributing author.

Sara Stevenson was the Chief Curator of the Scottish National Photography Collection at the National Galleries of Scotland from 1984 to 2010. During that time, she worked extensively on photography and its context, with particular emphasis on the work of David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. She is a member of the board of The Hill Adamson, which aims to establish a national centre for photography in Scotland. She is currently Honorary Senior Research Fellow at University of Glasgow, working on the early history of photography.

Saverio Tomaiuolo is Senior Lecturer in English Literature and Language at Cassino University, Italy. He has published on Victorian literature (Tennyson, Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and especially Braddon and the sensation novel) and postmodern literature (Robert Pirsig, Antonia Byatt) on Italian and international journals. He has published a monograph on Tennyson's narrative poems ('Tennyson e il senso del narrare', 2003), and an essay on *The Master of Ballantrae* in *JSS* 3, 2006.

Roderick Watson is Professor Emeritus at the University of Stirling where he taught for many years. He was General Editor of the Canongate Classics from the start of the series in 1987 and has published widely on Scottish literature and culture, including *Hugh MacDiarmid* (1976; 1985); *The Poetry of Norman MacCaig* (1989); *The Poetry of Scotland* ed., (1995); *The Literature of Scotland* (1984; 2007). The most recent collection of his own poetry is *Into the Blue Wavelengths* (2004). He edits the *Journal of Stevenson Studies* with Linda Dryden.





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

General Editors: Stephen Arata, Richard Dury, Penny Fielding
and Anthony Mandal (electronic editor)

The NEW EDINBURGH EDITION OF THE COLLECTED WORKS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (EdRLS for short) is making progress. The first volume to be published looks likely to be *Prince Otto*, edited by Bob Irvine of the University of Edinburgh: he is at present proofing the main text (Stevenson's text). One or two volumes of the essays should follow soon after: the main text for *Virginibus Puerisque* is at present being proofed and work has started also on volume 4 (Uncollected Essays to 1881). (Five volumes of essays are planned, co-ordinated by Richard Dury).

Julia Reid has been working on the *Amateur Emigrant* MS at Yale; Glenda Norquay was in the USA earlier in 2011 working on *St. Ives*, looking at MSS, letters etc. in the Beinecke Library, Princeton and the Huntington Library in Los Angeles; and Caroline McCracken-Flesher is working away at *Kidnapped*.

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

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 read-





ers. 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 generous 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 grant will also pay for a Research Assistant to scan volumes, store and back up all the text and image files that we acquire, order scans and images from libraries etc. It will also pay for assistance in preparing the texts for printing as well as partly covering the acquisition of reproductions, etc.

The Edition is in the process of negotiating a formal partnership with the National Library of Scotland: the proposal is that the NLS would scan a certain number of volumes in their collection at a preferential tariff and EdRLS would deposit files with them at the end of the project, to make a Robert Louis Stevenson digital archive. Further negotiations are taking place with the RLS Club of Edinburgh to see in what way they can help and collaborate.

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@t-r.it).

Richard Dury, Penny Fielding





Stevenson: Notes and Queries

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

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

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

Stephen Arata: sda2e@cms.mail.virginia.edu

Richard Dury: richard.dury@t-r.it

Penny Fielding: penny.fielding@ed.ac.uk





RLS

WEBSITE

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 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



edinburgh
(edinbarə) n.
UNESCO City of
Literature





Contribute and Subscribe to The Journal of Stevenson Studies

The Journal of Stevenson Studies offers new and original insights into the work of Robert Louis Stevenson and the moral, psychological and cultural ambiguities that he explored in what was soon to become our modern world.

Edited by Linda Dryden & Roderick Watson

**Contributions to future issues are invited and should
be sent to either of the editors as
MS WORD files in MHRA format.**

All contributions are subject to peer review by an Editorial Board of internationally recognised Stevenson scholars.

Email: l.dryden@napier.ac.uk

Email: r.b.watson@stir.ac.uk

Centre of Scottish Studies

University of Stirling

FK9 4LA





Volume 1 in 2004, contained essays by Richard Ambrosini, Steven Arata, Oliver S. Buckton, Liam Connell, Richard Dury, Vincent Giroud, Douglas S. Mack, Sudesh Mishra, Glenda Norquay, Olena M. Turnbull, Richard J. Walker, Roderick Watson.

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.





The Journal of Stevenson Studies

**The journal is available annually
by subscription only**

NB: We can now accept cheques in Euros, US Dollars,
Canadian Dollars and other currencies by agreement

Subscription Rates 2011 (all rates inclusive of postage)

	Personal		Institutional	
	UK	EU/OS	UK	EU/OS
1 Year	£15	£17 €18 \$23 USD \$24 CAD	£25	£27 €30 \$38 USD \$40 CAD

I wish to subscribe to The Journal of Stevenson Studies as—

- Personal UK / EU / OS* subscriber
- Institutional UK / EU / OS* subscriber

*please delete as applicable

I enclose a cheque for: made payable to:

The University of Stirling

Please return cheques to: Journal of Stevenson Studies

English Studies

University of Stirling

Stirling

FK9 4LA

Scotland

Name: _____

Address: _____

We regret that we cannot as yet process credit card subscriptions

