Robert Louis Stevenson: The Mediation of Literary Reputation and the Advent of Modernism

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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is the result of my own, independent work and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to place Robert Louis Stevenson as an important contributor to the emergence of Modernism. In exploring this, the thesis suggests that Stevenson's contribution to literary Modernism has frequently been overlooked due to several critical factors. Foremost amongst these is the issue of mediation. The thesis will discuss how Stevenson's posthumous reputation was constructed and re-orientated by figures unsympathetic to his commitment to stylistic innovation. The figures so discussed include Stevenson's literary editor Sidney Colvin and his immediate family, particularly Fanny Van De Grift Stevenson. The thesis also draws attention to the disproportionate influence individuals who were otherwise peripheral to Stevenson's life had in defining his reputation after his death – Lord Charles Guthrie being first among these.

Countering the image propagated by these earliest advocates, this thesis will demonstrate that far from being a conservative writer, Stevenson was a self-reflexive and innovative author, with a developed sense of the need to consciously develop a literary style. Through detailed analysis of individual texts (principally *The Master of Ballantrae, The Wrecker* and *The Ebb-Tide*) in a manner alert to this, the central thread of the thesis's argument will be developed.

Stevenson's work will be contextualised in terms of the genres from which it developed and which were dominant in the literary culture at the time he was writing. By doing so the thesis suggests that Stevenson reframed the norms of both Realism and Romance in order to innovate a new style which was reflective, critical of dominant discourse, and – crucially – anticipative of future forms.

Reflecting on the extent to which the early mediation of Stevenson's image and work defined his critical reception in much of the twentieth-century the thesis will close by considering the significance of new forms of mediation and reflecting on how these will influence the perception of Stevenson's work in the remainder of the century.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

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Thanks are also due to all the staff at the library of Edinburgh Napier University and at The National Library of Scotland. An even greater debt of gratitude is owed to Denise Brace at the Edinburgh Writers' Museum who supported me in my archival research with diligence, good humour and a patient interest that was often tested.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Robert Louis Stevenson remains one of the best known and most frequently read authors of the nineteenth century.[1] In the space of his brief yet prolific writing career he produced a substantial body of work comprising poetry, drama, short stories, travel writing and fiction. He is the author of at least two books, *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), which have that rare and abiding fame: to have contributed by-words and universal metaphors to the English language. He is by rough estimate the most frequently adapted author in the English language and his work has been translated into at least 26 languages.[2] It can be argued that it is partly this unprecedented commercial success, which has endured not just for generations but now for centuries, which has led to the critical under-evaluation afforded his writing. Familiarity, perhaps, breeds contempt in the work of literary criticism, be it scholarly or commercial; if there is no need for an author to be recommended, rediscovered or championed from obscurity there is a chance that they will not be spoken of in the terms of scholarship at all. Estimations of Stevenson, however, frequently overlook his range and diversity. He has tended to be represented either as an unchallenging author, an author of simplistic adventure fiction, or, in another mode, represented as a narrowly Victorian or narrowly Scottish author, with little meaningful value outside his period or place.[3] It is only in the last fifty years or so that Stevenson has begun to be reappraised, with both scholarly

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[1] As attested, for example by research related to readership and public engagement with Stevenson's work: see 'REF Case Study: Enhancing the Literary Reputation of Robert Louis Stevenson' https://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=43946 [accessed 31 December 2020].

[2] 'Richard Dury Archive: Film Versions of *Treasure Island*' http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org/richard-dury-archive/films-rls-treasure-island html [accessed 10 April 2020]; 'Richard Dury Archive: *Treasure Islan*d – Translations' http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org/richard-dury-archive/transl-treasure-island html [accessed 10 April 2020].

[3] For an overview of dominant critical attitudes in the century following his death, see Paul Maixner, 'Introduction' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 1-46 and James Robertson, 'A Reliable Author and His Unreliable Critics: The Fall and Rise of Stevenson's Literary Reputation', *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, vol 8 (2011), 5-16.

work and adaptation beginning to explore his depths, and his relevance outside a narrow generic and temporal range. It is now increasingly recognised that Stevenson was a complex and cosmopolitan author both figuratively and literally, migrating across a range of styles and (despite his ill health) across the globe. His life took him from Scotland to England, from England to France and from thence to America and then to every corner of the Pacific before he finally settled in Samoa.[4] Each of these contexts contributed to his knowledge and to his style and he drew from a plurality of sources and literary traditions in constructing a new idiom for his writing.

Stevenson's lasting popularity may have seen him endure as a widely-recognised 'heritage' writer, but with it his name has often been associated, at least in the past, with 'light literature'. This is a reputation that would have been unintelligible to readers in his own lifetime: to his contemporaries, far from being solely the writer of popular entertainments, he was considered a master stylist. No less an authority on this matter than Henry James writes of Stevenson as a paragon of elevated style.[5] Indeed, as will be shown in this thesis, Stevenson maintained his reputation for literary excellence throughout his life before the saturation of the market by hagiographic and sentimental appraisals in the decade following his death began to sour his reputation. Within a generation Stevenson, far from being championed as a master of high literature, was being roundly dismissed by the major Modernist authors of the 1910s and 20s who made of him a by-word for the outmoded and retrograde literary styles of an obsolete past: he had about him the odour of the last century, to paraphrase E. M. Forster.[6] This thesis will argue that this decline in Stevenson's reputation was a product of its mediation by figures who sought to take the diversity of Stevenson's literary output and reduce it down to one mode, a mode which favoured their own social or political perceptions, as reactionary establishment figures such as Sidney Colvin and Lord Guthrie fuelled a perception that Stevenson was an arch-representative of these Victorian values in both politics and literature. Concomitantly, the denigration of his style by the writers agonistically opposed to Stevenson's method reinforced the sense of his irrelevance.

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[4] See Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), *passim*.

[5] For a representative sample of Henry James's comments on Stevenson's style, see Edwin Miller, 'Introduction: A Theory of Fiction in Outline' in *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*, ed. by Edwin Miller (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), pp. 1-26 (pp. 19-20).

[6] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 161.

The rear-guard action of the few literary writers and figures who sought to champion him during the Modernist period, rather than saving his reputation, damned it through association with their own. In critical appraisals, both Edmund Gosse and G. K. Chesterton pinned Stevenson to their own eccentric and unfashionable styles at a time when they were both seen as outwith the current of their literary age.[7]

The contribution of this thesis will be to highlight and redress the critical bias that has developed against Stevenson due to these secondary factors. It will build on the critical rehabilitation begun in the 1990s by the work of Alan Sandison and those who followed his lead, and will attempt to locate Stevenson in the centre of the development of a literary form which developed from and modified the traditions of Romanticism, reapplied them to Victorian contemporaneity, and, in doing so, anticipated the modes and style of literary Modernism.

1.2 Aims of Thesis

This thesis will begin by considering the context of Stevenson's posthumous reputation and how, due to his untimely death, those who knew him would greatly impact the way that his work would be presented and emphasised to audiences. It will then chronologically plot the development of Stevenson's style through a critical reading of three key texts, *The Master of Ballantrae* (1888), *The Wrecker* (1892) and *The Ebb-Tide* (1894), alongside secondary texts, to contribute to the critical discussion which suggests that Stevenson's stylistic adaptation of Romance forms prefigured Modernism. It aims to do this by reading and reviewing a broad range of secondary critical resources charting Stevenson's critical reception through time.

The thesis will contend that Stevenson came to be seen as, as it were, 'too Victorian', partly because in the 1890s he was heavily sentimentalised in popular writing reflecting on his career – the phenomenon referenced in W. E. Henley's *Pall Mall Gazette* article of 1901, which details how Stevenson's reputation became a victim of the effusive sentimentalisation of his memory, so that the figure of the man outgrew his writing.[8] Oscar Wilde famously quipped 'one must have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without laughing'; through his being sentimentalised,

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[7] Edmund Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1903), pp. 273-302; G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929).
[8] W. E. Henley, 'R. L. S.' in *Pall Mall Gazette*, xxv (December 1901), 505-14.

Stevenson was drawn into the same ambit of this sophisticated rejection of mawkish and manipulative emotional demonstrativeness.[9] The boom of commemorative publications in the decades immediately following Stevenson's death testifies to this cosy lachrymosity.[10] Through a broader exploration of this, this thesis will argue that Stevenson's critical reception has changed over time to reflect shifts in cultural and social values around the image of the author and around emotional association.

The thesis will also indicate the degree to which contingency informs the reception and reputation of an author. Stevenson takes a phrase from *Julius Caesar* as an epigraph to one of his final novels: 'There is a tide in the affairs of men'.[11] There is a tide, too, in the reputation of the author: it ebbs and flows according to a course of history and fashion but this tide is not determined by a set physical fact but rather by a whole array of contingencies and subjective responses. From the first attempted dismantling of Stevenson's posthumous reputation in Frank Swinnerton's *R. L. Stevenson: A Critical Study* (1914), Stevenson has served as an example of a writer whose reputation clearly demonstrates how the critical regard of an author is not dispassionate and objective, but is strictly contingent – determined by the cultural, social and historical contexts of its period. Reputations can be burnished or besmirched by biases, false associations, and a plethora of other social factors. Stevenson has both benefited and then been disadvantaged by being Victorian; been disadvantaged and then benefited by being international, and so forth. The writer's reputation is in flux, finding favour or disregard depending on how his 'positionality' is interpreted by succeeding critics across succeeding generations. From an analysis of this, this thesis will argue that the corpus of an author's work can never be studied independently but is always mediated through a network of ideological structures and assumptions. This, it will be suggested, is central in answering the question as to how Stevenson's contribution to literary Modernism has been largely overlooked, though this attribution itself is an interpretation which has been mediated by contemporary ideological structures and assumptions.

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[9] Quoted in Ada Leverson, *Letters to the Sphinx* (London: Duckworth, 1930), p. 41.

[10] For example Eve Blantyre Simpson, *Robert Louis Stevenson's Edinburgh Days* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898); John Alexander Hammerton, *Stevensoniana* (London: Grant Richards, 1903); Eleanor Mary Sellar, *Recollections and Impressions* (Edinburgh: Blackwoods, 1907).

[11] *Julius Caesar*, IV.3.259: see Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide: A Trio and Quartette* (London: William Heinemann, 1894), p. iii.

1.3 Note on Choice of Texts

The three principal texts considered in this thesis are *The Master of Ballantrae* (1888), *The Wrecker* (1892) and *The Ebb-Tide* (1894). These texts were chosen as being the most important for understanding the evolution of Stevenson's style. Each reflects a moment of change and adaptation of Stevenson's previous modes of writing. Each is also a major landmark in the development of his style, which this thesis will contend prefigures Modernism. While other texts were considered from which the same argument can be developed, as the chapters will indicate, the texts chosen have particular qualities which emphasise the point more clearly. *Weir of Hermiston* (1896), for example, was considered as a subject for the thesis as a work which represents the furthest advancement of Stevenson's style. The novel is strongly supportive of an argument contending that the author was anticipating Modernism. Indeed, critical studies such as those of Alan Sandison and Gillian Hughes clearly delineate this.[12] However, given that the book was far from complete at the time of Stevenson's death and that this thesis is concerned with the presentation of Stevenson's existing work immediately after his death *The Ebb-Tide* was chosen in its place as Stevenson's final completed novel and a text which is in itself rich in such anticipations. This was felt to adequately compensate for the absence of *Weir of Hermiston.*[13]

It is particularly relevant to note that of these three texts chosen two of them were written collaboratively with Lloyd Osbourne. Indeed, a further potential candidate for the first novel to be studied here was *The Wrong Box* (1889), which has stylistic and formal innovations which could have amply illustrated some of the points made later in the thesis. This raises important questions about Stevenson as a collaborative writer. The subject has been discussed with great insight by Audrey Murfin in her *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Art of Collaboration* (2019). Chapters 7 and 8 also discuss the extent to which Osbourne did or did not contribute to each of these texts. In brief however, this thesis contends that, in the novels discussed, the

[12] Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism: A Future Feeling* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996); Gillian Hughes, 'Authority and the Narrative Voice in Stevenson's *Weir of Hermiston*' in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, vol 42, no 2 (November 2016), 233-247.
[13] Though *Weir of Hermiston* is discussed incidentally in chapter 8.

predominant stylistic direction is owed to Robert Louis Stevenson and so these collaborative works are contextualised principally in his corpus.

In terms of secondary resources, the principal source for contemporary reviews has been Paul Maixner's *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (1981). This has been, since its publication, the standard reference in terms of contemporary reception of Stevenson, and the reviews and other incidental critical writings gathered therein represent as comprehensive a range of period responses as can be expected in a volume of its size. That being said, there are gaps in its record; for while it includes examples from both Scottish publications and from the popular press, these are significantly outnumbered by reviews from metropolitan sources. Given that the emphasis of this study is on the dominant critical response to Stevenson this misrepresentative emphasis on what might be termed elite critical response is apt, for it was this critical opinion which was most decisive in determining the literary reputation of Stevenson.

For Stevenson's letters the standard scholarly edition was used; that is, the eight volume *Collected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, edited by Bradford Booth and Ernest Mehew. A short form indicator is used when referring to these letters which is presented as

'Letter: To [correspondent], [date]'.

1.4 Structure of Thesis

This thesis will begin by presenting a discussion of the people in Stevenson's life who would go on to control and so impact his posthumous reputation. In the next chapter the thesis will then provide a summary of the stylistic environment from which Stevenson initially drew and to which the entirety of his corpus is assigned by many later interpretations. Understanding Romance, in its Victorian form, and, indeed, its inheritance from the Romantic movement earlier in the century, is essential for contextualising Stevenson's literary method and his conceptualisations of national identity and its limitations. From this initial contextualisation a fourth chapter will consider a more particular context for Stevenson in the period in which he is writing: that is, the debate between Realism and Romance, the two dominant and contesting forms of literary production in the nineteenth century, with especial emphasis given to Stevenson's own engagement in public debate over the relative

merit of these forms. From this, the thesis will move to discuss the development from within this context of the emerging forms of the new mode of Modernism, delineating the key features of the movement and suggesting the first arguments for how Stevenson contributed to defining this new approach.

The observations of these contextual chapters will then be applied through detailed analysis of texts from within Stevenson's *oeuvre.* Close application to the texts and their contexts will support the principal argument. *The Master of Ballantrae,* in the first instance, will be proposed as an essential text in bridging the divide between the Romance and the 'novel of Modernity', suggesting that the author made ironic reflection on the conventions of genre instrumental in this progression. Following on from this, the thesis will examine the ramifications of Stevenson's slow movement towards this new form in a discussion of *The Wrecker* which will consider how Stevenson applies an incipient Modernism to a questioning depiction of commercial exploitation in the South Seas. The same theme will be returned to and advanced in the succeeding chapter which will make a claim for *The Ebb-Tide* being a clear instance of Modernist fiction and postcolonial critique. A final chapter will question the lack of recognition for this advancement, suggesting through a study of the mediation of Stevenson's literary reputation after his death that these critical Modernist works were overlooked and even redacted by the conservative figures who took it upon themselves to represent and defend Stevenson's reputation in the early twentieth century. An outline of the content of the chapters of this thesis is provided below.

Chapter 2, 'Some Salient Unity: Charles Guthrie and the Mediation of Robert Louis Stevenson' will investigate the management and representation of Stevenson and his work by those who claimed authority to interpret it following his death. This will comprise several case studies of individual figures and their contribution to the dissemination of the Stevenson myth which it will be suggested led to the selective presentation of Stevenson's diverse and complex *oeuvre*.

Chapter 3, 'Romanticism: Inheritance and National Tradition' will seek to provide a working definition of Romanticism. It will suggest that the Romantic moment extended far into the nineteenth century and defined conceptions of nation and cultural tradition which would be drawn upon by the authors who reached their maturity at the end of the century. It will also consider the phenomenon of Romantic nationalism and how competing notions of national identity in a British context

defined an author's identity and prefigured his reception. Following this, a brief coda will describe the Imperial Romance, discussing how this subgenre defined Stevenson's writing environment in the early portion of his career, and anticipating arguments later in the thesis as to how he reframed and subverted the form in his later work.

Chapter 4 'Victorian Realism and Romance' will discuss the origin and form of Victorian realism and its emergence as the favoured form of literary production in the period. The 'Art of Fiction' debate carried out between Henry James and Stevenson will be central to this discussion. The chapter will describe how James advocated the value of realism in fiction, to be met by Stevenson's counter-proposal of the value of Romance. It will, however, be suggested that there is a false dichotomy between the two forms and that Stevenson himself, despite his position in the debate, excelled in synthesising the two, successfully finding the Realism in Romance – and vice versa. This fact will be suggested as being key to understanding his critical value and why this is often overlooked.

Chapter 5, 'An Unplaceable Fiction: *The Master of Ballantrae* and Generic Ambivalence' will identify the novel as 'a mosaic of fragmentary reminiscences' and will suggest how this maps to Modernist modes.[14] This will lead on to a second chapter about the novel.

Chapter 6, 'Uncharted Water: Stevenson and the Unplottable Emergence of Modernism' is a further chapter on *The Master of Ballantrae* which will deepen reflection on the text. Moving through discussions of questions of verisimilitude and narrative ambiguity, it will then go on to suggest that the novel begins to meld the values of both Realism and Romance, and so begins to realise a new narrative form.

Chapter 7, 'The Island of Midway: Imperial Knowledge and Postcolonial Reputation in Stevenson's Pacific Writing' details the progression of Stevenson's written style, which will be described, and its increasing sophistication. Identifying this will provide means for the chapter to delineate a critique of the affecting of imperial violence on the pretext of capitalist development. This reading will be advanced in this chapter, and developed further in the one which follows.

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[14] [William Archer], 'An Unsigned Review, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 September 1889, xlix, 3' in Paul, Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 341-344 (p. 343).

Chapter 8, '*The Ebb-Tide:* A Drift Toward the Modern' argues that these later South Seas texts are key to resisting the idea that Stevenson's style is regressive, suggesting that these are novels which either move away from Imperial Romance, with its simplicities and triumphalism, or, indeed, that these are generating a reformed Romance, a Romance for modernity which prefigures the high Modernism of the following century.

Chapter 9, 'Conclusion' will close the argument of the thesis by presenting a discussion of Stevenson in the twenty-first century and of new scholarship. It will acknowledge some of the ideas previously discussed and how they have partly recontextualised Stevenson into the narrative of the development of Modernist literature. It will also discuss his contemporary reputation (and use) as a writer. With an increasing plurivocality of representations of Stevenson, he is no longer mediated by any one authoritative figure but by a thousand voices, each with their own perceived authority. There is a new equality of broadcasting due to social media and ease of access to the Internet which means none of these are privileged; the benefits and challenges of this will be discussed.

2. Some Salient Unity: Charles Guthrie and the Mediation of Robert Louis Stevenson

2.1 Introduction

In the decades succeeding Robert Louis Stevenson's death in 1894, amidst the glut of publications on the author and his life, a small sub-genre of memoirs based on personal recollections of the author thrived. These range in quality and relevance from the compendious *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, with its numerous articles detailing every stage of Stevenson's life, written by those who were closest to him, to the more insubstantial works, which elaborate an image of Stevenson based upon a slight or superficial acquaintance; Margaret Moyes Black's notoriously sentimental and inaccurate biography is a fair representative of this category.[15] Amongst these publications, however, perhaps the most significant and challenging is that written by Lord Charles Guthrie, whose *Robert Louis Stevenson: Some Personal Recollections* was published posthumously in 1920.[16] All these memoirs, of course, entail a degree of projection and control of a *notion* of Stevenson: each writer will notice and emphasise a particular aspect (or perceived aspect) of the author's character. In turn, the decision to record and publish these impressions represents an implicit effort to render an idiosyncratic response as being, at some level, authoritative and to enter it into the public record. In Lord Guthrie's case, however, this effort to sanction his own idea of Stevenson extended far beyond the preparation of his memoir. Guthrie was perhaps the most assiduous collector of material related to Stevenson's life in the early twentieth century and the collection he amassed was so substantial that it would form the core of the Stevenson collection

[15] Rosaline Masson, ed., *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1922); Margaret Moyes Black, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, [1898]).

[16] Charles Guthrie, *Robert Louis Stevenson: Some Personal Recollections* (Edinburgh: W. Green & Son, 1920).

of the Edinburgh Writers' Museum, which is the most extensive and significant archive of its kind in Europe. By amassing this material Guthrie also placed himself in a position of authority on Stevenson's life: the association with the artefacts and remnants of the author's existence gave the collector access to Stevenson's family, themselves keen to control the narrative of Stevenson's life. Furthermore, the amassing of material, particularly correspondence, placed Guthrie in a position to control and regulate access to knowledge about Stevenson.

Guthrie's own memoirs and correspondence reveal, in essence, an effort to propagate and preserve an image of Stevenson as the conservative and pious son of prosperous Edinburgh. He is keen to undermine – or to at least contextualise – the notion of Stevenson's 'Bohemianism', which Guthrie describes in negative terms as 'curious liking for queer company' and 'as extravagant revolt against some of the petty respectabilities of life'.[17] Stevenson's Bohemianism, Guthrie stresses, is superficial compared to the 'Scotch Puritan strain' in Stevenson's character which is here represented as being more essential to Stevenson's nature, 'interwoven with everything he wrote' and which 'came out from the very first and persisted to the very end' in Stevenson's life.[18] The defence of Stevenson as being uprightly pious, as articulated here and in works such as John Kelman's *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1903) reinforce – if in a more subdued manner – Fanny's own estimation of Stevenson as 'very near being an angel'.[19]

This mediation of an image of Stevenson, and a related idea about his writing, was significant in defining the enduring image of his literary value which began to coalesce after his death. Stevenson the literary stylist and formal innovator soon became eclipsed by the sentimental writer concerned with homely wisdom, Stevenson 'the apostle of cheerfulness', as he would be described.[20] The succeeding sections will elaborate further on those who defined the image of Stevenson, who formed a network of critical mediation around the writer which disseminated their idea of the author.

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[17] Guthrie, p. 13.

[18] Guthrie, p. 14.

[19] Guthrie, p. 15; John Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh and London: Olliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1903); Fanny Stevenson, 'Letter to Charles Baxter, 29 May 1888' in *Item: Typewritten Correspondence between RLS and W.E. Henley in 1888. Also Charles Baxter, Katherine de Mattos, Fanny Stevenson*, LSH 146/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, pp. 64-67.

[20] F. B. Willard, 'Preface' in Elbert Hubbard, *Robert Louis Stevenson and Fanny Osbourne* (New York: The Hartford Lunch Company, 1916), pp. [iii]-[iv], p. [iii].

For the purposes of this thesis, mediation will be used to describe how the interpretation of the author's intention and values are defined and disseminated by individuals who claim an authority in this based on their proximity or connection to the original author. Considering the biography of Stevenson it is important to acknowledge the impact that the 'biographers' (that is, all who correspond on or disseminate ideas of the author) have on the understanding of his life; hence Anna Poletti posits that all 'biographical acts are also acts of mediation'.[21]

While this chapter will mainly consider Stevenson's biography in terms of these mediations (that is, how Stevenson was presented by these individuals in correspondence and in published material), it is also pertinent to consider the role that textual biographies played in the late nineteenth century. Juliette Atkinson highlights that the genre of literary biography 'sharpened the contrast between famous and neglected writers' by championing particular canonical figures.[22] Indeed, Atkinson impresses that for an earlier generation of writers, being neglected or unknown was the mark of their status as 'sophisticated' and that it was their biographers who would confer posthumous fame and elevate them into being established as 'serious' authors. Given that, as Gordon Hirsch notes, Stevenson himself worried 'whether his success in popular literary forms' would preclude 'him from becoming a serious, heavyweight author', Stevenson's example might reflect the inverse of what Atkinson describes: famous and lauded in his lifetime, Stevenson's posthumous biographical reflection might serve to diminish rather than bolster his reputation.[23]

The study of literary networks has become a major element of recent work in literary studies, aiming to move away from the idea of an author as a single, unitary producer and to contextualise them in a wider environment of cultural and material production.[24] Indeed, in terms of the networks of literary production and exchange, Stevenson's work itself has been studied in these terms in Glenda Norquay's *Robert Louis Stevenson, Literary Networks and Transatlantic Publishing in the 1890s: The*

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[21] Anna Poletti, 'What's Next? Mediation' in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol 32, no 2 (2017), 263-266 (p. 263).
[22] Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 184.
[23] Gordon Hirsch, 'The Commercial World of *The Wrecker*' in *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, vol 2 (2005), 70-97, p. 76.
[24] For an influential example, see Andrew O. Winckles and Angela Rehbein, eds., *Women's Literary Networks and Romanticism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

Author Incorporated (2020).[25] This chapter will consider a form of network concerned not with the production of a text, but rather of a consensus around the interpretations of a text. The role of each of the individuals who formed this personal critical network around Stevenson's posthumous reputation, and their particular contributions, will each be considered in turn.

2.2 Fanny Van De Grift Stevenson

Stevenson married Fanny Van De Grift Osbourne in 1880 following an unconventional and troubled relationship which had begun four years earlier in the artists' colony of Grez-sur-Loing.[26] Fanny Stevenson became a critical figure in Stevenson's life and in his writing practice. He would memorialise her in several dedications, in one instance referring to her punningly as the 'critic on the hearth'.[27] As this suggests, Fanny Stevenson was frequently forthright in the expression of her views on Stevenson's work, which often varied strikingly from the received position both at the time and in the century since. The most dramatic example of this is her reported reaction to Stevenson's magnum opus, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. In a letter to W.E. Henley (with whom she would later have a violent sundering) she describes her initial reaction to the first draft of the novella. She recounts how Stevenson enthused that 'it was his greatest work' but Fanny Stevenson in the letter describes it as 'a quire of utter nonsense' and even baldly states her intent to burn it.[28] This is one version of an episode that has been recounted in multiple different ways, however. For example, Lloyd Osbourne describes the rejection of the first version of *Jekyll and Hyde* as being an independent decision on Stevenson's part. In this telling of the tale, Fanny Stevenson, when asked for her opinion on the manuscript, delicately suggested some

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[25] Glenda Norquay, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Literary Networks and Transatlantic Publishing in the 1890s: The Author Incorporated* (London: Anthem Press, 2020).

[26] Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 146-147, 194-195.

[27] Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Black Arrow* (London: Cassell and Company, 1888), p. [vii]. The reference is to the notion that a cricket on the hearth is a portent of domestic happiness, with a possible secondary allusion to the Dickens novella of that name – Charles Dickens, *The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairytale of Home* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1845).

[28] Fanny Stevenson, 'Letter to W. E. Henley', April 1885, Private Collection, quoted in Stuart Kelly, *The Minister and the Murderer: A Book of Aftermaths* (London: Granta, 2018), p. 176.

changes which then prompted Stevenson in 'a fury of resentment' to burn the manuscript himself.[29] This suggests a certain amelioration of Fanny Stevenson's forthright rebarbative criticism of Stevenson's work, which is belied by her own private letter to Henley. Indeed, while Lloyd Osbourne describes being 'thunderstruck' by the bluntness of her criticism, which he is careful to note that he found 'cruelly wrong', far from being the hand which burnt the manuscript, Fanny's, in this version, is the hand that makes an 'ineffectual start', an attempt to save the manuscript from destruction.[30] The same letter also suggests a motivation for these corrections in that she indicates that she found the content of the story to be too controversial, too frank, and too revealing. Indeed there are other extant letters from Fanny Stevenson to Robert Louis Stevenson's editors and collaborators which continue this theme. For example, when Stevenson proposed to extend the essays on the South Seas which he had been commissioned to write in 1888 into a comprehensive historical and sociological description of Pacific cultures Fanny Stevenson wrote to Sidney Colvin expressing her frustration in a letter which indicates that she felt that such subjects written in such a form would be harmful to Stevenson's reputation as a writer:

> Louis has the most enchanting material that anyone ever had in the whole world for his book, and I am afraid he is going to spoil it all. He has taken into his Scotch Stevenson head, that a stern duty lies before him, and that his book must be a sort of scientific and historical impersonal thing, comparing the different languages (of which he knows nothing really) and the different people, the object being to settle the question as to whether they are of common Malay or not. Also to compare the Protestant and Catholic missions, etc., and the whole thing to be impersonal, leaving out all he knows of the people themselves [...] think of a small treatise on the Polynesian races being offered to people who are dying to hear about Ori a Ori, the making of brothers with cannibals,

[29] Lloyd Osbourne, *An Intimate Portrait of R. L. S.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), p. 64.
[30] Osbourne, *An Intimate Portrait of R. L. S.*, pp. 64, 65.

> the strange stories they told, and the extraordinary adventures that befell us; – suppose Herman Melville had given us theories as to the Polynesian language and the probable good and evil results of the missionary influences instead of *Omoo* or *Typee*.[31]

These misgivings were shared by Colvin, who expresses a similar concern with what he saw as the unsuitability of *In the South Seas* (1896). In the first volume publication of the book, Colvin provides a diffident 'Editorial Note' in which he suggests, and then emphasises, that this was an incomplete work and one in which only small sections had been completed to Robert Louis Stevenson's satisfaction.[32] As Colvin has it, 'before the [original] serial publication had gone very far, [Stevenson] realised that the personal and impersonal elements were not very successfully combined, nor in proportions that contented his readers'.[33] Colvin suggests here a dissatisfaction with the text that had its source in Stevenson himself, and that omissions of narrative description of, for example, Hawaii and Tahiti were a source of regret.[34] Compare, however, the following letter from Stevenson to Colvin discussing the issue:

> One more word about the *South Seas* in answer to a question I see I have forgotten to answer. The Tahiti part has never turned up, because it has never been written. As for telling you where I went or when, or anything about Honolulu, I would rather die; that is fair and plain. How can anybody care when or how I left Honolulu? This is (excuse me) childish. A man of upwards of forty cannot waste his time in communicating matters of that degree of indifference. The Letters [ie. *In the South Seas* as it was being published

[31] Bradford and Mehew, eds., *Letters*, VI, 2173.
[32] Sidney Colvin, 'Editorial Note' in *Letters and Miscellanies of Robert Louis Stevenson: In the South Seas, A Footnote to History* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1896), pp. ix-x.
[33] Sidney Colvin, 'Editorial Note' in *Letters and Miscellanies of Robert Louis Stevenson: In the South Seas, A Footnote to History* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1896), pp. ix-x (p. x).
[34] Sidney Colvin, 'Editorial Note' in *Letters and Miscellanies of Robert Louis Stevenson: In the South Seas, A Footnote to History* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1896), pp. ix-x (pp. ix-x).

> serially in the *New York Sun,*] it appears, are tedious; by God, they would be more tedious still if I wasted my time upon such infantile and sucking-bottle details. If ever I put in any such detail, it is because it leads to something or serves as a transition.[35]

We see here a tension between Stevenson's attempt to develop a more sophisticated and complex style of writing against Fanny Stevenson and Colvin's anxiety for him to continue in a more familiar vein. The railing, by Robert Louis Stevenson, against the 'infantile' and 'childish' concern with personal, anecdotal detail is, of course, also a railing against his own literary history: his earlier travel writing was far from sparing of these details; it was, indeed, viewed by some contemporary reviewers as being focused on the author's self almost to the point of solipsism.[36] The irritation that the more mature Stevenson displays that he should be expected to write about himself at all seems also to be an irritation that his juvenile work was, as the reviewer says, 'all about himself'.[37]

Fanny Stevenson had an eye to Victorian notions of propriety as well as a certain vicarious modesty regarding the capacity of Stevenson's writing. Fanny Stevenson was committed to preserving the idea of Stevenson's 'genius': her letters suggest that both safe themes and familiar genres were the means by which Stevenson could maintain his popularity and avoid disappointing his readership. The tensions this must have caused in periods when Stevenson sought to innovate and to expand his repertoire in terms both of form and theme are rarely more than alluded to in Stevenson's letters and yet are likely to be a contributory factor in the extreme domestic tensions experienced by the couple in Stevenson's later years in Samoa, especially during 1893. After Stevenson's premature death in December 1894, Fanny Stevenson's role as censor (in the classical sense) of Stevenson's work – indeed, as a mediator as defined at the head of this chapter – continued, and continued

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[35] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, 6 September 1891'.

[36] 'From an Unsigned Review, *Fraser's Magazine*, September 1879' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981) pp. 66-69 (p. 68).

[37] 'From an Unsigned Review, *Fraser's Magazine*, September 1879' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981) pp. 66-69 (p. 68).

unimpeded. Unimpeded by the messy reality of a lived life: Fanny Stevenson's description of Stevenson after his death replaces the man who was clearly often a source of frustration to her with an angelic ideal. Her letters and incidental writings increasingly describe Stevenson with the iconography of a cliché late Victorian popular religiosity in her recollections.

This is very much the idea of Stevenson which was to be pilloried by Henley in his *Pall-Mall Gazette* article of 1901, in which the posthumous vision of Stevenson then dominant was characterised as describing a 'seraph in chocolate'.[38] In conjunction with this angelic image, Fanny Stevenson continued to persist in smoothing the burrs of controversy and sexuality off of Stevenson and his work. This was likely to be one element in her impatience with Colvin (combined with his slow rate of production) which led her to replace him as official biographer of Stevenson. Colvin by no means wished to emphasise qualities of Stevenson which a Victorian audience might find objectionable, but he did clearly have less fidelity to Fanny Stevenson's vision of Stevenson, whereas Graham Balfour, who was chosen to replace him, was willing to propagate this and to accept Fanny Stevenson's very close engagement with (or control of) writing the biography.[39]

2.3 Thomas Stevenson

When Robert Louis Stevenson returned from America with his new wife in 1880, his rapprochement with his parents was swiftly succeeded by an unsolicited intervention in his literary affairs. This is signalled in a letter to Colvin, where Stevenson states:

> My father desired me still to withdraw the *Emigrant*, in the meantime, and I have written to Paul to break it to him gently.[...] whatever may be the pecuniary loss, my father is

[38] W. E. Henley, 'Against the "Seraph in Chocolate, the Barley Sugar Effigy", *Pall Mall Magazine,* December 1901' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981), pp. 494-500.
[39] Graham Balfour, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901).

> willing to bear it; and the gain to my reputation will be considerable.[40]

The withdrawal of *The Amateur Emigrant* (1895), Stevenson's account of his journey across the Atlantic to America was not a trivial act: the rights to the publication had already been negotiated with Kegan Paul and its production was so far in hand that Stevenson had already received the galley proofs to correct.[41] As such, the withdrawal was not of a proposed work, or of one in the early stages of writing, but rather of a work on the verge of publication, into which Kegan Paul had already sunk a significant amount of cost and labour, to say nothing of the projection of imminent sales. It is worth observing at this juncture that there had already been heavy editorial intervention at this stage: these proofs are still extant, and feature substantial marginal comments by Paul and by Sidney Colvin.[42] The tenor of these was primarily concerned with 'decency' and with dwelling too closely on the 'nasty' aspects of travel in steerage; despite Stevenson's concession to remove these, his father evidently remained dissatisfied with the content of the book. A notice appeared in the *Athenaeum* signalling this intent, which read, in full: 'Mr. R. L. Stevenson has determined to suppress his *Amateur Emigrant*, announced by us some little time ago, and has withdrawn it from his publisher's hands'.[43] As to what Thomas Stevenson found objectionable in *The Amateur Emigrant*, it is difficult to state with certainty. Julia Reid, in her discussion of the suppression of the book draws attention to Thomas Stevenson's sense of scandal, expressed in a letter to Charles Baxter, that Stevenson should travel in anything other than First Class.[44] This suggests that, rather than a concern with particular content, Thomas Stevenson's anxiety may have been based more around class-status: a worry that his son admitting to consorting with passengers in steerage would be an act of irreparable harm to his social standing. This is, to a degree, speculative given the

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[40] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, 27 August 1880'.

[41] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, May 1880'.

[42] See Julia Reid, 'Introduction' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Amateur Emigrant* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018) pp. xxvii-lv (p. xxxvii); Julia Reid, 'Essay on the Text' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Amateur Emigrant* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 131-160 (pp. 134-135).

[43] 'Literary Gossip', *The Athenaum*, No. 2765 (23 October 1880), 534-536 (p. 534).

[44] Julia Reid, 'Introduction' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Amateur Emigrant* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. xxvii-lv (p. xxxvii).

absence of explicit written evidence, but it is the interpretation that most closely aligns with the attitudes Thomas Stevenson elsewhere expresses – and one that amplifies the concerns that Colvin had about the text. The suppression of the text was no trivial act; for one, it would have represented a considerable expense. As noted above, Stevenson stated that his father was to meet the necessary costs. What these amounted to it is, again, difficult to say for certain. Reid infers that the initial payment made by Kegan Paul for the publication rights of *The Amateur Emigrant* were likely to be twenty pounds.[45] Beyond this simple reimbursement, however, there were likely to be additional costs related to printing and production, as well as a risk of damages due for the breach of contract. Furthermore, there was an additional cost involved. Given that Thomas Stevenson's concern seemed to be for his son's reputation, it is remarkable that no consideration seems to have been given to how damaging to his name this revocation was: in withdrawing publication of the book so late in its production, Robert Louis Stevenson had both gone back on his word and signalled to Kegan Paul – and any other publisher – that Stevenson could not be relied on to produce the work contracted.

Sidney Colvin was explicit in his opposition to *The Amateur Emigrant*, as it stood in proof. In an editorial note to his edition of Stevenson's letters, he remarks:

> The first draft of the first part of the *Amateur Emigrant*, when it reached me about Christmas, had seemed to me, compared to his previous travel papers, a somewhat wordy and spiritless record of squalid experiences, little likely to advance his still only half-established reputation; and I had written to him to that effect, inopportunely enough, with a fuller measure even than usual of the frankness which always marked our intercourse.[46]

If Thomas Stevenson shared in this concern – indeed, felt it in greater degree, since he called for suppression rather than emendation, the question of the 'only half-established reputation' may have been at the root of it – but the damage done to this

[45] Reid, 'Introduction', p. xxxv.
[46] Sidney Colvin, 'Note' in Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. by Sidney Colvin *Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson to His Family and Friends*, 2 vols (London: Methuen, 1899), I, p. 192.

reputation by such sharp practice to publishers is likely to have been more significant than the content of the book so eliminated. However we interpret this, what we see here is clear evidence that there was a desire on the part of Thomas Stevenson to control what of Stevenson's writing should be seen by the public.

Thomas Stevenson's death in 1887, then, was significant for more than the usual reasons – with his passing, the main censor of, and impediment to, Stevenson's writing had left the scene. No one would be quite as assiduous or – to Stevenson's ears, quite so persuasive – in controlling Stevenson's writing. Nonetheless, Colvin remained, and others would join him to fill the vacuum left by Thomas Stevenson's absence.

2.4 Charles John Guthrie, Lord Guthrie

Charles John Guthrie was born in 1848. Son of the eminent philanthropist, Thomas Guthrie, he was raised in an atmosphere of privilege tempered by Calvinist austerity so typical of the Edinburgh of the nineteenth century. His name is now best remembered for his central role in what was one of the most high-profile miscarriages of justice in Scottish history, the conviction for murder of Oscar Slater. In 1909, Guthrie was the judge at the trial of Slater, a German-Jewish immigrant with a history of low-level criminal involvement who had been arraigned and charged on suspicion of the murder of Marion Gilchrist in her home in West Princes Street, Glasgow.[47] The trial was characterised by a number of flaws in process and protocol, principally related to Guthrie's failure to challenge inaccuracies in the prosecution's case and, more culpably, in several instances of misdirection of the jury.[48] It was on the basis of this latter fact that Slater's conviction was quashed in 1928, after nearly two decades of campaigning for a retrial by prominent national figures, including Arthur Conan Doyle.[49]

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[47] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case of Oscar Slater* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), p. 57; 'Slater, Oscar (1873–1948)', in Magnus Magnusson, ed., *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, 5th edn (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1990), p. 1358.

[48] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case of Oscar Slater* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), pp. 57, 87, 91; Lord Guthrie's charge, with the challenged statements, is reprinted verbatim in William Roughead, ed., *Trial of Oscar Slater* (Edinburgh and Glasgow: Willaim Hodge & Company, 1910), pp. 283-296.

[49] It should be noted that this finding did not mean that Slater was acquitted of the murder. 'Oscar Slater's Death Recalls Famous Murder Trial: Lengthy Legal Battle Against Crown', *Glasgow Herald*, 2 February 1948, reproduced in *Selection of Newspaper Cuttings About Oscar Slater (NAS*

Away from this place of notoriety in Scottish legal history, Guthrie is most notable for amassing the first major collection of 'Stevensoniana'; material culture and artefacts related to Stevenson's life and writing.[50] Collecting and presenting this material (in Stevenson's former home at Swanston, then owned by Guthrie) allowed the advocate to place himself as a gate-keeper to knowledge on Stevenson's life, and to literally curate an image of the author as Guthrie chose to see him. Guthrie's collection also testifies to a willingness to cultivate relationships with Stevenson's associates, to control access to biographical and bibliographical material and even to occupy sites connected with Stevenson in order to propagate this version of the writer's life, which presented Stevenson as, behind a superficially Bohemian exterior, an ultimately socially conservative and conformist figure.[51]

The manner in which Lord Guthrie sought to document and delineate Stevenson's character are an essential case study in understanding succeeding efforts to do the same. Guthrie makes of Stevenson - an author of complex, contradictory and often conflicting positions - an author with a single, simple and direct approach. Guthrie's idea of Stevenson is not merely reductive; it portrays Stevenson as uncritically conservative, at odds with liberal attitudes in his own society, to say nothing of contemporary progressive values. This imputation of a reactionary attitude to Stevenson sets a norm which informs many later responses to his work. However, these can be met with counter-claims offering instances of progressiveness and radicalism in the work of Stevenson; the suggestion of imperialist attitudes, for example, can be met with myriad examples of Stevenson's strongly anti-colonial rhetoric, as will be discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis. But, where the same is done in inverse – where, for example, more recent studies claim Stevenson to be against patriarchy, there is not always the same diligence to depict the multiplicity of Stevenson's views.[52] While it is true that Guthrie's motivations may be different, and certainly less rooted in the academic contingencies of framing a study as a demonstrable hypothesis, the result is the same: it is a selective reading,

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ref. HH16/111/37/21, 27, 35, 48, 54, 57, National Archives of Scotland <http://www nas.gov.uk/documents/HH16-111-37-various.pdf> [accessed 8 June 2015]; Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case of Oscar Slater* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912).

[50] See Charles John Guthrie, *Robert Louis Stevenson: Some Personal Recollections* (Edinburgh: W. Green & Son, 1920), pp. 3-4.

[51] Guthrie, pp. 4-6, 12-21.

[52] See for example Roslyn Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific: Travel, Empire, and the author's profession* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016).

reductive, and aiming to 'prove' Stevenson as the champion of a particular set of values the author favours. To emphasise one aspect of Stevenson and his writing, to make a 'salient unity' out of the diversity of the author's thought is at best incomplete and at worst misleading. Stevenson is an author capable of incisive anti-colonialist thinking and crass stereotyping, of insightful feminism and male chauvinism, of deep class sympathy and rank snobbishness. Like Walt Whitman, whom the younger author regarded as the ideal writer, Stevenson 'contains multitudes'.[53] That much that he does contain is now unpalatable to contemporary eyes should not be effaced, but rather engaged with, contextualised and challenged. To evade this responsibility deracinates Stevenson from his context, and makes of him as much a 'barley-sugar effigy' by our own standards of what is sweet and fitting as the sentimentalised accounts of his earliest biographers.[54]

Leaving this caveat aside, the significant question at this stage of the discussion is what image of Stevenson Guthrie sought to propagate. This is, in itself, made problematic by the predominant image posterity has of Guthrie himself.

Guthrie's name is now perhaps indelibly associated with his posthumous disgrace; he has been placed abidingly in an historical position wherein he occupies the role of establishment antagonist to an oppressed victim. His act of judicial misconduct has seen posterity reduce his life down to this single role. There is a dramatic irony, then, in the fact that in life he attempted to cultivate a reputation based upon an acquaintanceship with Robert Louis Stevenson which similarly reduced an active and varied life down to a single salient fact. In truth, Guthrie's connection to Stevenson was somewhat slight: while both had trained as advocates together in Edinburgh and both were members of the Speculative Society during that time, Stevenson does not seem to have shared any great intimacy with Guthrie.[55] Stevenson's correspondence to Guthrie is scant, and, though not deeply formal in tone, is always concerned with official requests rather than with expressions of affection. A representative example is Stevenson's request for Guthrie to sponsor his step-son's membership in the 'Spec.' in 1885, in which Stevenson declares himself

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[53] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920), p. 108 (51., l. 8).

[54] Henley in Maixner, ed., p. 494.

[55] Charles John Guthrie, *Robert Louis Stevenson: Some Personal Recollections* (Edinburgh: W. Green & Son, 1920), p. 32.

'glad to recall myself to your recollection', a somewhat stiff phrase which hardly suggests a major role for each in the other's life.[56] Nevertheless, Guthrie expanded this association with Stevenson after the latter's death by developing social ties to Stevenson's family in Scotland, including with Margaret Stevenson on her return from Samoa following her son's death and with Alison 'Cummy' Cunningham, Stevenson's childhood nurse.[57]

2.5 Swanston Cottage

A further development of what might be termed Guthrie's vicarious association with Stevenson arose when the advocate became a tenant of Swanston Cottage in 1908.[58] Swanston had been the summer home of the Stevenson family during the adolescence of Robert Louis Stevenson, and is the background for several of his reflective essays, and features as a key location in his unfinished romance *St Ives*.[59] After Guthrie acquired the cottage, he began to develop it as a museum to its most celebrated former resident, displaying 'some things which belonged to Stevenson, and many connected with him'.[60] Swanston became a place of literary pilgrimage, visited by dignitaries, tourists and litterateurs. One notable example was Wilfred Owen, who visited in both a personal capacity and because he was teaching *St. Ives* in a literature class at Tynecastle High School.[61] Guthrie, as curator of this site, came to occupy a central and determining role in a cultural network centred on Stevenson, establishing himself as an authority while also establishing the authority of Swanston and its environs (Edinburgh, the Pentlands) as the most legitimate topos to connect to Stevenson; that is, re-centring his life and work into a Scottish context after its exilic dislocation to Vailima and the wider South Pacific. This re-siting (and reducing) may be significant in the neglect of Stevenson's 'South Seas' fiction in the

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[56] 'Letter: To Charles Guthrie, 18 November 1885'.

[57] Guthrie, p. 22.

[58] Guthrie, p. 3.

[59] See, for example, Robert Louis Stevenson 'An Old Scotch Gardener' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895); Robert Louis Stevenson, *St. Ives, Being the Adventures of a French Prisoner in England* (London: William Heinemann, 1898), pp. 47-48 *et passim*.

[60] Guthrie, p. 71.

[61] Dominic Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen: A New Biography* (London: Phoenix, 2003), p. 349.

early twentieth century and in the concomitant emphasis on the essential Scottishness (and, indeed, Scott-ishness) of his work. An indicative example of this perception is found in Henry J. Cowell's *Robert Louis Stevenson: An Englishman's Re-Study,* which neglects to mention any of Stevenson's Pacific-set fiction, instead highlighting the fiction set 'in his native Scotland' which was written in Vailima, and citing these as proof that Stevenson's 'heart found its real home in Scotland to the very last'.[62]

2.6 Alison 'Cummy' Cunningham

Around the time Guthrie acquired Swanston, he also began to cultivate a close friendship with Alison 'Cummy' Cunningham, Stevenson's childhood nurse.[63] Much is made by Guthrie in his memoir of his association with Cummie: he presents himself as being in a position of guardianship in relation to her, occupying a role as the executor of the charitable beneficence of Fanny Stevenson.[64] Guthrie's relationship with Cummy ties him to a still more primal Stevenson than the adolescent Robert Louis Stevenson of Swanston: the Stevenson of the nursery, 'Smoutie', the original child of the *Child's Garden of Verses*. In the 1910s there was an increasing appetite for the sentimental in Stevenson's work and life, and it was this idea, reinforced by a growing notion of Stevenson as being a figure locked in perpetual boyhood, that would have made Cummy an appealing contact for Guthrie.[65] The holdings related to Cummy and Lord Guthrie's relationship that are preserved in the Writers' Museum convey the sense that Guthrie saw her as a source of unique information and insight into Stevenson's life. The album of letters from Stevenson to Cummy, for example, contains notes related to each individual piece of correspondence which record questions posed by Guthrie on the subject and content

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[62] Henry J. Cowell, *Robert Louis Stevenson: An Englishman's Re-Study* (London: The Epworth Press, 1945), pp. 100, 80.

[63] Guthrie, p. 4.

[64] Guthrie, p. 4.

[65] The clearest example of the popular interest in the sentimentalising of Stevenson's childhood is the publication of a facsimile of Margaret Stevenson's journal of RLS's infancy (Margaret Stevenson, *Stevenson's Baby Book, Being the Record of the Sayings and Doings of Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson, Son of Thomas Stevenson, C.E. and Margaret Isabella Balfour or Stevenson* (San Francisco, Ca: J. H. Nash for John Howell, 1922)).

of each letter, along with Cummy's laconic answers.[66] In essence, Guthrie is performing a cross-examination to acquire knowledge and information about Stevenson's history that had not been printed: it is the collector's desire applied to personal relationships, an attempt to acquire and control knowledge about Stevenson, just as Guthrie acquired and controlled access to the material culture related to his life. Cummy's responses, incidentally, frustrate this desire: her answers are non-commital and indefinite ('it must have been so', 'perhaps'), suggesting an inability or unwillingness to expand or elaborate her memories of Stevenson in the way typical of the books of recollections of the writer popular in this period.[67]

2.7 The Osbournes

It was Lord Guthrie's link to Cummy that provided the association which would become most significant in his role in the management of information about Stevenson, namely a relationship with Stevenson's immediate family. Guthrie is direct about this in his memoirs, stating that 'in connection with [Cummy], I had many conversations with [Stevenson's] aunt […] and correspondence with Louis's widow and step-children, Lloyd Osbourne and Mrs. Strong'.[68] These latter relationships began with practicalities: by placing himself in a role of guardianship over Cummy, he became the intermediary between Stevenson's heirs and a beneficiary of his will. So, for instance, Fanny writes to Guthrie in an undated letter (which, internal evidence suggests would be from 1911 or 1912) offering 'whatever funds Cummy may need'.[69] This correspondence continues over the next few years, always with Guthrie in the context of the guardianship of Cummy. The letters provide an interesting insight into the manner in which patterns of behaviour in the Stevenson household established during Robert Louis Stevenson's life continued long after his death. The second of Guthrie's albums, for example, contains a letter

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[66] *Item: Letters: Robert Louis Stevenson to Alison Cunningham 1871*-1894, Acc/no 139/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum.

[67] See, for example, the notes on pp. 43 and 67 in *Item: Letters: Robert Louis Stevenson to Alison Cunningham 1871*-1894, Acc/no 139/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum.

[68] Guthrie, p. 4.

[69] 'Undated Letter from Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson to Charles Guthrie' in *Item: Album of Guthrie's Letters, etc.,* Acc no. LSH 459/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 4.

in Belle Strong's hand, written at the request of her mother as 'she is very tired', a pattern and formula repeated in several letters (see, for example, the letter dated 7th September [1913]).[70] Belle's role as amanuensis and Fanny's neuropathic illness are both elements that are now seen as familiar parts of Stevenson's later life, but which were downplayed in early biographical accounts, and letters referencing them were omitted from early collections of Stevenson's correspondence.[71] These omissions are only one example of a great range of censorship and selective publication practised by Stevenson's literary executor, Sidney Colvin.

2.8 Sidney Colvin

Sidney Colvin was one of Guthrie's chief correspondents in the period covered by the albums of letters maintained in the Writers' Museum. The connection is a suggestive one: Colvin, like Guthrie, was extremely assiduous in both acquiring, and then restricting access to, Stevenson's correspondence and other personal writings. His means of attempting to modify perceptions of Stevenson range from bowdlerisation (excising suggestive passages, submitting euphemisms for profanity) to the outright destruction of material that he thought reflected badly upon Stevenson.[72] This was done particularly extensively in the *Vailima Letters* (1895), and with his editorial comments on Stevenson's writing, as has been noted above, and will be highlighted intermittently throughout the thesis.

As a correspondent, Colvin was central to Guthrie's attempt to construct an image of Stevenson that was sanctioned by the authority of one of Stevenson's closest companions. As an example, Colvin's opinion is used as licence to validate the images of Stevenson used in Guthrie's biographical memoirs: responding to an enquiry from Guthrie, Colvin identifies the portrait 'with the watch chain and fishing

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[70] 'Letter from Belle Strong to Charles Guthrie, 7 September [1913[?]]' in *Item: Album of Guthrie's Letters, etc.,* Acc no. LSH 459/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 20; 'Letter from Belle Strong to Charles Guthrie, 7 September [1913[?]]' in *Item: Album of Guthrie's Letters, etc.,* Acc no. LSH 459/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 39.

[71] See, for example, the text and notes of Robert Louis Stevenson, '2415: To Sidney Colvin' in Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, eds., *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 7, pp. 298-311 and Robert Louis Stevenson, '2443: To Sidney Colvin' in Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, eds., *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 7, pp. 341-348.

[72] Ernest Mehew, 'Introduction' in Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, eds., *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1, pp. 1-16 (pp. 5, 4).

rod' as Stevenson: 'my wife and I feel quite certain', Colvin writes, based upon resemblances which he details.[73] Guthrie's relationship to Colvin thus follows a similar pattern to that he attempted to foster with Cummy, in that he attempts to acquire authority on Stevenson by having it relayed to him by those who knew him best.

As Guthrie's intimacy with Colvin grew, this bestowing of information became more substantial, as when the latter supplied minor pages of manuscript and a letter written by Stevenson.[74] Similarly, Colvin's correspondence with Guthrie (and likewise Guthrie's correspondence with other sources) documents and details the sales of Stevenson material, as when Colvin notes the details of the auctioning of Robert Louis Stevenson letters in America in 1919.[75] Guthrie is thus made part of a network of editors and managers of Stevenson's reputation, collecting and collating biographical evidence which may be used to support or undermine the particular view of the writer which they wished to disseminate. This element raises challenging bibliographical questions. For example, Colvin's correspondence with Guthrie highlights a number of tantalising absences: references are made to letters which are not clearly identified and may represent uncollected and potentially lost letters.[76] There is even a suggestion that these same letters have been suppressed, perhaps even destroyed. Colvin wrote to Anna Henley in 1911 to make the troubling statement that:

> Had I my will, I should […] destroy a good many R.L.S. letters that have been through my hands, – either as too trivial, or too intimate and unveiled for the eyes of strangers either now or hereafter […] Any advice I could give would be

[73] Sidney Colvin, 'Letter to Charles Guthrie, 21 February 1919' in *Item: Miscellaneous Letters to Lord Guthrie,* Acc LSH 458/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p.7.
[74] See *Item: Miscellaneous Letters to Lord Guthrie,* Acc LSH 458/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 17.
[75] Sidney Colvin, 'Letter to Charles Guthrie, 18[?] September 1919' in *Item: Miscellaneous Letters to Lord Guthrie,* Acc LSH 458/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 10.
[76] See *Item: Miscellaneous Letters to Lord Guthrie,* Acc LSH 458/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 17.

> coloured by this general preference for destroying everything that is not manifestly worthy and suitable for preservation.[77]

Colvin arranges, in an undated letter, a meeting with Guthrie to discuss an unspecified 'letter and enclosures' related to Stevenson.[78] The placement of this letter in Guthrie's album suggests a link to the correspondence of Stevenson and W. E. Henley, the same as is being referred to in Colvin's letter to Anna Henley, which came briefly into Lord Guthrie's possession at this time.[79] These letters, as has been described in previous sections, and as will be elaborated on further in later sections, contain material which might be regarded as rather disobliging to the reputation of both the correspondents. Stevenson, in his defence of Fanny, finds himself in a rearguard action which eventually involves him in *ad hominem* and misogynistic arguments against the honesty and character of his cousin, Katherine De Mattos. Wounding as this might be to Stevenson's reputation, there is equally a motivation in suppressing the quarrel in order to defend Henley himself: as one of Guthrie's principal sources of material relating to Stevenson, any suggestion of an animus or even estrangement between the two men would be detrimental to the authority of access which Guthrie enjoyed. His possession (and thus suppression) of the letters avoided this risk, and left Guthrie's characterisation of Henley's (and, by proxy, his) connection to Stevenson unchallenged.

2.9 W.E. Henley and the 'Nixie Affair'

Lord Guthrie's handling of the Henley letters represents the most overt and direct attempt he made in manipulating the biographical evidence of Stevenson's life. The sequence of correspondence in question represents, in the words of Damian Atkinson, 'the quarrel and final estrangement' which effectively ended a passionate

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[77] Quoted in Ernest Mehew, 'Introduction' in Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, eds., *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1, pp. 1-16 (p. 4).

[78] Sidney Colvin, 'Undated Letter to Charles Guthrie' in *Item: Correspondence to Lord Guthrie from 1908-1917, Referring to RLS's Friends and Haunts,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 15.

[79] William Archibald, 'Letter to Charles Guthrie, 23 January 1911' in *Item: Correspondence to Lord Guthrie from 1908-1917, Referring to RLS's Friends and Haunts,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 15.

and committed friendship which had lasted nearly a decade and a half.[80] The manuscripts of the letters are now held in the National Library of Scotland, and have been published in several collections, but initially they were placed under an embargo when they were donated to the library by Charles Baxter.[81] The content of these letters, and how this reflected upon the character of Stevenson, were clearly viewed as incendiary by Baxter, and he was not alone in this view. Before coming to Baxter, the correspondence first passed through the hands of Guthrie, sent to him by William Archibald as an enclosure to a letter dated 23rd January 1911.[82] Archibald writes:

> By this post I am sending you under separate registered cover the letters which certainly have a historical literary interest but nevertheless I think it a pity they ever were written. No doubt they never would have been written if Henley had been more tactful in his method of conducting his correspondence. The letters that Mrs Henley is sending you will probably be a more valuable addition to the Stevenson collection than the ones I am forwarding though I think that the mutilated letter of Henley's which began the trouble is of great interest; the mutilation itself showing Stevenson's first impulse on reading it.[83]

The level of secrecy and delicacy that Guthrie and his circle attach to the letters and their contents is tellingly revealed here. Indeed, even the damage to the letter mentioned by Archibald shows a passionate, even violent, impulse which

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[80] Damian Atkinson, 'The Quarrel and *The Scots Observer* March 1888-1894' in Damian Atkinson, ed., *The Letters of William Ernest Henley to Robert Louis Stevenson* (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2008), p. 343.

[81] See note 1 to '2032: W. E. Henley to RLS' in Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, eds., *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 6, pp. 129-131 (p. 129).

[82] William Archibald, 'Letter to Charles Guthrie, 23 January 1911' in *Item: Correspondence to Lord Guthrie from 1908-1917, Referring to RLS's Friends and Haunts,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 15.

[83] William Archibald, 'Letter to Charles Guthrie, 23 January 1911' in *Item: Correspondence to Lord Guthrie from 1908-1917, Referring to RLS's Friends and Haunts,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 15.

contrasts sharply with the image of the placid, cheerful and sensitive Stevenson of popular memoirs of the time, including Guthrie's own.[84] It was Henley who characterised this tendency to simplify and sentimentalise Stevenson's life as the making of 'a barley-sugar effigy of a real man', a 'Seraph in Chocolate'.[85] There is ample evidence to the contrary in the fury of his response to Henley's claim in these letters that Fanny had plagiarised a story, 'The Nixie', which had appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* in March 1888.[86] The mercurial, contradictory Stevenson, driven variously by conflicting moral ideals (chivalry in defence of his wife, loyalty and tolerance for a close friend) closely resembles the figure Henley describes in 1904: the 'histrion', 'play[ing] at life with […] a solemn grace', adopting the 'mask' of a moral role to bring order to the 'riotous, intrepid, scornful' personality underneath.[87]

The 'Baxter letters' contain not only Stevenson's responses to, and correspondence related to Henley's accusation, but Fanny Stevenson's communication with Charles Baxter on the same subject. Baxter, as a mutual friend to both Henley and Stevenson, became something of a mediator in the dispute: he received both Henley's attempts to exculpate himself and the various letters describing Stevenson's conflicting emotional responses to the situation, as well as serving as go-between in arranging the two men's ongoing professional commitments to each other.[88] That Baxter was aware of the level of intimacy this entailed, and that he was custodian of information that could strongly impact upon the reputation of the correspondents is evinced in the envelope which contained the letters, preserved in the Edinburgh Writers Museum.[89] The envelope is inscribed, in Baxter's hand, with 'RL Stevenson correspondence as to difference with W. E. Henley March April 1888. Private To be delivered on my death to Edmund Baxter

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[84] Guthrie, p. 14.

[85] W. E. Henley, 'From R. L. S.' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 494-500 (p. 497).

[86] Note 5 to '2032: W. E. Henley to RLS' in Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, eds., *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 6, pp. 129-131 (p. 130).

[87] W. E. Henley, 'From R. L. S.' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 494-500 (p. 497).

[88] See, for example, 'Letter: To Charles Baxter, 21 May 1888'.

[89] Charles Baxter, 'Inscribed Envelope' in *Item: Correspondence to Lord Guthrie from 1908-1917, Referring to RLS's Friends and Haunts,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 45.

Whom failing to C. S. Baxter 4 Jan 1900 CB'.[90] This bequest to his sons (and the marking of the contents as private) raises a challenging question as to how William Archibald acquired the letters – and why he felt it appropriate to pass them to Guthrie. It is notable that Baxter added to his original inscription, a passage which, if the different colour of ink is indicative, was written at a later date as a justification for preserving the letters:

'Note I have preserved these letters because they show much more clearly than anything that has been published the close terms of affection that existed between Louis Stevenson & myself. CB'[91]

It is a contradictory and rather self-serving formulation: enjoining the level of secrecy indicated by placing the letters under an embargo, then justifying retaining them by claiming that they serve as evidence of a relationship is a paradox, in that to use them to support a claim to intimacy would necessarily entail disseminating them to an audience. The same can likewise be said of the detailed transcripts of all the letters of the Henley/Stevenson quarrel in Guthrie's collection. William Archibald, in the letter which accompanied the correspondence, assents to a desire of Guthrie's, which he expresses as 'the advisability of keeping them [the enclosed letters] out of the hands of what you aptly describe as the "literary mudrake"'.[92] With this aim in mind, there arises an obvious question as to why Guthrie should have not only maintained but reproduced the letters.

The final page of one of Lord Guthrie's albums of correspondence offers a telling insight: a letter from an unnamed individual at the *Scotsman* newspaper, dated to two years after Guthrie's receipt of the letters, is preserved which reads in part 'I should like to encourage the idea of the true history of the Stevenson and Henley squabble being told. It could, as you suggest, be pigeon-holed for use on a proper occasion'.[93] The motivation, it may be inferred, to establish his authority on Stevenson, to control and direct the representation of the writer led Guthrie to

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[90] Charles Baxter, 'Inscribed Envelope' in *Item: Correspondence to Lord Guthrie from 1908-1917, Referring to RLS's Friends and Haunts,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 45.

[91] Charles Baxter, 'Inscribed Envelope' in *Item: Correspondence to Lord Guthrie from 1908-1917, Referring to RLS's Friends and Haunts,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 45.

[92] William Archibald, 'Letter to Charles Guthrie, 23 January 1911' in *Item: Correspondence to Lord Guthrie from 1908-1917, Referring to RLS's Friends and Haunts,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 15.

[93] 'Letter to Charles Guthrie, 21 July 1913' in *Item: Correspondence to Lord Guthrie from 1908-1917, Referring to RLS's Friends and Haunts,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum p. 47.

preserve the letters, and so to maintain himself as the only point of access to material that had otherwise been suppressed.

2.10 Posthumous Publication and the Romantic Reputation

There is a clear bifurcation of interpretation in some critical responses to Stevenson immediately after his death: the florid, hagiographical tone of Alice Brown's observation that: 'Yesterday it was a commonplace of criticism to name him the greatest living master of English style, sharing the unvexed throne with Ruskin only' necessarily suggests that 'today' this is no longer so.[94] There is an air of apprehensiveness or over-insistence where Brown continues by insisting that

> today has brought the hour for pondering over our treasures and bethinking ourselves wherein their beauty lay, that thereby our gratitude and worship may increase. We can not go too far; such keen espial will only point the way by beauty led, and unveil plenitude of fair device.[95]

The over-emphatic tone here, particularly in the hyperbolic 'we can not go too far', suggests the way in which Stevenson's writing and his person underwent what amounts to an apotheosis after his death, entering a rarefied field above sober critical reflection or, rather, suggesting that any such 'pondering […] and bethinking' needs must lead to the 'increase' of 'gratitude and worship'.[96] 'Worship' is perhaps the most telling word Brown uses here: this study is the first step towards the hysteria of the personal cult of Stevenson. Robert Kiely, while describing the pathology of Brown's sickly vision, also successfully identifies that 'she provides us with one of the most important clues to Stevenson's enormous popularity'.[97] To Kiely, Brown's sentimental account is almost Christological: she makes 'of Stevenson a redeemer, who in his lifetime descended into hell, rose again, and ascended into heaven'.[98]

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[94] Alice Brown, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Study* (Boston: Copeland and Day, 1895), p. 8.
[95] Brown, p. 8.
[96] Brown, p. 8.
[97] Robert Kiely, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 8.
[98] Kiely, p. 8.

Brown's Stevenson-Christ redeems the Victorian age from the shocks and confusions of the paradigmatic shifts of the period:

> she makes him the suffering lamb, a divine symbol of a sick and dying generation, scourged by Darwin and Lyell, broken by industrialization, and mocked by Zola and the realists. Living out his last years in a small feudal kingdom of his own making, Stevenson became the modern personification of the wounded lord in a medieval romance. The days of youthful heroism were gone; the knight had passed his prime, but he was dying nobly, and, best of all, with colour and a certain style. What Tennyson had described in *Morte d'Arthur* and Arnold in *Tristram and Iseult*, Stevenson seemed to embody.[99]

Brown was an effusive, rather than a careful, critic of Stevenson: her estimations are often contradictory and inconsistent.[100] Moreover, though she is the first and one of the most sentimental of the early proponents of the cult of Stevenson ('with him […] the style *is* the man'), Brown does make some choice observations on Stevenson's style which would be repeated by more carefully considered criticism in the future.[101] Her description of Stevenson's sentences as being composed of 'the very word of words to paint the true complexion of appearances' is a sentiment which echoes G. K. Chesterton's better known image of Stevenson 'pick[ing] the right word up on the point of his pen'.[102] Brown does give one negative judgement on Stevenson's writing, if only after first disavowing it by suggesting the opinion could only be voiced should 'any arise capable of censuring [Stevenson's] style'.[103] Such dissociation aside, the flaw Brown finds in Stevenson is to be seen in the 'large and never [the] little', in how those perfectly turned sentences

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[99] Kiely, p. 8.

[100] As, for instance, where she praises the careful awareness of Stevenson's choice of language on the same page on which she insists he does not write in an 'over-poetical' or finished manner (p. 20), then praises how he 'ignored dialectic for poetic beauty of phrase' two pages later.

[101] Brown, p. 9.

[102] G. K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 150.

[103] Brown, p. 22.

'cohere' in a larger structure.[104] As Brown has it, 'one sentence does not grip its neighbour with hooks of steel […] they are like priceless gems unset, like flowers but loosely garlanded'.[105] The writing of Stevenson, that is, 'is destined to live in the memory, not as an imperishable form, but a series of beautiful successions'.[106] This aestheticized approach to his writing accounts for Robert Kiely's observation of how Stevenson's 'life and much of his fiction were regarded as a product and a symbol of a prevailing mood' of the Victorian era in which 'even for those […] who regarded themselves as modern and forward-looking' there existed a 'deep reserve of nostalgia' for the secure hierarchical structures and moral certainties which were supposed to have existed in former ages.[107] As Kiely observes,

> to recognize that mood helps to explain the extent of his reputation in 1895 and its decline almost immediately after the First World War. Elevated initially on relatively emotional and personal grounds, he seemed to an age hardened by a catastrophic disillusionment to be a little egoist on gilded stilts.[108]

The problems of such associations were compounded by the appropriation of Stevenson's life as being exemplary in facing privation and pain, such that compilations of his writing with names such as *Brave Words About Death* (1916) led to him being indelibly associated with a culture on the home-front which sought to sentimentalise and even aestheticise the sufferings of war.

Stevenson's reputation was so tarnished and traduced by this connection that he became the *bête noire* of modernist critics. However, alongside this more high-mindedly moral objection, there was equally a visible repugnance among the critics of the early twentieth century to Stevenson's commercial success. As Linda Dryden remarks, Stevenson's descent from his secure Victorian position as 'a highly regarded [writer] of considerable talent' can be linked with how 'during the twentieth century […] this reputation became subordinated to his popularity as the

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[104] Brown, p. 22.
[105] Brown, p. 22.
[106] Brown, p. 22.
[107] Kiely, p. 9.
[108] Kiely, p. 9.

writer of the best-sellers *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)'.[109] This 'subordination' has elsewhere been described as a 'delayed reaction against him as an excessively commercial writer', and given as being 'partially the fault of those who tried to deify him after his death'.[110] Kiely expands this point by noting how

> immediately after Stevenson's death, his closest friends, especially Edmund Gosse and Sidney Colvin, and his relatives (under the firm hand of Fanny Stevenson] did everything in their power to enlarge the image of R.L.S. [a coinage originating in this period, it should be noted] as an innocent and childlike man, responding with bravery and good cheer to a life of torment. They called him "the perennial boy", "thou restless angel", "friendship incarnate", and sometimes depicted him as a kind of secular holy man without blame or blemish.[111]

If this impossible inflation of his character, 'this angelic portrait', as Kiely has it, 'helped Stevenson's reputation to soar in the decade following his death, it has contributed correspondingly to its decline since the 1920's'.[112] In this Stevenson shared in the critical fate of many other writers of the period who shared some elements of his style and themes, a fate secured as much by their esteem of Stevenson's writing as by these textual resonances. The prestige (or lack thereof) of those who lauded Stevenson's work was also a significant determiner in how his writing was received, and in how it would suffer a reversal in the twentieth century. Stevenson was placed into a context of association with writers of muscular imperialist adventure, and much modernist criticism tars Stevenson with this brush: if, in E. M. Forster's phrase, Stevenson has the smell of the previous century, it is as much a taint of transference as it is the aroma of Stevenson himself.[113]

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[109] Linda Dryden, 'The Gothic: Detection and Science Fiction' in Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2013), pp. 96-103 (p. 96).
[110] Kiely, p. 9-10.
[111] Kiely, p. 10.
[112] Kiely, p. 10.
[113] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962 [1927]), p. 161.

Such associations, however, overlook the fact that contemporary reception of Stevenson by other authors tended to be approving, yet often with a slight tone of disparagement under the surface. Rudyard Kipling writes eloquently of that recurrent motif of Victorian critical reception, style: 'a writer called Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson who makes the most delicate inlay-work in black and white, and files out to the fraction of a hair'.[114] The sentiment corresponds to the description of Stevenson by Vivian, the posing aesthete of Oscar Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying', as a 'delightful master of delicate and fanciful prose'.[115] The praise of the 'delicacy' of Stevenson's writing in these quotations clearly carries a subtext, a diminishment of the worth of the prose, a suggestion of 'fine, finicking' work, accomplished in superficialities, but iterative and insubstantial in itself.[116]

2.11 Conclusion: Literary Reputations and Re-evaluations

If Stevenson's correspondence is viewed as a tool by which contesting authorities attempted to 'map' an image of the writer, the trade in Stevenson's letters and other personal effects take on a particular significance. Charles Guthrie's collection of Stevenson material, for example, represents a significant investment of authority on to the advocate, merely by his owning of them and so controlling access to knowledge about Stevenson. In short, his ability to restrict access to evidence that would contradict his idea of Stevenson means that the narrative he constructed in his memoirs and correspondence could not be contradicted. The initial authority gained by his association with Stevenson is likewise an issue he attended to, shoring up the superficiality of his connection to Stevenson by associating with those who had been closer to the writer, and then placing himself as a mediator of the knowledge they held – as indicated both in his correspondence with Sidney Colvin and in the interviews he conducted with Alison Cunningham.

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[114] Quoted in L. Cope Cornford, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1900), p. 193. The quotation is present in the earliest editions of *Soldiers Three*, but absent from later editions. See Roger Lancelyn Green, 'Kipling and R. L. Stevenson', *The Kipling Journal*, Vol XXXI No 150 (June 1964), 10-16 (p. 10).

[115] Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying' in Merlin Holland, ed., *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994), pp.1071-1092 (p. 1074).

[116] After the manner of Aunt Annie's calligraphy in Arnold Bennet, *A Great Man: A Frolic* (New York: George H. Doran, 1911), p. 75.

Guthrie's correspondence provides ample evidence of the manner in which the gate-keepers to his reputation attempted to close down any image of Stevenson that contravened the master narrative propagated in the 'authorised' biographies – that is, those such as Graham Balfour's and Guthrie's own that had the imprimatur of Robert Louis Stevenson's Estate.[117] Published material which did not have this approval was vigorously contested by Fanny Stevenson, as is testified to in Guthrie's correspondence. In a long letter, written in an increasingly shrill tone, Fanny takes exception to the 'slanderous' inaccuracies of '[Evelyn Blantyre] Simpson's book', for example.[118]

The strength of Fanny Stevenson's animus against Simpson's *The Originals of Robert Louis Stevenson*, a conspicuously sentimental and generally hagiographic work, is indicative of a trend to conservative defensiveness of Stevenson's reputation which was to become more and more marked as more critical and resistant studies were published.[119] The 'faultless monster' which Henley so resented in the depictions of Stevenson, would be increasingly challenged by a new generation of iconoclastic scholars willing to smash the idol to Victorian values that had been made of 'RLS' by those who saw him as 'very near being an angel'.[120]

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[117] See Graham Balfour, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), pp. ix-xi.

[118] Fanny Stevenson, 'Letter to Charles Guthrie, 23 March 1913' in *Item: Miscellaneous Letters to Lord Guthrie,* Acc LSH 155/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 24.

[119] Evelyn Blantyre Simpson, *The Robert Louis Stevenson Originals* (London: T. N. Foulis, 1912).

[120] W. E. Henley, 'From 'R. L. S.'' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 494-500 (p. 497); Fanny Stevenson, 'Letter to Charles Baxter, 15 May 1888' in *Item: Typewritten Correspondence between RLS and W.E. Henley in 1888.* Also *Charles Baxter, Katherine de Mattos, Fanny Stevenson*, Acc. No. LSH 146/91, Edinburgh Writers' Museum, p. 50.

3. Romanticism- Inheritance and National Tradition

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will contextualise Stevenson's place in the literary tradition by describing his occupation of an undetermined place or period between Romanticism and Modernism ahead of later chapters which will analyse the text. This chapter will first consider how the definition of Romanticism fluctuated over time, and how certain of these fluctuations extended so broadly as to be able to accommodate a writer such as Stevenson, despite his writing much later than the period normally assigned to Romanticism. The chapter will define key characteristics of literary Romanticism, then place Stevenson in relation to the movement through consideration of the affinities between his writing and that of Walter Scott. Finally, this chapter will argue that despite Romanticism typically being associated with rebellion and revolution it could be seen as more of an evolution, where there is a symbiotic dependence between Romanticism and Modernism. If this is the case then this would support the notion that Stevenson, though he can be categorised as a romantic, as will be defined forthwith, did indeed contribute to the development of Modernism.

3.2 The Romantic Image

Stevenson is a writer whose reputation is bound up as much in his biography as in the product of his pen. Critical discussion of Stevenson's writing has historically had to contend with a parallel discourse which has focused on the imagery of the 'romantic' Stevenson – 'romantic' in its broadest sense as an aesthetic, associated with a pose and drama, with the 'wind-swept and interesting'. Stevenson, as depicted in much of the popular iconography after his death meets this image – he is the

recognisable, reducible figure of the stereotyped, faintly bohemian writer.[121] Christopher Isherwood describes this imagery in terms of the iconography of the late Victorian period:

> Two great legendary figures dominated the literary background of my generation in its youth; the Dying Wanderer and the Martyred Dandy, Stevenson and Oscar Wilde. I don't mean that we necessarily admired either of them very much as writers, but you couldn't deny their personal fascination.[122]

This phenomenon - the afterlife of 'personal fascination' which endures despite, or even at the cost of, the literary reputation of Stevenson – has been a significant aspect of the fluctuation of what David Robb describes as the 'critical regard' towards Stevenson.[123] If, as Robb contends, Stevenson 'remains sidelined and often disregarded', the origin of this lies in how his image was modified, adapted and selectively presented during his life and posthumously.[124]

The difficulty of extricating the 'icon' of Stevenson the writer from the literature he produced is an issue which was recognised even among the first efforts to rehabilitate Stevenson as a legitimate subject of academic study. Robert Kiely, in his pioneering monograph of 1964, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure,* concedes that 'there is little question that Stevenson's whole existence – including the circumstances of his death in Vailima at the age of forty-four – was "romantically right"'.[125] To Kiely, Stevenson is the victim of his own appeal: the 'critical commentary' produced on Stevenson in his own lifetime 'makes little effort

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[121] Consider, for example, the frontispiece illustration to Margaret Moyes Black's biography, or the cover to *The Bookman* 'Extra Number' which commemorates his death: the pose is dramatic and mannered, the dress consciously 'exotic'. Margaret Moyes Black, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: T. E. Nelson, 1904); *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Man and His Work: The Bookman Extra Number* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913). See 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, 6 October 1894'.

[122] Christopher Isherwood, 'R.L.S.' in Christopher Isherwood, *Exhumations: Stories, Articles, Verses* (London: Methuen, 1966), pp. 47-55 (p. 47).

[123] David Robb, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2016), p. 5.

[124] Robb, p. 5.

[125] Kiely, p. 6.

to separate this colourful man from his work'.[126] The validity of this observation can be illustrated through quotation from the work of the eminent Victorian literary critic Edmund Gosse. Gosse rates Stevenson as 'the most exquisite English writer of his generation', but, as Gosse remarks, 'those who lived close to him are apt to think less of this than of the fact that he was […] the most lovable of human beings'.[127] This is the kind of critical estimation which speaks to both the high regard in which Stevenson was held in the Victorian period, but also to the extent to which this reputation was challenged by succeeding generations. These later generations, indeed, also 'th[ought] less' of Stevenson's writing than of how 'loveable' he was; but to them this was a demerit – evidence that his popularity was predicated on his personality rather than on the quality of his writing.[128] The suggestion that it was Stevenson's personality, as appreciated through his relationships with arbiters of Victorian taste such as Gosse, which determined the enthusiasm with which he was received would indelibly mark later critical reception of Stevenson. If, as Andrew Lang claimed, 'Stevenson possessed, more than any man I ever met, the power of making other men fall in love with him', there has been since the period a suspicion that the Victorian men of letters have been too besotted by Stevenson, too love-struck, to see what qualities can genuinely be found in Stevenson's writing.[129]

In turn, the reversal of the elevated estimation of Stevenson's reputation was very much predicated on reversing this image before it was involved in the reconsideration of the writing itself. The first blow against Stevenson's position at the head of the Victorian pantheon was the article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* by the critic, editor and poet W. E. Henley which tilted against Stevenson as 'the seraph in chocolate', a saccharine and infallible figure as depicted in Graham Balfour's biography of 1901.[130] Henley engages with Stevenson's writing only as a reflection of his personality: literature, he contends, is part of a writer's self and personality, inseparable from them.[131] Engaging in a debate with the champions of Stevenson on

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[126] Kiely, p. 6.
[127] Edmund Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1903), p. 302.
[128] Gosse, p. 302.
[129] Andrew Lang, 'Recollections of Robert Louis Stevenson', *The North American Review*, vol 160 no 459 (1895), 185-194 (pp. 191-192).
[130] W. E. Henley, 'From 'R. L. S.'' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 494-500 (p. 497).
[131] Henley in Maixner, p. 496.

their own terms, disputing the merits of Stevenson based upon the content of his character, Henley ratifies the terms of the discourse and effectively sanctions a critical tradition in the Anglophone world of the twentieth century which made proposals and counter-proposals based around the substance of Stevenson's life. As debates to his biography dominated the public image of Stevenson scholarship, so his writing receded into the background, becoming increasingly less visible, becoming instead almost incidental to the facts of his life. With no critical advocacy being conducted in favour of Stevenson's writing, and with the historiography of his Victorian life gaining precedence, the ground was laid for the easy dismissal of Stevenson's work as belonging, in the words of E. M. Forster, to the 'stuffy room' of the 'immediate past'.[132] Stevenson had become emblematic of an outmoded age, fit to be included among the eminent Victorians against whom the Modernist establishment raged. Compounding this was Stevenson's openness about his early attempts to develop a literary style by consciously emulating authors who wrote decades before he did.[133] Stevenson thus lays himself open to mischaracterisation as a literary reactionary to a generation of writers obsessed with 'mak[ing] it new'.[134]

3.3 'Too Many Meanings': 'Romanticism' and Unstable Definitions

Isherwood suggests that Stevenson wished to be read as a Romantic figure: he affected the pose of 'the wanderer' and so aimed to emulate the 'glamour of Byron and George Borrow', coupling the superficial aesthetic of the Romantic period with his own literary persona.[135] It is evident that there is more to this association than Stevenson's careful cultivation of an appearance and manner intended to recall the poets of the earlier part of the century.[136] Indeed, contemporary reviews describe Stevenson in terms of 'the Romantic style', or of contributing to a

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[132] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962 [1927]), p. 161.
[133] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A College Magazine' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1895), pp. 57-77 (p. 59).
[134] Cf. Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1935).
[135] Christopher Isherwood, 'R. L. S.' in Christopher Isherwood, *Exhumations: Stories, Articles, Verses* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1966), pp. 47-54 (pp. 47-48).
[136] The photographs of Stevenson taken by Percy Florence Shelley, in which the author poses in the style of the photographer's father are a fair testament to this: see Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 289-290.

new 'period of Romantic literature'.[137] These reviews not only stress the literary antecedents of the Romantic period, who Stevenson both inherits from and emulates, but suggest that his is not merely plagiarism, but 'a reversion to the fundamental ideas' that motivated these writers and so represents 'a re-creation from those bases'.[138]

But Stevenson would be excluded from the traditional definition of Romanticism, which, as Karl Kroeber ruefully notes, saw the movement as 'five poets, a Scottish novelist nobody read, and the years 1798–1832'.[139] This rigid canon – Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron and Walter Scott – bound between dates defined not by their historical context, but by the dates of their own careers and lives (1798 being the date of publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, 1832 the year in which Scott died), represent the narrow exclusivism with which Romanticism was once defined and so studied. In later criticism, however, the problem has become quite the opposite: so strong has the move away from this sparse and limited definition been, that the margins of Romanticism – which writers, themes and years it should contain – are now vague and endlessly contested. Indeed, it has become somewhat of a truism in literary studies that Romanticism suffers from a degree of indefinability. As Duncan Wu puts it, 'Romanticism is a flashy but brazenly opaque term' with which the critic gestures towards the dominant literary trend of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century without defining its parameters, relying instead on a vague set of characteristics and personalities which it is hoped all readers perceive as being 'Romantic'. [140] This semantic vagueness stands in contrast to what would, of course, be an error: the difficulty in providing a categorical definition of Romanticism is, as Jane Moore and John Strachan put it, a 'fruitful instability', which allows for the boundaries of the movement to be questioned, without contesting that there was an identifiable cultural movement

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[137] H. C. Bunner, 'Unsigned Review, *Century Magazine*, February 1883' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 119-122 (p. 122); Andrew Lang, 'From an Unsigned Article, "Modern Men: Mr. R. L. Stevenson", *Scots Observer*, 26 January 1889' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 330-334 (p. 332).

[138] Bunner in Paul Maixner, ed., p. 122.

[139] Karl Kroeber and others, 'How it Was', *Studies in Romanticism* 21.4 (Winter 1982), 554-571 (p. 557).

[140] Duncan Wu, *Thirty Great Myths About the Romantics* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2015), p. xiii.

which influenced artistic production across Europe in this general period.[141] To put this more directly still, '"Romanticism" is a critical label that it is very difficult to do without'.[142] So long as they are defined as contingent and open to challenge, meaningful generalisations can be made in order to shape an outline of the nature of Romanticism. However, to do so requires that the various complexities related to defining the term be addressed.

First among these complexities is the problem that Romanticism as a concept suffers from a paradoxical tendency to be viewed and defined variously as a general, even universal phenomenon, or as being specific to a particular national culture, or even group of poets, as indicated in Kroeber's 'classical' definition.[143] At its most general, the definition of Romanticism can be so vague as to be effectively meaningless. This can be seen in Friedrich Schlegel's definition of 'Romantic poetry [as] a progressive, universal poetry', and still more so in his circular definition of 'the romantic kind of poetry' as 'the only [type] that is more than a kind, that is, as it were, poetry itself'.[144] Given that this represents the first attempt to define 'the romantic' in literature (and, indeed, the first published use of the label), this vagueness frustrates the hope that a categorical definition can be found in the first theoretical work devoted to the subject.[145]

Such contentless definitions, however, can in themselves be read as indicative: if, as A. O. Lovejoy observes, 'the word "romantic" comes to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing', this does not only have a negative value, but also proves the depth of the field, as 'the variety of its actual and possible meanings and connotations reflect the complexity and multiplicity of European Romanticism'.[146] This notion of 'multiplicity' is key, in that generalisations about the character of Romanticism overlook the fact that the Romantic tendency in art was expressed in varied forms, which differed according to the national context in

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[141] Jane Moore and John Strachan, *Key Concepts in Romantic Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 2.
[142] Moore and Strachan, p. 2.
[143] Kroeber and others, p. 557.
[144] Friedrich Schlegel, 'Athenaeum Fragments' in Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's* Lucinde *and the Fragments*, trans. by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), pp. 174-175 (pp. 174-175).
[145] Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Emergence of Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 70-71.
[146] A. O. Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948), p. 232.

which they emerged. As such, Lovejoy observes that 'the "Romanticism" of one country may have little in common with that of another, that there is, in fact, a plurality of Romanticism, of possibly quite distinct thought-complexes'.[147] Nonetheless, Lovejoy concedes that, though 'it has never been clearly exhibited', 'there may be some common denominator' to these distinct traditions.[148] To understand the specificities of particular Romanticisms, it is important to at least gesture towards what this 'common denominator' might be. By demonstrating what values Romanticism as a general term denotes, it will be possible to identify the particulars of the differing forms which comprise this mode.

By identifying these shared qualities a case will be made that Stevenson's Victorian contemporaries were right to recognise in his early work a new mode of Romanticism which took the conventions and even ontologies of the movement and reapplied them to a new cultural context.

3.4 Qu'est ce que le Romantisme? – Towards a Working Definition

One of the most influential ways of defining Romanticism has been to stress its revolutionary nature. This emphasis allies a movement in the cultures of representation in art with the historical context of the 'Age of Revolution', which saw seismic political and social change affected by the French Revolution in 1789 and the rapid mechanisation and urbanising which characterised the Industrial Revolution.[149] Romanticism was indeed, in its first flourishing, a radical movement, defining itself against the dominant aesthetic and cultural trends of the previous period, though as will be discussed later could also be argued to be an evolution of it. It was, for instance, profoundly (and self-consciously) antagonistic to neo-classicism, being as it was hostile to all notions of classical culture as being superior to both the contemporary and to 'unrestrained nature'.[150] This theme emerges vividly in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, which describes the 'universal things' the young poet found to provide a more authentic education beyond the boundaries of his Classically-

[147] Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas,* p. 235.
[148] Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas,* p. 236.
[149] Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution* (London: Phoenix, 2011), p. 1; see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1962).
[150] Matthew Johnson, *Ideas of Landscape* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 27.

oriented and urban-based studies at Cambridge: 'Ofttimes did I quit / my Comrades, leave the crowd, buildings and groves, / and as I paced alone the level fields […]/ the mind / drooped not' he writes, describing how it was in the study of his self, and calling on the 'common countenance of earth and sky […] to teach me what they might' that he found a deeper truth.[151] Nature and personal experience, then, are valued above the conventionalities and structures of ossified tradition. A second poet, more touched still by the 'disordered sight' of the Romantic vision, saw the slavish adherence to classical modes and forms as fatal to inspiration: 'Rome and Greece swept art into their Maw', Blake writes, and 'it is the classics, not monks and Goths, that Desolate Europe'.[152] The 'mathematic form of the Grecian', is contrasted with 'the living form', and Classicism is given as the root of the destructive and acquisitive impulse of Blake's contemporary society.

The Romantic revolution, then, resists the prescribed rigidities of acceptable form set by eighteenth-century 'Augustan' style in favour of dynamic personal expression. The perception of the ancient past shifted: no longer was it an imperative enjoining order and structure, but rather a source which could be assimilated for inspiration and become a foil for personal expression. This, perhaps, accounts in part for why the Romantics were so drawn to ruins, be they the 'colossal wreck' in 'an antique land' of Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Ozymandias' or the ruined acropolis, still standing 'despite of war and fire', in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.[153] The fragmentary remains of antiquity, reduced to confusion and no longer fit to perform their original purpose, but able to serve as a source for lyrical effusion on their faded beauty, as in Wordsworth's *Prelude,* where 'temples […] in their ruins yet / Survive for inspiration'.[154]

This is an appropriation which illustrates the contrast between the ideology of 'Classicism [which]', as Michèle Hanoosh suggests, 'implies discipline, moderation,

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[151] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind: An Autobiographical Poem* (London: Edward Moxon, 1850), pp. 59-60.
[152] Wordsworth, p. 61; William Blake, 'On Homer [and] On Virgil', http://www.themorgan.org/collection/William-Blakes-World/204 [accessed 21 April 2020]
[153] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ozymandias' in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p.194 (ll. 13, 1); George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (London: John Murray, 1812), p. 62.
[154] Wordsworth, *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind: An Autobiographical Poem* (London: Edward Moxon, 1850), p. 314.

and order' and 'Romanticism [which] evokes spontaneity, extravagance, and freedom'.[155] This divide was not only aesthetic, it had an implicitly political edge:

> Classicism involves invention within convention,
> Romanticism the creative imagination; if Classicism goes
> with absolute monarchy, a hierarchy of power and value,
> Romanticism goes with revolution, democracy, egalitarianism
> […] Classicism privileges the public order, Romanticism
> individualism and the self. [156]

Romanticism, then, was concerned with undermining the structures of power, with its interiority and self-reflexiveness being as much involved with its radical turn as its more overt polemicizing: to 'rise like lions after slumber' or to 'lie / In vacant or in pensive mood [in] the bliss of solitude' each have their own potency in destabilising the conventions of Classicist power structures.[157]

It could be argued that Stevenson was an inheritor of this tradition, at least insofar as he favoured depictions of "authentic" rural life and agrarian scenes in his early travel writing.[158] His earliest essays of this kind are a species as much of rural anthropology, as it were, as they are of conventional nature writing, featuring depictions of rural life and the ventriloquised voices of native agricultural labourers. But equally Stevenson benefitted from his own class privilege and his (admittedly irregular) classical education. As such, though he writes on topics which were popular subjects in Romantic writing (for instance, a fine example of the pastoral in his pen portrait of the old gardener at Swanston), he writes, too, in a manner which

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[155] Michèle Hannoosh, 'Romanticism: Art, Literature, and History' in William Burgwinkle and others, eds., *The Cambridge History of French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 450-460 (p. 459).
[156] Hanoosh, p. 459.
[157] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy' in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), pp. 387-401 (l. 378); William Wordsworth, 'Poems of the Imagination: XII' in *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 187 (ll. 19-22).
[158] See, for example, his description of Swanston and the Pentlands in 'An Old Scotch Gardener' and 'Pastoral' in *Memories and Portraits*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), pp. 77-89, 90-105.

early reviewers praise as ideally Classical in form: it is in 'the true Queen Anne style' of Addison's *Spectator*, as one enthusiastic reviewer had it.[159]

3.5 Romantic Enlightenment: Continuity as Resistance

It is possible, of course, to question this concept of Romanticism as an oppositional movement against the high 'Augustan' neoclassicism of the eighteenth century. Duncan Wu, for example, challenges this dominant model as one of his 'myths' about Romanticism, noting that rather than 'leading a revolutionary campaign against the eighteenth century', the Romantic poets, including the canonical 'Big Five', continued to be influenced by mid-eighteenth century modes of prosody and philosophy both.[160] As such, although Robert Southey, one of the most influential Romantic poets and critics, could characterise 'the time which elapsed from the days of Dryden to those of Pope, [as] the dark age of English poetry' due to its excessive formalism and continual recourse to standard neoclassical tropes, this cannot be taken to be the generally held view in the period.[161] Indeed, a contemporary review of Southey's *Specimens of the Later English Poets* described him as being 'an editor […] conspicuous for the singularity of his tenets in matters of poetical taste'.[162] By 1831, the vision of Romanticism as locked in an oedipal, agonistic struggle against the Augustan poetry of the generation preceding was seen as entirely stale, with Carlyle declaring that 'we are troubled with no controversies on Romanticism and Classicism, – the[…] controversy on Pope having long since evaporated without result'.[163]

As Wu's study makes clear, however, this 'controversy' over the limiting nature of Augustan thought for which Pope metonymically stands, was not in the

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[159] Lore Metzger, *One Foot in Eden: Modes of Pastoral in Romantic Poetry* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Lionel Johnson, 'On Stevenson as a Probationary Classic, from a Review *Academy*, 3 June 1893' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981), pp. 417-421 (p. 419).

[160] Wu, p. 82.

[161] Robert Southey, *Specimens of the Later English Poets, with Preliminary Notices*, 3 vols (London:Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1807), I, p. xxix.

[162] Unsigned Review in *The Edinburgh Review or Critical Journal for October 1807 – January 1808,* ed. by Francis Jeffrey (Edinburgh and London: Archibald Constable and John Murray,1808), pp. 31-40 (p.31). It should be noted, however, that the great mutual antipathy of Jeffreys and Southey may somewhat temper the value of this source.

[163] Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 5 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899), II, pp. 165-215 (p. 172).

least without result, and, despite Carlyle's wishful thinking, these categorisations and periodisations of fiction endured well into the nineteenth-century and beyond, continuing to thrive in contemporary discourse on the Romantics.[164] This division does much to occlude the continuities between the Romantics and their immediate predecessors, obscuring the extent to which Romanticism developed from, and expanded, the cultural context of the Enlightenment, with its privileging of personal experience and individualism against traditional, socially conformist models of identity.[165] The endurance of the categorisation and periodisation of Romanticism thus encompassed the work of writers who inherited or modified the tradition: this too, could account for Stevenson's relative lack of status until his work began to be reassessed by later scholarly criticism.[166]

Roger Scruton defines this indebtedness of 'Romantic art' to the Enlightenment in negative, yet not in oppositional terms.[167] To Scruton, Romanticism is a synthesis of Enlightenment values with the communitarian, and specifically, religious identities which they replaced.[168] Thus, while Romanticism is an expression of 'ever deeper mourning for the like of "natural piety" which Enlightenment destroyed', the movement did not seek to efface or deny the reality of 'the rational culture of Enlightenment', but rather 'searched for another and deeper culture' beneath it.[169] In this characteristically conservative vision, the Romantic poet is an ark, preserving 'in the sanctuary of the poet's self' pre-Enlightenment aesthetics and pre-Enlightenment values so that they might be grafted onto the new forms of a post-Enlightenment world.[170] Viewed in this way, every appeal to 'Providence for solace and support' in Wordsworth, each description of the 'glories' of an idealised Medieval past in Keats, and even Shelley's gestures towards a vague, pantheistic divinity represent the rediscovery of a pre-Enlightenment past,

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[164] See Wu, pp. 1-7, 29-39.
[165] Milan Zafirovski, *The Enlightenment and its Effects on Modern Society* (New York: Springer, 2011), p. 34.
[166] See, for example, Edwin M. Eigner, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Romantic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966).
[167] Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 49.
[168] Scruton, p. 49.
[169] Scruton, p. 49.
[170] Scruton, p. 49.

transfigured and made new having been plucked like brands from the burning of a rationalist age.[171]

This imagery of literary Romanticism as hybridising and so redeeming the rationalist culture of the eighteenth century with an aesthetic culture 'rooted in mystery', swiftly and concisely gets to the crux of what distinguished Romanticism as an intellectual and creative phenomenon. At the same time, it acknowledges its almost symbiotic dependence on the Enlightenment and the values that it bequeathed to the dawning century of the Industrial Revolution. As Duncan Wu observes, in this description Scruton 'view[s] Romanticism as the consequence of cultural developments that occurred during the Enlightenment': that one was 'an attitude concealed within' the other.[172] In other words, Romanticism was an evolutionary development of the Enlightenment rather than a revolution which overthrew its values.

Seen this way, the division between the Augustan and the Romantic era is not as sharp and concretely definable as is often suggested. That there *was* a division of some kind and that it was keenly felt by the writers who consciously defined Romanticism, as Wordsworth and Coleridge did in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, is less easily dismissed.[173] Though there was little determined resistance to the immediate past, some were less able to see Romanticism as a synthesis between Enlightenment norms and older social and aesthetic values. A writer as fundamental to the Romantic archetype as Lord Byron on reaching this conclusion expressed a desire to retreat to past certainties, insisting, in a letter to his publisher John Murray in 1817, that the Augustan poetry of 'the little Queen Anne's man' Pope had far greater merits than any of the Romantics.[174] Here one of the chief Romantic poets is explicitly saying that he and his peers are wrong, that their 'revolutionary poetical system […] is not worth a damn' in itself, while stating his aim to model his future

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[171] William Wordsworth, 'The Excursion' in *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), pp. 751-907 (Book V., l. 516); John Keats, 'The Eve of St Agnes' in John Keats, *Poems* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897), pp. 205-224; Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Prometheus Unbound' in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), pp. 205-308 (p. 269).

[172] Wu, p. 4; Scruton, p. 48.

[173] Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800/1802)' in Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), pp. 5-25.

[174] See Wu, p.34.

poetry in imitation of the Augustans.[175] Southey, by contrast, failed to see Romanticism as indebted to its immediate past, and persisted in his rejection of the 'dark ages of poetry'.[176] Both of these disparate responses are united in their concern for unity, for absolute and definable parameters, which cannot be reconciled to the fuzzy logic of culture as synthesis. The same anxiety arises in many reactions to the questions of nation and authenticity that preoccupied most Romantic movements.

This is relevant to Stevenson in the technical elements of his style. He 'aped' a Classicist style of prose by looking to ancient forms as modes for his own writing, seeking to find a way to emulate them, and so to anoint his own writing, just as the authors of the Augustan period did before him.[177] Horace and Virgil were particular sources of inspiration to him, as evident in the frequent use of quotations from their work: the former, indeed, loaned the title to two separate and disparate essays which are the most indicative of Stevenson's philosophy – a philosophy which itself is a neo-classical reconstruction of the stoicism of Marcus Aurelius.[178] A classical inheritance, and an (eighteenth century) classicist style are at the root of much of Stevenson's non-fiction writing. By contrast, however, in the same period he was developing a style for his poetry and his prose fiction which transcended these formal constraints, and sought instead the effusions of a Romantic tradition.

3.6 'Out of Scott a Bad Tradition Came'

Stevenson was demoted from the Elysian fields of the English 'Great Tradition' by nothing more than a footnote. The historical romance, for all its

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[175] George Gordon, Lord Byron, 'Letter CCXCVII: To John Murray, September 15th 1817' in *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with Notices of his Life*, ed. by Thomas Moore, 2 vols (Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1830), I, p. 277. Note that the date of the letter precedes much of Byron's major work: at the time of its writing he was still in the process of composing and publishing *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, one of the most significant works of the Romantic period.

[176] Southey, p. xxix.

[177] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A College Magazine' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1895), pp. 57-77 (p. 59).

[178] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Pulvis et Umbra' in *Across the Plains with Other Memories and Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus,1892), pp. 289-301; Robert Louis Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque* (London: C. Kegan Paul and Company, 1881); Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. by Meric Casaubon (London: J. M. Dent, 1906).

popular success and critical regard, was debarred from the 'authentic tradition of literature', as F. R. Leavis styled it, with the following assessment:

> 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.[179]

This dismissive estimation encapsulates what Edwin Eigner describes as 'the two prejudices that have deprived Robert Louis Stevenson of a critical audience'.[180] The second prejudice is one which, Eigner claims, 'few people take seriously anymore', and so declines to discuss, but this idea that Stevenson 'composed English prose rather too well' *will* be taken seriously by this thesis in chapter six. The first prejudice, the one which Eigner shows willing to study, will be considered here. It is the charge that Stevenson was 'a mere romantic fabulist, writing in the Scott tradition'.[181]

That Stevenson was writing in such a tradition is one which cannot reasonably be contested. Indeed, Stevenson was far from hostile to Scott; Frank McLynn describes the later writer as 'hav[ing] an encyclopaedic grasp of Sir Walter [Scott] and to be able to quote from him at will'.[182] That Stevenson took this tradition seriously is also difficult to deny. Eigner attempts to do so, but a less selective consideration of Stevenson's descriptions of his own work reveals comments which invest even these efforts in the lighter historical romance to be worthy of his effort. *Kidnapped* offers a fair example of this: it is a book which Stevenson is pleased to call 'infinitely my best, and indeed my only good, story'.[183] The same letter, to the Canadian author, George Iles indicates the pains he took with the work, describing the length of time writing as being as long as the involved work on *Prince Otto*, which he thought of as his most 'finished' work.[184] Indeed, when in

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[179] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Penguin, 1962), p. 6, n. 1.
[180] Edwin M. Eigner, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Romantic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 4.
[181] Eigner, p. 4.
[182] Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1993), p. 40.
[183] 'Letter: To George Iles, 29 October 1887'.
[184] 'Letter: To George Iles, 29 October 1887'.

the process of writing the novel, Stevenson wrote to his father indicating the extent of research and thought that went into *Kidnapped*, despite its being intended for no more elevated a berth than *Young Folks* magazine.[185] It is in this same letter to his father, after detailing his involved primary research, that Stevenson remarks of the 1750s 'I find it a most picturesque period, and wonder that Scott let it escape'.[186] There are other works in Stevenson's corpus that are just as consciously related to Scott, and which similarly show a high level of fidelity to serious research and conscious development of style. *St. Ives* (1897), left unfinished at Stevenson's death, bears perhaps the closest connection to the elder writer's work, as is knowingly signalled by the brief appearance 'of that inimitable author' in the events of the story.[187] *St. Ives*, though critically neglected when compared to the interest shown the similarly incomplete *Weir of Hermiston*, has been highlighted by contemporary scholarship evident in the scholarly edition by Glenda Norquay, who shows that the novel was carefully planned and extensively researched.[188]

Stevenson, then, was at least in part a Romantic writer, part of the Scott tradition which Leavis so easily dismisses. Stevenson did not, as some would later do on his behalf, 'make excessive claims for his books', as Eigner puts it.[189] However, while Stevenson was consistently self-effacing about his own work in the genre of romance, he recognises its lightness as having a particular value, even a certain responsibility. Thus, in a letter of 1884 to A. Trevor Haddon, Stevenson gives his advice as to solemnity in fiction.[190] This sets up one of the paradoxical adages Stevenson is so fond of when waxing rhetorical: 'The world is very serious', he writes; 'art is the cure of that, and must be taken very lightly; but to take art lightly, you must first be stupidly owlishly in earnest over it'.[191] 'Seriousness', then he suggests, should not be in the subject of the novel, but in the discipline of its production. He was, in this sense, a serious author of what he self-deprecatingly

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[185] Letter: To Thomas Stevenson, 25 January 1886'; 'Letter: To W. E. Henley, 8 April 1885'.
[186] 'Letter: To Thomas Stevenson, 25 January 1886'. This is a particularly obliging note to strike with his father: Thomas Stevenson placed great value on the writing of Scott, particularly *Guy Mannering*: see Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Thomas Stevenson' in *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), pp. 132-143 (p. 140).
[187] Robert Louis Stevenson, *St. Ives* (London: William Heineman, 1898), p. 69.
[188] Robert Louis Stevenson, *St. Ives*, ed. by Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, [forthcoming]).
[189] Eigner, p. 5.
[190] 'Letter: To A. Trevor Haddon, [23 or 24 April] 1884'.
[191] 'Letter: To A. Trevor Haddon, [23 or 24 April] 1884'.

described as ‘unserious’ work. His works he was content to describe as ‘tushery’ and as ‘tissue[s] of adventures’ without ‘philosophic pith under the yarn’.[192] Despite this, he was a strong partisan for the Romantic, championing the form in his debate with Henry James, where he argued the merits of the Romance as compared to those of realism, as will be discussed further in chapter four. He reduces this into a single epigrammatic formulation in his letter to Haddon: ‘Beware of realism, it is the devil: it is one of the means of art, and now they make it the end!’.[193]

3.7 Conclusion: Romanticism and Stevenson

The shifting idea of Romanticism which informed Stevenson’s definition of the Romance as distinct from Realism contained, then, a sense of cultural continuity, as will be discussed when considering these competing categories in chapter 4 of this thesis. The possibility of carrying over a legacy from Romanticism into later nineteenth-century forms was something which Stevenson saw as positive; indeed, his theory of the Romance can be read as an attempt to both restore and update Romanticism for his contemporary period. So successful was he in doing so, however, and so absent is any later attempt to similarly revivify the form, that Stevenson became a victim of his own success in reframing Romanticism. By absorbing the modes of Romanticism into his own method of writing, particularly in his works of narrative romance, these modes would be, to the Modernist eye, tainted by association: as Stevenson’s writing, especially his popular fiction was rejected, so too was the attempt to carry Romanticism forward in traditions of fiction, at least in name. After this period, Romanticism became periodised: not a mode of approaching writing, but the way in which certain writers wrote between, say, 1789 and 1850.

The Romanticism in the fiction of Scott being reflected and developed in the adventure fiction of Stevenson was met with particular praise by critics and advocates of Stevenson especially the influential literary critic Andrew Lang.[194] These are the same elements which met with particular dispraise by Modernist critics

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[192] ‘Letter: To R. A. M. Stevenson, June 1894’.

[193] ‘Letter: To W. E. Henley, May 1883’; ‘Letter: To R. A. M. Stevenson, June 17, 1894’.

[194] See, for example, Andrew Lang, ‘From an Unsigned Article, “Modern Men: Mr R. L. Stevenson”, *Scots Observer*, 26 January 1889’ in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981), pp. 330-334.

or those who anticipated them, who accuse these elements in Stevenson of 'put[ting] back the clock of English fiction fifty years'.[195] By contrast, Stevenson's earliest biographers and advocates in his personal circle, often amplified the superficially conservative, 'Romantic' aspects of his work, emphasising the very elements which these critics were denigrating as outmoded. This would go on to impact the way that the generation who came after him considered and then rejected his work.

[195] Attributed to Stephen Crane in Ford Maddox Ford, *Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections: Being the Memories of a Young Man* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1911), p. 52.

4. Victorian Realism and Romance

4.1 Introduction

The critical emphasis on the formal innovation of the Modernist period has tended to overshadow the fact that the later Victorian period was also characterised by intense and self-reflexive consideration as to the nature of writing. Far from being a period of complacency, as later critics were to typify it, the late-Victorian period was a time of self-consciousness and even anxiety as to the proper role, mode and function of fiction in society.[196] The Victorian habit of literary self-analysis reached its peak in the 1880s with the public exchange between Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson on the contesting merits of realism and romance in the novel. James and Stevenson had first met in 1879, and while the American author had at first been dismissive, describing Stevenson as 'a great deal (in an inoffensive way) of a *poseur*', in time he warmed to Stevenson, becoming one of Stevenson's closest friends and most frequent correspondents.[197]

Spurred by Walter Besant's lecture on the 'Art of Fiction', James wrote a piece for *Longman's Magazine* expanding on the theme, in which he cited *Treasure Island*; Stevenson responded with 'A Humble Remonstrance', arguing for the value of the 'romance' against stricter realism.[198] As Janet Adam Smith acknowledges, 'critics […] rarely couple the names of Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson': James had, by the mid-twentieth century, been safely immured within the unassailable walls of high literature in the Great Tradition, while Stevenson had been

[196] See, for example E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 161; Peter Faulkner, *Modernism* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. ix-xi.
[197] Henry James, 'To T.S. Perry, 14 September 1879' in Leon Edel, ed., *The Letters of Henry James*, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974-84), II, pp. 254-256 (p. 255).
[198] Janet Adam Smith, 'Introduction' in Janet Adam Smith, ed., *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), pp. 9-47 (pp. 24-25); Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction' in Janet Adam-Smith, ed., *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), pp. 53-85; Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance' in Janet Adam Smith, ed., *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), pp. 86-100.

banished to 'the nursery or schoolroom'.[199] But the critical consensus of the 1880s placed Stevenson on much the same rank as James, despite the former's commercial success.[200] As Peter Keating notes, 'Stevenson's theories on the art of fiction were just as acceptable as his practice' to this audience: there was no gap in credibility between the authors.[201] Indeed, it is an indication of the ultimate success of the mode of realism over that of romance which means that this is not immediately evident to later readers.

This is not to suggest, however, that the debate between James and Stevenson was as oppositional as some critical work has suggested, where James's realism and Stevenson's 'romance' are two armed camps, each defended with absolutist zeal.[202] Rather, as will be demonstrated below, 'The Art of Fiction' debate was characterised by reciprocity and relativism. As James himself notes, 'the [realist] novel and the romance, the novel of incident and that of character – these separations appear to me to have been made by critics and readers for their own convenience […] but to have little reality or interest for the producer'.[203] Nonetheless, for all the fact that the boundary between them is thoroughly permeable, realism and romance are recognisably distinct as forms, or perhaps, paradigms. This chapter will attempt to define and describe the range and limits of these forms, and so contextualise the movement to later literary modes, especially Modernism, while acknowledging the instability of these terms, particularly in the context of Stevenson's polymorphous and liminal writing. Stevenson's engagement in debate and the consideration that he gave to his responses to James indicates a writer who is reflective and intentional in his work. This contrasts with the way that he was portrayed after his death by his early biographers and those who were less supportive of his commitment to innovation of style and theme. The following sections will contribute to a growing picture of the context in which Stevenson was writing and received, and aims to

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[199] J. A. Smith, 'Introduction' in J. A. Smith, ed., p. 9; F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), pp. 43-60; J. A. Smith, 'Introduction' in J. A. Smith, ed., p. 9.

[200] See Paul Maixner, 'Introduction' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 1-46 (pp. 14-35).

[201] Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London: Fontana, 1991), p. 347.

[202] See for example, Pam Morris, *Realism* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 9-20.

[203] Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction' in Janet Adam Smith, ed., *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), pp. 53-85 (pp. 71).

provide a foundation on which to base a critical reading of three main texts by Stevenson in the succeeding chapters.

4.2 The Origin and Form of Victorian Realism

The origin of the valorisation of verisimilitude in fiction, that is, the notion that the highest aesthetic or moral worth of a work of fiction is its representation of a 'credible' simulacra of a possible reality, can be argued to be contextually specific to the nineteenth century. As Pam Morris remarks, the 'aesthetic evaluations of realism are frequently informed by or entangled with views on the development of the Enlightenment, the expansion of capitalist production and the emergence of modern mass culture'.[204] The deeper ideological significance of realism as a preferred mode thus arises in a culture which is newly expansive and materialistically rationalist. As George J. Becker notes, the cradle of realism was 'the ferment of scientific and positivist thinking which characterised the middle of the nineteenth century'.[205] 'Realism really did constitute a fresh start because it was based on a new set of assumptions about the universe'.[206] It was to become, Becker continues, 'what Zola always spoke of as the major current of the age'.[207] The *zeitgeist* is always a social construction of implied and explicit value judgements: the preference for the mode of realism adheres to, reflects and reinforces this. As such, Becker notes, the 'claims about the nature of reality and [the] evaluative attitude towards it' which realism carries with it means that 'it is […] a term that is frequently invoked in making fundamental ethical and political claims or priorities, based upon perceptions of what is "true" or "real"'.[208]

These values would come to be fiercely contested in the twentieth century, most influentially in the Western academy by the poststructuralist movement, which denied the existence of a unitary ontological truth upon which ethical positions could be founded, but also by new schools of realism which challenged Victorian assumptions on the location of truth or on its interpretation as producing social

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[204] Morris, p. 10.
[205] George Becker, 'Modern Realism as a Literary Movement' in George Becker, ed., *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 3-38 (p. 6).
[206] Becker, 'Modern Realism as a Literary Movement' in Becker, ed., pp. 3-38 (p. 18).
[207] Becker, 'Modern Realism as a Literary Movement' in Becker, ed., pp. 3-38 (p. 24).
[208] Morris, p. 2.

imperatives.[209] If poststructuralism was revolutionary, these latter approaches could be said to be evolutionary, building upon, reconfiguring and appropriating existing forms. As such, they are willing to assess the qualities of Victorian realism in a historically informed manner. Thus, the critics Eric Auerbach and György Lukács, two otherwise disparate figures occupying radically different political positions, can both, as Morris notes, 'identify two defining achievements of nineteenth-century realism: first, the perception that individual lives are the location of historical forces and contradictions and, second, the serious artistic treatment of ordinary people and their experience'.[210] Realism in the nineteenth century, to Auerbach, was integrally related to the expansion of democracy, its 'serious treatment of everyday reality' and selection of what he describes as 'socially inferior human groups' (that is, the working classes and lower-bourgeois) as 'subject matter' links to the expansion of franchise and political agency to these groups.[211] Lukács proposes much the same, from an explicitly Marxist view: realism is the form which reflects the expansion of middle-class hegemony and its assimilation of the subjectivity of the proletariat.[212] For all that the motivation is disputed between Auerbach and Lukács, the outcome that they identify is the same: the lives of a widening sector of society become the subject of fiction, and those lives are presented in a grounded 'anti-romantic' way.[213]

This sense of 'writ[ing] out of a historicised imagination' is scarcely expressed in 'The Art of Fiction': indeed, though James talks of realism as affording the writer access to 'all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision', in practice James's vision seems largely restricted to 'the clink of teaspoons and the accent of the curate', in the words of Stevenson's estimation of realism.[214] But, as Morris remarks, Victorian writers in the English tradition (among whom James must be included, despite his American origins), while 'articulat[ing] a less explicit sense of

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[209] Marianne De Koven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 52, 92.
[210] Morris, p. 79.
[211] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 491.
[212] George Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, trans. by Edith Bone (New York, NY: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), pp. 85-87.
[213] Lukács, pp. 93-94.
[214] Morris, p. 79; James, 'The Art of Fiction' in Janet Adam Smith, pp. 53-85 (pp. 76); Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance' in *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), pp. 247-274 (p. 258).

history than writers like Stendhal and Balzac' instead 'represent social forces of change at deeper structural levels or by means of symbolism and imagery'.[215]

This is the same phenomenon noted by Alison Byerly, who describes how 'the rise of realism in nineteenth-century British literature and art shows how highly Victorians valued art's mimetic capacity', then suggests that 'the Victorians also saw how art could be turned from a reflection of reality into a substitute for reality; it could act as either a powerful diagnostic tool or as a placebo'.[216] The symbolic representation of social change made by these writers can, then, just as often be an evasion of the realities of Victorian life as it can be a confrontation of them.

Still more suggestively to the present purpose, this blurring between strict mimesis and symbolic representation may indicate that there is far less of a sharp dichotomy between realism and romance in the continental traditions, as well as why this should be the case: Stevenson defines the historical narrative and the war story as intrinsically belonging to the romance mode. If Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, then, can be at once a romance and a foundational work of realism, the distinction between the two forms is scarcely sustainable.

This, however, perhaps suggests a level of superficiality which neither party brought to what has come to be known as the 'Art of Fiction' debate. This was an epistolary discussion between Henry James and Stevenson on the relative merits and qualities of the literary modes of realism and romance, published in the pages of *Longman's Magazine* in 1882.[217] The initial prompt for this exchange was the publication of a transcription of a lecture given by Walter Besant in which he advanced the proposition that 'Fiction [should be considered] as one of the Fine Arts'.[218]As one of the earliest systematic developments of the theory of the novel, Besant's formulation of 'the general laws' of the form and function of fiction struck a receptive note in Henry James.[219] The response he framed was, as Julia Reid observes, 'a nuanced defence of literary realism, of novels which attempted to

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[215] Morris, p. 79.

[216] Alison Byerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1-2.

[217] The correspondence is reproduced in full in Janet Adam Smith, *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948); Glenda Norquay, 'The Art of Fiction: Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson' in Thomas Hubberd, *Critical Insights: Henry James* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2016), pp. 141-154 (p. 141).

[218] Walter Besant, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1884), p. 3.

[219] Besant, p. 3.

produce "the illusion of life"'.[220] This response invited another in return, this time from Robert Louis Stevenson. Where James advocated for fiction as being the accumulation of precision of detail, Stevenson suggests in his 'Humble Remonstrance' that fiction should not be principally concerned with such mimesis. He writes:

> The whole secret is that no art does "compete with life". Man's one method, whether he reasons or creates, is to half-shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality. The arts, like arithmetic and geometry, turn away their eyes from the gross, coloured and mobile nature at our feet, and regard instead a certain figmentary abstraction.[221]

Frank Swinnerton, in detailing the terms of the debate between James and Stevenson summarises the distinction thus:

> [Realism] must not be regarded as describing here an accumulation of detail or a preference for unpleasant subjects […] Realism, as the word is here used, is applied only to work in which the author's invention and imagination have been strictly disciplined by experience and judgement, and in which his direct aim has been precision rather than the attainment of broad effects.[222]

Realism, then, is contrasted to romance principally in terms of its focus: detail contrasted to scope. For all that, this framing of the debate could be argued as placing romance as a reaction to, or even as a simplification of other narrative forms. To correct this potential imbalance, the romance must be considered in its own right as a new form emergent in a particular social milieu.

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[220] Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science and the* Fin de Siècle (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 18.
[221] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), pp. 275-299 (p.283).
[222] Frank Swinnerton, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1914), p. 147.

4.3 The Reaction of Romance

If realism, and the new philosophies of materialism which undergirded it, was the dominant zeitgeist of the mid-Victorian period, Stevenson is at risk of being seen as at best out of step with his time, and at worst as a reactionary retreating into an historical past to evade the social realities of his own time.[223]

In reality, however, romance was every bit as dependent on new and specific social and scientific contexts as realism. The romance, with its themes of adventure, wonder and exploration, rather than being a reaction or backlash against the constrained material norms of Victorian life was responding vigorously to new trends which had come to underpin both public and private life in the late nineteenth century. Bruce Mazlish, in his study of the popular forms of fiction which characterise this period, provides an important context for understanding the romance fiction of Stevenson's period. Mazlis identifies imperialism, new understandings of the subconscious and the spread of romantic nationalism as vital backgrounds to the growth of the popularity of the romance.[224] Nevertheless, while each of these phenomena saw parallel growth at the same time as the explosion in popularity of the romance, it is not possible to link these in a narrowly causal way.[225] As Patrick Brantlinger notes, 'the cause[s] of the upsurge in romance writing toward the end of the century are numerous, complex, and often the same as those of the upsurge of occultism', suggesting there are elements which are emerging from, and feeding into, a resistive response to what has already been represented as the Victorian norm. Indeed, Brantlinger continues by saying that 'the new romanticism in fiction is frequently explained by its advocates [amongst whom Stevenson is included] as a reaction against scientific materialism as embodied in "realistic" or "naturalistic" narratives'.[226]

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[223] An implication already being made in the early period of Stevenson's career: see William Archer, 'Robert Louis Stevenson: His Style and His Thought', *Time*, November 1885, 581-591 (p. 587).
[224] See Bruce Mazlish, 'A Triptych: Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Rider Haggard's *She,* and Bulwer-Lytoon's *The Coming Race*', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 35 no 4, October 1995, 726-745 (pp. 740-742).
[225] Though consideration of these factors, especially imperial expansion, will be made later in this thesis.
[226] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 231.

Whichever way we choose to interpret it, the new romance emerged from either the mainstream or the counterculture of a specific Victorian context, and came to play, as Nicholas Daly states, 'an important part in British culture'.[227] Significantly, Daly sees the contribution here made as being the formulation of a 'narrative theory of social change', which is to say, the way that popular audiences can be understood in terms of the narratives they engage with and rely, and how those same narratives are used to articulate the changes they experience in their own lives.[228] The romance, that is, rather than being reactionary, is laden with reformative or even revolutionary potential.

Stevenson's part in this is closely tied to the theories of his writing expressed in 'A Humble Remonstrance' and his other essays on writing. Peter Keating, in commenting on 'the attractiveness of Stevenson' as a writer notes his 'possession of two highly-developed qualities which are rarely found together: he was an aesthete and a writer of exciting stories'.[229] That these two qualities are not necessarily disparate or mutually exclusive was not appreciated by some of the earliest advocates of Stevenson's work. The tension between these two factors and the assumption of their irreconcilability is seen in much of the early attempts to control Stevenson's posthumous reception. The author's advocates frequently oscillate between favouring one or the other, struggling to decide where the emphasis should lie. Thus, to take one representative example, Fanny Stevenson at times emphasised Stevenson's 'serious' writing while belittling his adventure fiction (see for example, the diffident and disobliging way she describes both *The New Arabian Nights* and *The Black Arrow* in her notes to the *Biographical Edition* (1905), and at other times expresses frustration with Stevenson's attempts to write in a more profound register rather than in a popularly accessible way (see, for instance, the discussion of *In the South Seas* in Chapter Two).[230]

Against this, though, stands Keating's claim that 'in an age which was becoming obsessed with the need to separate Art from Entertainment, Stevenson

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[227] Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the* Fin de Siècle*: Popular Fiction and British Culture 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 5.
[228] Daly, p. 5.
[229] Keating, p. 347.
[230] Fanny Stevenson, 'Preface to the Biographical Edition' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *New Arabian Nights* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), pp. v-ix; Fanny Stevenson, 'Preface to the Biographical Edition' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Black Arrow: A Tale of the Two Roses* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp. v-xii.

spoke and acted on behalf of both'.[231] The crux of Stevenson's claim, already quoted, that 'man's one method, whether he reasons or creates, is to half shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality' is that this is the 'source of [art's] power': 'Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant' and 'the novel […] is a work of art [which] exists, not by its resemblances to life […] but by its immeasurable difference from life'.[232] Fiction, that is to say, to Stevenson is a truly creative, rather than imitative form: it produces new realities rather than emulating existing ones.

In a perceptive analysis, Kenneth Graham notes this element of the author's work, remarking that Stevenson 'would seem to belong, and belong quite ostentatiously, to the Idealist camp'.[233] Graham links this explicitly to James, 'the cautious realist of "The Art of Fiction"', who gestures towards idealism as a defence against the unconstrained frankness of Zola's more earthy form of realism, Naturalism.[234] But Stevenson's idealism is 'more whole-hearted' and 'more clear' than that of James.[235]

Graham was not the only commentator to make this link: a similar sentiment, expressed in Margaret Moyes Black's notoriously coy and inaccurate biography of Stevenson, more clearly highlights a distinction which led some to prize romance as a superior mode. 'In an age', Moyes Black writes, 'when a realism so strong as to be unpleasant has tinged too much of latter-day fiction Mr Stevenson stood altogether apart from the school of the realists'.[236] Here we have the heart of the matter: the equation between naturalism and the more moderate Victorian realism which James tried to disassociate from it had, to a section of the reading public, been made absolute. Furthermore, realism was coming to be seen as a suspect genre: public concern over the content of realist fiction, especially that of translated French authors, rapidly inflated in the 1880s to a full scale moral panic.[237] This is well

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[231] Keating, p. 347.

[232] Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance' in J. A. Smith, ed, pp. 91, 93.

[233] Kenneth Graham, 'Stevenson and Henry James: A Crossing' in Andrew Noble, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Vision Press, 1983), pp. 23-46 (p. 29).

[234] Graham in Andrew Noble, ed., p. 29.

[235] Graham in Andrew Noble, ed., p. 29.

[236] Margaret Moyes Black, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), p. 90.

[237] George J. Becker, 'Pernicious Literature' in George J. Becker, ed., *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 350-351; cf. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972).

illustrated by the Vizetelly Trial of 1888, which saw the British publisher of Emile Zola's fiction successfully prosecuted for obscenity, and by the rise of the 'Vigilance Association' and its emulators, which sought to police and suppress fiction they took to be 'morally corrupting'.[238]

Stevenson was secure from this damning association, for if, as Keating observes, 'the experimental range of his work worried his admirers, there was still at the heart of it *Treasure Island, Kidnapped, The Black Arrow* and *The Master of Ballantrae*. They were the perfect antidote to naturalism'.[239] This, of course, did much to harm the reputation of Stevenson when the Modernist generation rose in outrage against the dominion of Mrs Grundy, that most emblematic of moral critics.[240] One of the voices which joined the chorus of attacks against the 'pretence' and 'tedious virtuosity' of romance in general, and Stevenson in particular, was E. M. Forster, who railed against *Treasure Island* as an 'insincerity', unknowingly echoing the terms of the 'Art of Fiction' debate.[241] The irony is, however, that elsewhere Forster praises the 'fantastic-prophetical' which 'compels us to an adjustment' to accept 'something that could not occur'.[242] This, arguably, is exactly the aim that Stevenson envisages for the romance in 'A Humble Remonstrance' and 'A Gossip on Romance': the envisaging of another possible society in another place or time. This is the thrust behind Stevenson's description of 'voyaging further afield than [the] home-keeping fancy liked to travel', and in the suggestion of the elliptical, the sense that there is a deeper sense to be found behind quotidian things; as he puts it that 'so it is with names and faces, so it is with incidents that are idle and inconclusive in themselves, and yet seem like the beginning of some quaint romance, which the all-careless author leaves untold'.[243] It was this element of romance as

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[238] Clarence R. Decker, *The Victorian Conscience* (New York, NY: Twain Publishers, 1953), pp. 93-98.

[239] Keating, p. 347.

[240] 'Mrs. Grundy' was originally a censorious character in Thomas Morton's 1757 play *Speed the Plow*. Her figurative use as repressive moral critic was well established by as early as the 1850s: see Peter Fryer, *Mrs. Grundy: Studies in English Prudery* (London: Dobson, 1963), pp. 15-19, 257 and *passim.* She is not infrequently referred to by Stevenson, appearing even in his published poetry: see Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Hail! Childish Slaves of Social Rules' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Collected Poems of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Roger C. Lewis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 318-319, l. 14.

[241] Forster, p. 163.

[242] Forster, p. 103.

[243] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribners's Sons, 1895), pp. 247-274 (pp. 248, 253-254).

infinite potential which developed into the still more adventurous fields of speculative fiction – 'scientific romance', to use the term first applied to such works.[244]

It is telling, then, that the most significant proponent of that genre, H. G. Wells, like Stevenson before him, as Keating notes, 'took public issue with Henry James's claim that "art competes with life"; 'unlike Wells', however, Stevenson 'did not call for fiction to involve itself directly in life, or for it to reflect the chaotic unorganised quality of life'.[245] In contrast, Stevenson has a belief in what Keating terms 'organicism'; that is, in the 'well-written novel' as a unified and contained object, 'echo[ing] and re[echoing] its one creative and controlling thought'.[246]

The effect of this iteration of the purpose of the book is, ideally, to absorb the reader entirely in the novel: 'we should gloat over a book', Stevenson writes, 'be rapt clean out of ourselves and rise from the perusal, our minds filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images'.[247] Reid recognises the same standards in 'A Humble Remonstrance', observing that

> Stevenson's essay overturn[s] the hierarchy between intellectual and sensual literature, suggesting that the romance was just as valuable as the 'novel of character'. His celebration of novels which appealed to the "sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man" was partly a strategic move of self-defence against James's criticism of *Treasure Island*, but also indicated a revaluation of unconscious dreams and desires.[248]

It is in this that Stevenson provided romance's most significant contribution to the changing literary culture which was moving away from the 'deadened' forms

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[244] Brian Stableford, *Scientific Romance in Britain 1890-1950* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), p. 9 *et passim*.
[245] Keating, p. 347.
[246] Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance' in J. A. Smith, ed, p. 92.
[247] Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance' in Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits,* p. 247.
[248] Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science and the* Fin de Siècle (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 18.

of naturalism.[249] The paradigm shift affected by Stevenson in which the submerged elements of a person, the 'illogical tendencies' and 'unconscious dreams and desires' become a valid basis for cultural exploration would prove to be fertile ground. If it can be agreed that 'Stevenson casts romance as a cultural curative, the restorative for a modernity whose sickness stems from its repressed instinctual life', then a strong link to Freud's theories of primal repression emerges.[250] Likewise, if as Daly has it, 'the romance as Stevenson theorises it is an attempt to move away from the contemplative pleasures of contemporary realism in order to recapture the immersive reading experience of childhood' and 'offer us a thoroughgoing holiday from our own intellectual nature, from the very limits indeed of our own subjectivity', the work of Jung on the collective conscious is prefigured.[251] That is to say, romance is here posited as a modern form, precisely because it responds negatively, or, at least, counter-vailingly, to modernity. Romance is a reactive cultural production which responds to the specific environment of modernity by attempting to formulate an alternative to its reality, a reshaping or evasion of the brute realities and pressures of a contemporary industrialised society.

This, of course, is not to suggest that Stevenson was consciously so visionary in his estimation of the potentials of the romance form. Rather, he recognised that 'idealism' had distinct limits. As such, though he claims that 'the immediate danger of the realist is to sacrifice the beauty and significance of the whole to local dexterity, or, in the insane pursuit of completion, to immolate his readers under facts', he equally recognises that 'the danger of the idealist is […] to become merely null and lose all grip of fact, particularity, or passion'.[252] It is telling that these lines were written at the same time as Stevenson was wrestling with perhaps his least convincing novel, *Prince Otto* (1885). Claire Harman describes the novel as being 'regarded with something like embarrassment by Stevenson's apologists'; be that as it may, it was certainly regarded with embarrassment by Stevenson.[253] A

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[249] Jenni Calder, 'Introduction: Stevenson in Perspective' in *Stevenson and Victorian Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), pp. 1-10 (p. 4).
[250] Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science and the* Fin de Siècle (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 24.
[251] Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the* Fin de Siècle*: Popular Fiction and British Culture 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 18.
[252] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Note on Realism' in *The Art of Writing and Other Essays* (London: Cassell and Company, 1884), pp. 24-28 (p. 28).
[253] Harman, p. 247.

contemporary review described it (to Stevenson's chagrin) as a 'Gilbert comedy', and it does, indeed, recall the work of W. S. Gilbert, albeit with a noticeable lack of lightness and effect.[254] It is the story of the ruler of the distinctly Ruritanian principality of Grünewald, whose general ineffectualness leads to dissent in his subjects and disloyalty in his wife. The general sequence of improbable events grow more convoluted and increasingly inconsequential. Stevenson's frustration with the novel's failure was greatly compounded by the unusual level of effort he put in to it: while he recognised that 'the big effort, instead of being the masterpiece, may be the blotted copy' he still had the confidence in the same letter, written the year before its publication, to call it 'my chief o' works'.[255] Fanny Stevenson describes the novel as 'fantastic and artificial to a [high] degree', and Stevenson himself recognises this quality.[256] The novel is self-described in its subtitle as 'A Romance'. Stevenson nonetheless considered the book as being infected with touches of realism; it is, he wrote, 'semi-reasonable' with the 'people more developed' and 'the action, if there ever had been such a State of Grünewald [,] might have taken place'.[257]

To Stevenson, *Prince Otto* perfectly illustrates 'the difficulty of being ideal in an age of realism'.[258] For Stevenson 'the unpleasant giddy-mindedness, which spoils the book and often gives it an air of wanton unreality and juggling with air-bells', far from being in the divorce from reality, instead comes 'from the too great realism of some chapters and passages […] which disprepares the imagination for the cast of the remainder'.[259]

Stevenson, then, far from being the best example of the romance as a style fundamentally opposed to realism, was advocating a synthesis of the two, seeing them as mutually informing and benefiting each other. This further contributes to one of the strands of this thesis's central argument, that romance does not exist in opposition to realism (or, later, Modernism), but instead there is a symbiotic dependency between them. The work of later commentators on Stevenson to simplify his work, and dissever these interconnecting forms, obscures this, and is a

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[254] 'Letter: To Edmund Gosse, 2 January 1886'.
[255] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, 9 March 1884'.
[256] Fanny Stevenson, 'Preface to the Biographical Edition' in *Prince Otto: A Romance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp. v-xii (p. v.).
[257] 'Letter: To W. E. Henley, early May 1883'.
[258] 'Letter: To Charles Warren Stoddard, February 1886'.
[259] 'Letter: To Charles Warren Stoddard, February 1886'.

factor in later critical deprecation of his writing. 'A Gossip on Romance' contains a description of *Robinson Crusoe* which notes that it 'is as realistic as it is romantic'.[260] It is this faith that 'true romantic art […] reaches into the highest abstraction of the ideal' and yet also 'does not refuse the most pedestrian realism' which informs his own particular style in fiction, distinguishing it from the more naïve forms of romance which arose in response to his earlier work, particularly the explicitly derivative works of H. Rider Haggard.[261] This will be discussed further in chapter 8, where it will be related to Stevenson's subversion of these emergent tropes of romance fiction in his later work.

4.4 False Dichotomies: The Realism in Romance

Stevenson had developed his idea that 'all representative art, which can be said to live, is both realistic and ideal; and the realism about which we quarrel is a matter purely of externals' a year before his supposed dispute with James on the subject in 1884.[262] 'This question of realism', as Stevenson elaborates, is 'not in the least degree the fundamental truth, but only the technical method, of a work of art. Be as ideal or as abstract as you please, you will be none the less veracious'.[263]

This broader idea of truth was a key element of Stevenson's work, and vital to understanding the distinction he made between realism and romance. As Jenni Calder observes, Stevenson 'had no interest, or for a long time thought he had not, in a Zolaesque accurate recording of reality, but the nature of reality is nevertheless fundamental to his writing'. [264]

Rather than representing an untempered form, the romance in direct and antithetical opposition to the realist novel, Stevenson, particularly in his later narratives, writes a deceptive blend, which despite showing the strong colouring and 'exotic' locations of romance is increasingly contaminated by realist and even naturalist tropes. These are employed in the pursuit of a greater artistic or moral 'Truth'. So, for example, as Oliver Buckton makes clear, much of the minatory

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[260] Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', p. 264.
[261] See sections 4.7 and 4.8.
[262] Stevenson, 'A Note on Realism', p. 23.
[263] Stevenson, 'A Note on Realism', p. 24.
[264] Jenni Calder, 'Introduction: Stevenson in Perspective' in *Stevenson and Victorian Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), pp. 1-10 (p. 7).

atmosphere which underpins the allegorical impact of *The Ebb-Tide* depends upon a forensic focus upon squalor and the kind of sensational details of violence that Stevenson once found so distasteful in Zola, to whose work he explicitly compared it.[265] However, Buckton's argument could be extended to encompass a wider range of Stevenson's fiction. Indeed the emphasis on physicality and discomfort is a remarkable presence in all of Stevenson's romance fiction. A fine instance is the 'flight in the heather' episode in *Kidnapped* which vividly conveys the 'tediousness and pain' which Alan Breck Stewart and David Balfour suffer; a marked emphasis on privation which contrasts sharply with the tendency of romance fiction to sanitise and make anodyne the consequences of the violence and exertion so central to its plots.[266] Indeed, to one anonymous contemporary reviewer, this 'distressing aspect' made the novel fitter to be compared to *Anna Karenina* than to a typical romance.[267]

This argument can be extended farther still to encompass even *Treasure Island.* For all that a century of adaptation and familiarity has defanged it, Stevenson's first adventure novel is strikingly dark in its depiction of force. As Phillip Stevenson notes, there is a current of 'violence inherent in the conventional Romance', irrupting at various points throughout the narrative of *Treasure Island.*[268] Phillip Stevenson emphasises what might be termed the disenchantment that occurs at such points: the breaking down of the ambiguity of the romantic image with the stark reality as Jim Hawkins (and the reader for whom he is proxy) encounters 'the reality of murder at sea, the terrible truth that lurks behind the patina of Romance'.[269] This is echoed, too, by Julia Reid in her statement that 'Stevenson increasingly sensed that the energies unleashed by romance might be destructive rather than invigorating'.[270] It is this 'rejecti[on] of the idea that the cult of heroic manliness might rejuvenate an ailing modernity' which culminates in *The Ebb-Tide*,

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[265] Oliver S. Buckton, *Cruising With Robert Louis Stevenson: Travel, Narrative and the Colonial Body* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007), p. 269.

[266] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1921), p. 192; see 'An Unsigned Review, *Saturday Review*, 7 August 1886' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 237-240 (p. 239).

[267] 'An Unsigned Review' in Maixner, ed., pp. 237-240 (p. 239).

[268] Phillip Stevenson, '"Mine Was a Peculiar Kind of Wreck": Rober Louis Stevenson's Deconstruction of *Treasure Island* in *The Wrecker*', *DQR Studies in Literature*, Vol. 57 (2015), 47-60 (p. 47).

[269] Phillip Stevenson, p. 52.

[270] Reid, p. 10.

Stevenson's most radical re-writing of the romance'.[271] That is to say, what Reid terms 'the rejection of romance' in Stevenson's earlier fiction, leads '*The Ebb-Tide* [to] move beyond romance' to embrace 'new literary modes including a naturalistic realism'.[272] In doing this 'it undertakes a radical politicisation of the Romance genre, as it identifies adventure's primitive energies with the brutal imperialist creed of heroic masculinity'.[273] This suggests that Stevenson, far from being unreflective and championing the prevailing values of his era, was rather using the dominant literary mode of his time – a mode which he greatly contributed to defining – in order to subvert narratives of masculine over-mastery.

4.5 Romance in the Age of Empire

Perhaps the most striking conclusion Stevenson draws from his debate over the relative merits of romance and realism lies in his conclusion that 'the whole secret' of an art is that 'it does not compete with life'; it is not representative, does not mimetically recreate reality.[274] Art, rather, is a means to evade that reality, or to control and reframe it. 'Whether he reasons or creates', as Stevenson puts it, 'man's one method […] is to half-shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality'.[275] By this estimation, then, to write is to recreate reality selectively – and this selectivity has interesting ramifications when considering the context in which Stevenson wrote. By observing which facts the author of late nineteenth-century romance 'half-shuts' his eyes to, the next sections will consider the phenomenon of the imperial romance, a form of the wider genre which makes an adventure of the mechanisms of colonial expropriation. It will be suggested that the selective representation of the imperial reality in these texts affected a cultural environment in which the dominant narratives of empire were reiterated, and the possibility of framing an alternative view impeded.

The period at which Stevenson was writing saw imperial romance flourish, with new examples produced in abundance and older works in the form kept in print

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[271] Reid, p. 10.
[272] Reid, p. 10.
[273] Reid, p. 53.
[274] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), pp. 275-299 (p. 282).
[275] Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', p. 283.

and in popular regard. These works uniformly valoursied and idealised the imperial project, sanitising violence and bowdlerising the brutal realities of colonial expansion. Examples range from the fantasies of H. Rider Haggard, with their descriptions of violent penetration into hidden kingdoms in the heart of Africa (for example, *She* (1887), *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *Allan Quatermain* (1887)), to more grounded, but often equally violent narratives based on the lives of famous missionaries and imperial conquerors (for example, W. H. G. Kingston's *Travels of Dr. Livingstone* (1886), G. A. Henty's *With Clive in India: The Beginnings of an Empire* (1884)). This next sections will provide a survey of imperial romance fiction in order to characterise their salient features, and to contextualise the argument which will be made later in this thesis: namely, that Stevenson repurposed this genre and inverted it into a means to critique imperialism through the framing of explicitly anti-colonial narratives in a way that would prefigure Modernist works which subverted the imperial worldview. Understanding the manner in which 'empire writing' generated a monoculture which, as Ellke Boehmer notes, was 'powerful and pervasive' in how it colonised the mentalities and the perception even of the coloniser allows an appreciation of the difficulties of articulating representations which resist its construction of the world; it shows, in Boehmer's words, 'what anti-colonial literary resistance was up against'.[276] The romance, whose popularity Stevenson did so much to increase, became compromised in this period, a means to proselytise racial hierarchy and nationalistic chauvinism.

4.6 Nostalgia and Decadence: Convention in the Imperial Romance

'Fictional romance', as Wendy Katz observes, 'prefers the past to the present' and 'foregoes the prosaic for the wonderful'.[277] It 'favours […] striking and colourful contrast to the ordinary routine'.[278] As Linda Dryden notes, in the perception of the British readership of Victorian imperial romance these contrasts could be found in the open, expansive and 'primitive' territories of 'the exotic lands

[276] Elleke Boehmer, 'Introduction' in Elleke Boehmer, *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. xv-xxxvi (p. xxxv).
[277] Wendy Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire: A Critical Study of British Imperial Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 30.
[278] Katz, p. 30.

of Africa, India or the Far East'.[279] The imperial romance combined this setting with a nostalgia for a lost national ideal which, it was implied when not directly suggested, was 'now endangered or lost completely', as Andrea White puts it.[280] The Empire becomes, in these narratives, a proving ground, a place where the British (read: English) could test themselves and prove that it is possible to halt the modern decay of manliness and virtue. This is achieved in a standardised and generic manner, with a young male hero being 'proved' through encounters in which his 'character' and his national superiority are demonstrated, principally through the application of dizzying levels of violence to the native population. Thus, G. A. Henty's novels typically culminate in his boy heroes being present at significant moments of conflict in colonial history – at the Siege of Seringapatam in *The Tiger of Mysore* (1895), on the punitive Nile Expedition in *The Dash for Khartoum* (1892) and in the Battle of the Boyne in *Orange and Green* (1888), while H. Rider Haggard's African stories typically end with genocidal levels of violence against an antagonist tribe, often by the subservient black proxy of the white protagonists – Umslopogaas 'holding the stair' for his European superiors in *Allan Quatermain* (1885) is a typical example.[281] This depiction of violence as means of effecting a resolution to events – a resolution which will inevitably benefit the interests of the colonial/colonising party – is a standard in romance of this period. It is a prime example of how the genre, in Peter Keating's description, '[placed] itself [...] abjectly at the service of dominant late Victorian domestic and imperial ideologies'.[282]

4.7 Rise of Popular Fiction and Imperial Society in the Late Nineteenth Century

As Wendy Katz observes, 'fictional romance prefers the past to the present, foregoes the prosaic for the wonderful, and appeals more to the senses than to the mind'.[283] It is a genre whose appeal lies in dynamism and in escapism. Distance from

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[279] Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 36.
[280] Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 62.
[281] H. Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain* (London: Capuchin Classics, 2009), pp. 290-303.
[282] Peter Keating, 'A Woven Tapestry of Interests' in Harold Bloom, ed., *Edwardian and Georgian Fiction* (Philadelphia, PA: Chelsea House, 2005), pp. 181-216 (p. 204).
[283] Wendy Katz, p. 30.

the quotidian, both in terms of events and location, are key to its effect. It is this that is central to Stevenson's characterisation of 'fiction [as being] to the grown man what play is to the child': it should be engrossing, concerned more with 'a certain kind of incident' than with 'eloquence and thought, character and conversation'; these are 'but obstacles to brush aside' in pursuit of 'the brute incident'.[284] Stevenson dignifies this quality by suggesting that this combination of 'situation […] animated with passion' is the foundation of the epic.[285] In rooting the contemporary romance in ancient forms, Stevenson burnishes a maligned genre with the reflected glory of the key texts of classicism, valourised in his period as 'the highest art'.[286]

At a time in which realism was coming into the ascendant, Stevenson and his fellow 'romancers' resisted the idea that fiction's proper concern was with the sober mimesis of 'real life'. Such real life was, to the newly literate labouring classes and city clerks of the late Victorian period, one which warranted escaping. H. Rider Haggard, a major proponent of the form, highlights this in a reflection on his readership, writing of 'a weary public continually [calling] for books, new books to make them forget, to refresh them, to occupy minds jaded with the toil and emptiness and vexation of our competitive existence'.[287] This emphasis on 'competitive existence' indicates a further root for the impulse to read (and produce) romance; much of the fiction sought to idealise historical periods and historical values, at least as they were understood in the light of the biases of the Victorian period, reclaiming values of chivalry and moral certainty for a materialist age. In this can be seen the clearest indication that the romance form is grounded in the earlier mode of Romanticism: both show a concern with foundational value and with privileging the experience of the pastoral and the sublime over urban civilization. By this light, rather than Romanticism in literature dying out as the Industrial Revolution reached its peak, it can be argued instead that it first diminished and then returned in a popularised, demotic form as the romance. Romance, that is to say, is Romanticism assimilated to a mass culture in an imperial age.[288]

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[284] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance' in *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), pp. 247-274 (pp. 247-249).

[285] Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', p. 261.

[286] Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', p. 261.

[287] H .Rider Haggard, 'About fiction' in *The Contemporary Review*, vol LI (January-June 1887), 172-180 (p. 174).

[288] Note, too, the through line to 'romance' as it was understood in the pre-Romantic, early modern period, where it characterised narratives in verse on heroic themes: a frame of reference both for the

The romance, then, offered, in Katz' striking phrase, 'a reprieve from urban existence and the chance for a life of action'.[289] The empire was a zone of adventure, a place to escape the pollution and general degradation of contemporary life. This is vividly demonstrated by a passage at the end of Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* where the eponymous character ('an old Africa hand', as he describes himself) writes of the depredations of European modernity, from which the heart of Africa offers a refuge:

> I am convinced of the sacred duty that rests upon me of preserving to this […] people the blessings of comparative barbarism. […] I cannot see that gunpowder, telegraphs, steam, daily newspapers, universal suffrage, etc., etc., have made mankind one wit the happier than they used to be, and I am certain they have brought many evils in their train.[290]

This explicit valorisation of pre-modern society and 'undeveloped' nature against industrialisation indicates a further link between Romanticism and its popular inheritor, romance. The rhetoric here recalls similar missives decrying the expansion of technological development in Britain earlier in the century – as in Wordsworth's 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway':

> And must he too the ruthless change bemoan
> Who scorns a false utilitarian lure
> 'Mid his paternal fields at random thrown?
> [...]
> Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance
> Of nature.[291]

idealised individual of Romanticism and the modern questor of the imperial romance. See also R. R. Agrawal, *The Medieval Revival and its Influence on the Romantic Movement* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1990).

[289] Katz, p. 31.

[290] Haggard, p. 318.

[291] William Wordsworth, 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway' in William Wordsworth, *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1889), p. 78, ll. 6-8, 11-12.

Both modes share a concern for maintaining an originary or primal purity of nature: both, too, want that nature preserved as a concession for the use of the incomer – for Wordsworth, that his new home in the Lake District remains suitably romantically isolated, for the fictional Quatermain that Africa might remain a zone of rugged contrast to European modernity.

It is perhaps an irony that it was the very cultural ubiquity of Romanticism that had made the remote places of Britain no longer isolated and rugged – but crowded and overdeveloped: 'Marmion' made the Highland Line, and, if Grasmere had become, as Ruskin put it, 'a common thoroughfare' by the end of the century, it may well be put down to Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lake District* (his best-selling publication by a significant margin). With pristine nature lost to the mother country, it had to be looked for in the empire. As such, by the 1880s, romantic purity was to be found in the 'savage' lands of Africa or the South Seas. Travel to the imperial periphery was seen as a retreat to the past, not only in the stadialist interpretation which saw such cultures as 'behind' on a historical line of progression, but in terms of the romantic view of history which bemoaned a lost agrarian past. The perceived lack of development of colonised territories was thus presented as being a positive quality. The people of these lands, too, were seen as retaining a certain lost ideal of form and character. This was the age in which the faux-Rousseauan 'noble savage' was made a fetish of – as evident in the passive, idealised 'natives' of Haggard's fictional Zu-Vendis or – intermittently – in Stevenson's representations of the people of Polynesia, as will be discussed in chapter 7, section 4.

Romance is, as Richard Chase describes it, 'the penchant for the marvellous, the sensational, the legendary, and in general the heightened effect'.[292] To Chase, these are qualities which are often a means to evade or 'to falsify reality', contrasted with the 'intrepid and penetrating dialectic of action and meaning' found in the realist novel.[293] Nonetheless, Chase suggests that 'the very abstractness and profundity of romance allow it to formulate moral truths of universal validity' – a broad claim, using questionable terms, but one which suggests there are means by which the romance can mount a counter-claim to moral and artistic validity.[294] By

[292] Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), p. 21.
[293] Chase, pp. 21, x.
[294] Chase, p. xi.

contrast, by the close of the century – partly due to Stevenson' influence – the romance came to be seen as a medium particularly appropriate to inculcating a sense of moral responsibility and imperial duty in boys and young men. As Wendy Katz mordantly puts it, 'coincidentally, the search for "eternal principles" in primitive societies turns up results which, predictably, reinforce the need for imperial law and order'.[295]

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, adventure fiction had come, as John MacKenzie observes, to be a principal support for the valorization of imperialism and its related phenomenon of racial and national chauvinism.[296] This change coincided with – and, arguably, drove an unprecedented increase in the publication and consumption of fiction.[297] Stevenson was instrumental in fuelling the public desire for this form.

4.8 The Boundaries of Imperial Romance – Nation and its Narrative

As the nineteenth century developed, the preoccupations of romance with the interiorised horror of the gothic would come to be transmuted into new forms which developed the framing of the foreign as at once exotic and threatening. Saree Makdisi cites as an important context for this shift the contact with Britain's nascent empire in India.[298] The 'Other', by this contact 'The Orient', became the reference point for definitions of the national self, or, as Makdisi summarises his argument,

> Britain's imperial relationships compelled British writers to articulate what it was that made Britain different from its others […] this entailed the emergence of an altogether new, modern sense of British imperial and national subjectivity, a

[295] Katz, p. 32.
[296] John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 89.
[297] Keating, p. 3; Martin Green *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1980), pp. 220-221.
[298] Saree Makdisi, 'Romanticism and Empire' in Jon Klancher, ed., *A Concise Companion to the Romantic Age* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 36-56 (p. 45).

> sense of self that could be defined against the Asiatic others who were subjected to the empire.[299]

This transmutation affected genre, too, for while Makdisi claims that the colonial appropriation of India as symbolised by Macaulay's 'Minute on Indian Education' 'sound[ed] the death knell of Romanticism', it would, in fact, live on in new narratives and forms which expropriated the motifs of Romanticism out into a colonial context.[300] The form of imperial romance was as deeply bound up in the sense of nationhood and its conscious definition as its early nineteenth century predecessor. Here, however, the nation and its identity was defined in conflict with other cultures, its value indicated (it was thought) in its capacity to subdue the 'barbarian' and the foreigner.

Colonial encounter thus became a central engine for the production of fiction in the later nineteenth century, with imperial settings becoming a frequent, even typical, feature of writing of the period.[301]

The othering of the people encountered in these contacts was a grimly pragmatic necessity in the imperial project, a necessary precondition to justifying an intrusive presence. The imperial romance was instrumental in normalising such representations. Rana Kabbani states that imperial novels were filled with 'descriptions of distant lands peopled by fantastic beings […] as one dominant group became able to forge images of the "alien" by imposing its own self-perpetuating categories and deviations from the norm'.[302] By identifying how these authors represented empire, and the 'other' or 'alien,' it is possible to analyse the dominant ideologies of Imperialism; or as Lindy Stiebel says: 'to understand how a culture imagines its world, both 'home' and 'away,' one looks to its literature'.[303]

As Linda Dryden notes, 'in the imperial romances of the late nineteenth century the selection of ideas contained in the novels usually reflects current values,

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[299] Makdisi, pp. 43-44.
[300] Makdisi, p. 45.
[301] Shomik De, 'Colonialism and Victorian Literature (An Introspective Study)', *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, vol 6.1 (March 2018), 1485-1481 (pp. 1485-1486).
[302] Rana Kabani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (King's Lynn: Pandora, 1994), p. 3.
[303] Lindy Stiebel, *Imagining Africa: Landscape in H. Rider Haggard's African Romances* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 1.

and opinions about empire.[304] What is left out of the text is often omitted because it would undermine the imperial cause; this makes for a deeply conservative type of literature'.[305] 'The less palatable' elements of imperial reality are, as Dryden points out, the reality to which authors of imperial romance 'half shut [their] eyes'.[306] The publication of books set in the imperial zone but denatured of the brutalities of the colonial presence served to further nationalist mythologies which made of English activity a glorious and enlightened mission rather than a grubby expropriation of wealth. The colonised populations, when they are represented, are uniform and deindividuated, divisible into the placid and inert grateful subjects, and the low and sinister rebels. Racial superiority is implicitly sanctioned by both these representations, which frame the British conqueror as more capable and also more brave: the worthy inheritor of the fallow field of the occupied territory. Elleke Boehmer suggests how vital these 'prevailing representations of empire' were to how 'late nineteenth-century society grounded itself'.[307] The depictions of the gentlemanly adventurer of the imperial romance draw deeply from a romance tradition which predates the novel. The refined and aristocratic (or 'gentlemanly') hero of imperial romance is a temporally and geographically displaced knight errant, a Tristan or an Orlando, proving his moral superiority over those with whom he contests through superior martial prowess. As with the historical romances of the earlier part of the century, there is evidence here of a longing for a return to a pre-industrial and feudal age where 'character' and conflict define success, rather than financial pursuit. A prime instance of this can, again, be found in H. Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain*, which idealises the 'lost' African kingdom of Zu-Vendis. Sir Henry Curtis is the archetypal romance hero – tall, blonde, upper-class – 'altogether a magnificent specimen of the higher type of humanity', as Quatermain has it.[308] At the close of his adventures in Zu-Vendis, as already alluded to, he expresses the wish that it be preserved from 'the greed, drunkenness, new diseases, gunpowder, and general demoralisation which chiefly mark the progress of

[304] Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 35.
[305] Dryden, p. 35.
[306] Dryden, p. 35.
[307] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 43.
[308] H. Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain* (London:Capuchin Classics, 2006), p. 26.

civilization amongst unsophisticated peoples'.[309] The 'natives' of Zu Vendis – those few who remain after the events of the novel have left tens of thousands dead – are to be kept 'in the blessings of comparative barbarism' by shielding them from the advantages which first gave the Europeans technological ascendance – and thus power – over them.[310] This is the crux of the imperial romance formula: the 'Britain knows best' mentality, which simultaneously demeans and fetishises pre-industrial society. Said has described this tension in Western depictions of 'the east', the 'attraction of repulsion' which leads chauvinist cultures to simultaneously idealise and denigrate non-European nations.[311]

The construction of a mythical Africa, as in Haggard's fiction, was a comforting fantasy which smoothed a complex and, to most Victorian sensibilities, incomprehensible continent with a staggering plurality of cultures and societies into something primal, simple and containable. At the same time, it soothed anxieties over the complexities of British contemporaneity, offering the solace of what Jefferson Hunter describes as 'the promise of lost simplicities'.[312] This constitutes one of the myriad polarisations of the imperial romance; here, between the 'decadence' of civilization and the purity of 'savagery'. The genre is rife with racial polarisations between the noble colonialist and the brutish 'native' – rather belying the valorization of the primitive, of course – alongside similarly simplistic binaries of gender. Women are seldom present, and when they are, they tend to be passive or subservient, there to be protected by the masculine heroes, or to be in love with them.[313] These binaries depend upon different groups being defined in a reductive, almost archetypal manner. They can be taken to be another instance of the romance employing broad characterisation, as contrasted to the more nuanced and individuated representation of personalities in the realist novel. These are works, as Dryden puts it, of 'simple male loyalties and idealised love', of 'the white hero' and the 'noble savage'.[314] Stevenson for all his influence on the genre has less obvious

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[309] Haggard, p. 319.
[310] Haggard, p. 318.
[311] See Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995); Said, p. 186.
[312] Jefferson Hunter, *Edwardian Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 83.
[313] Examples abound, but R. M. Ballantyne's *The Gorilla Hunters* (1861) and G. A. Henty's *With Lee in Virginia* (1890) provide particularly striking examples of both dynamics.
[314] Dryden, pp. 39-40.

examples of this than the raft of latter day Man Fridays found in the works of Haggard and Henty. However, the relationship between David Balfour and Alan Breck Stewart can be read in terms of this paradigm, with a Highlander in his feudal mentality and disposition to violence being opposed to the mercantile lowland probity of the heir to the House of Shaws.

There is, too, in *Kidnapped* an instance of what might be termed the localisation of another phenomenon essential to the imperial romance, as described by Patrick Bratlinger:

> Like emigration narratives, adventure fiction is typically focused on the future: crossing frontiers and exploring new territories, the white heroes are pathfinders for the Empire and Civilisation. Almost always, civilisation is equated both with the supposed superiority of the white race and with colonisation by white settlers. Like James Fenimore Cooper's final Mohicans, indigenous peoples in most imperialist adventure fiction must give way to the white invaders of their territories. Though the 'dying savage' is often treated with sentimentality, his demise is typically viewed as inevitable and as making room for progress – that is, for civilisation on Western terms.[315]

This accords with the events and context of *Kidnapped*. Emigration indeed is explicit in this, witnessed in the scene of the departure of the emigrant boat which Balfour sees. But *Kidnapped,* too, is also an account of these 'pathfinders for empire': the redcoats are the colonisers of the lowlands and of England, moving in to occupy a depopulated Highlands. The dying savages of this atypical imperial romance are the Gaels with their pre-mercantile loyalty-based culture. Just as the soldiers of the Raj followed the British Missionary Society in India, so in eighteenth century Scotland did 'the bishops come in with the

[315] Patrick Brantlinger, *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 30.

dragoons at the back of them', as the saying goes. The reflection of nineteenth-century imperial expansion in fictions of the British (domestic) eighteenth century is suggestive in understanding the way in which romance, as Stevenson wrote it, could subvert dominant images of empire – by situating the imperial expansion, with its con-commitent 'othering' of a racialised subject at home, the potential arises for a native reader to identify with the colonised subject across cultures.

4.9 Imperial Romance and Fantasies of Male Power

As central to the genre of romance in its late-Victorian form as racial othering was, it can often obscure a subsidiary and related repression that is often at work in its narrative (and even paratextual) structures. Elaine Showalter argues that this adventure fiction was an explicitly (and oppositionally) male form: 'The revival of "romance" in the 1880s was a men's literary revolution intended to reclaim the kingdom of the English novel for male writers, male readers, and men's stories'.[316]

Julia Reid's paraphrase of Showalter states this far more starkly: she claims that 'the romance revival was rooted in misogyny'.[317] If this is so, it was largely in terms of exclusion and erasure rather than overt hostility: as a male form produced in a period of overt censorship of depictions of sexuality (see above), the 'boy's own' story necessarily tended to centre fictions of contest and power over fantasies of sexual conquest. This was central to accounting for the lamentable absence of developed female characters in Stevenson's own adventure fiction. In the instance of *Treasure Island,* he can plead his claim that it was written to the demands of his step-son, the twelve-year-old Lloyd Osbourne, whose demands were 'women were[to be] excluded'.[318] The same constraint was, however, absent in his later fiction, yet women remain conspicuous by their absence.[319]

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[316] Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the* Fin de Siècle (London: Virago, 1992), p. 79.
[317] Reid, p. 31; see Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the* Fin de Siècle (London: Virago, 1992), pp. 80-82.
[318] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'My First Book: *Treasure Island*', *McClure's Magazine*, vol 3, no 4 (September 1894), 283-293 (p. 287).
[319] A criticism dating back to some of the earliest responses to Stevenson's work: see Paul Maixner, 'Introduction' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 1-46 (p. 36).

As Daly observes, the way that the notion that 'romance is a gendered genre' was determined in the Victorian period is significant: 'pervasive in the critical accounts is the assumption that the romance is a more healthily masculine form than the realist novel'.[320] This was deeply connected to the 'contemporary discourses of degeneration' which saw the British as in a process of atavistic decay, rapidly declining from its physical apex due to its separation from a life of hardy endurance and conflict.[321] This decline was described in terms of 'emasculation' and 'feminisation', with the hardy and bloody past of the race being contrastingly manly. As such, *Treasure Island* displays a 'clearly […] violent and aggressively masculine fantasy' in its quest narrative, as may equally be said of all of Stevenson's early romance fiction.[322] As such Stevenson's description of the 'universal' fantasies which his romance is said to satisfy, the idea that every child has 'imbrued its little hands in gore, and […] triumphantly protected innocence and beauty' is, as Reid notes, 'unmistakably gendered'.[323] These fantasies can scarcely, then, be said to be 'universal': rather, they reinforce a specifically masculine culture: indeed, a masculine culture specific to the cultural presuppositions and prejudices of its particular time and place. The romance, here, becomes an engine for reinforcing and reiterating performative masculinities which both encourage imperial endeavour (as will be described below) and reinforce domestic hierarchies of gender.

This last is an element doubtlessly strongly linked to Stevenson's well-known and early identified aversion to representing female characters.[324] However, to Stevenson himself the potential issue with representations of gender lay not in his adherence to romance convention, but in the fact that he intruded realism into it. As he wrote to Sidney Colvin, 'with all my romance, I am a realist and a prosaist, and a most fanatical lover of plain physical sensations plainly and expressly rendered'.[325] It is in realism that is 'peril': 'were I to do love in the same spirit as I did (for instance) D. Balfour's fatigue in the heather; my dear sir, there were grossness ready

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[320] Daly, p. 18.
[321] Daly, p. 18.
[322] Reid, p. 35.
[323] Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', p. 94; Reid, p. 35.
[324] A fact, indeed, recognised and excused by Henry James: see Henry James, 'Robert Louis Stevenson' in Janet Adam-Smith, ed., *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), pp. 123-160 (p. 127).
[325] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, 1 May 1892'.

made!'.[326] Stevenson, then, rather than blithely reinforcing romance ideals, was carefully navigating the appropriate boundaries of his realism, investigating how far his realist precision could proceed, while being distinctly aware of the context of his literary milieu, policed and determined by the standards of Mrs Grundy.

4.10 Towards New Forms

In the words of Peter Faulkner, 'divergent and often conflicting ideas about art and culture are characteristic of the end of the nineteenth century'.[327] The debate between Stevenson and James on the nature of fiction was integral to the development of this new phase of literary self-consciousness which was to bloom into the myriad new movements and forms which characterised the *fin de siècle* and later the Modernist period. Moreover, the debate already shows forth the polysemous definitions of the Modernist method by being far more reciprocal and indeterminate than is often supposed. As Caroline McCracken-Flesher puts it, 'critical tradition has preferred to read Stevenson through binaries derived from his debate with James, yet neither James nor he reductively privileged either romance or realism'.[328] Instead, both authors favour a synthesis between the objective and the mediated, the empirical and the emotional, which would become the core *weltanschauung* of literary Modernism.

As such, the increasing inflection of realism into Stevenson's romances, shows, in Reid's words a 'transition from dreams of adventure to disenchantment' as 'the meaning which he attributes to the romance genre shifts' and 'adventure becomes increasingly dystopic, and a much more politicised reality begins to emerge'.[329] In other words, 'Romance was […] becoming for some a more serious literary form'.[330] The emergence of 'a far more complex literary form' from a genre which had once found its most suitable place for publication in the boy's story papers of the middle of the century is a significant development, and one aided by

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[326] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, 1 May 1892'.
[327] Peter Faulkner, *Modernism* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 5-6.
[328] Caroline McCracken –Flesher, 'Literary Criticism' in Caroline McCracken–Flesher, ed., *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2013), pp. 3-7 (p. 5).
[329] Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science and the* Fin de Siècle (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 43.
[330] Dryden, p. 24.

the willingness of Stevenson to both take the form seriously, and to defend it vigorously in the public sphere. It was this advocacy, and the development of the form which it allowed, that led to 'rise of [the] new romance' in the late nineteenth century, with a concomitant decline in the popularity of the realist novel.[331] The presence of the 'politicised reality' in this new variety of romantic fiction was inherited by key proto-Modernist and Modernist writers, most obviously Conrad, whose indebtedness to *The Ebb-Tide* has been well documented.[332]

If this can be seen as an instance of the dissociation of 'the arts […] from nineteenth-century assumptions' which is, in Reid's words, part of the 'historical process' of Modernism, so too is the modulation of realism, a recognition and rejection of Zola's notion of 'scientific' fiction, with its pretensions to empirical objectivity.[333] The alteration of James's style from such works as *A Portrait of a Lady* (1881) to the ambiguously supernatural and intensely subjective *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) perhaps represents a parallel to the modification of Stevenson's fiction as his career progressed. Arguably, the origin of this alteration lay in the 'Art of Fiction' debate: there is a significant fact that James's 1888 revision of his original article removes the statement that art should 'compete with life', a phrase directly challenged by Stevenson in 'A Humble Remonstrance'.[334]

4.11 Conclusion

The art of fiction debate represents an important instance of Stevenson attempting to define and categorise his own fiction. As a retrospective of his style and an articulation of his aims as an author it has done much to secure his reputation as a reflective and conscientious author. Despite the superficial simplicities of his form he successfully conveys its potential for depth and literary sincerity for whatever that may mean. It is significant too that this defence is sure against attempts to later reframe his intentions and the significance of his work. The manner

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[331] Dryden, p. 24.
[332] See for example, Eric Massie, 'Stevenson and Conrad: *The Ebb-Tide* and *Victory* Revisited' in Linda Dryden and others, eds., *Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad: Writers of Transition* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2009), pp. 30-38.
[333] Emile Zola, 'The Experimental Novel' in George Becker, ed., *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 162-196 (p. 169).
[334] Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science and the* Fin de Siècle (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 18.

of how James debates the matter with Stevenson and in particular the almost deferential attitude he has to Stevenson's particular style would prove instrumental to those who sought to argue for Stevenson as a significant contributor to later literary developments. There is however a questionable aspect in this for it is only by association with a securely canonical high literary author that Stevenson is considered thus rather than on his own merits. Despite this debate and this advocacy the qualities of complexity in his work remained often overlooked and his direct contribution to the emergence of Modernism easily missed.

5. An Unplaceable Fiction: *The Master of Ballantrae* and Generic Ambivalence

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will consider *The Master of Ballantrae* as a work whose superficial genre indicators belie a complex text. In its use of disparate narrators, it is a novel which explores ideas of textual authority, doing so not only in regard to fiction, but, through its interactions with the historical period in which it is set, with historiography as well. In this engagement with questions of textual and historical authority, Stevenson anticipates some of the narrative strategies of writers who postdate him significantly. This will support the suggestion that the *Master of Ballantrae* is both a significant landmark in the development of Stevenson's own style, and a major step towards the advent of recognisable Modernist forms in fiction.

5.2 Fragmented Narratives and Conflicting Forms

Stevenson began writing *The Master of Ballantrae* in the winter of 1887 while living in Saranac Lake in upstate New York. Saranac had become a major centre of treatment for tuberculosis and other pulmonary conditions under the pioneering Dr Edward Trudeau, himself suffering from TB.[335] Severe ill health in the year preceding impressed upon Stevenson the need to once again seek respite from the pollution of the cities: he was drawn to Saranac rather than Davos, to which he had repaired before, largely because the extreme remoteness and the Highland aspect of the settlement appealed to him.[336] The winters at Saranac were bitterly cold: indeed, this fact was key to the placing of the 'cure cottages', as cold, dry weather was taken to be therapeutic to weak and injured lungs.[337] Fanny Stevenson could not

[335] Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 330.
[336] Harman, p. 330; 'Letter: To Edmund Gosse, 8 October 1887'.
[337] Jim Murphy and Alison Blank, *Invincible Microbe: Tuberculosis and the Never-Ending Search for a Cure* (New York: Clarion Books, 2012), p. 36.

endure this cold, and so Stevenson was often left deprived of company as his family scattered to various points on the continent, leaving him alone at the resort.[338]

It was in this climate of isolation and extreme cold that the spark of inspiration for Stevenson's 'Winter's Tale' first came upon him, as described in his 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*'.[339] By the following winter, publication of the novel had begun in *Scribner's Magazine*.[340] The selection of this work to be published in *Scribner's* reverses a trend in the publication of Stevenson's historical fiction, and reflects a change in how Stevenson's fiction was perceived and, indeed, marketed. *The Master of Ballantrae* shares superficial similarities with *Kidnapped*, for example, with both books being focused on family conflict against the background of the Jacobite rebellion. Equally, both share a certain dynamism in the narrative, which rests heavily on action, conflict and momentum in the plotting.

Kidnapped, however, was published in *Young Folks*, which also first published *Treasure Island* and *The Black Arrow*. As the name suggests, this was a weekly paper targeted at juveniles, and was characterised both by the sternly didactic tone of the editor, James Henderson, in the correspondence column and by a tendency to publish a rather limited range of fiction. Of the stories published alongside *Kidnapped, Gentle Deeds* by 'Captain' Frederick Whittaker is perhaps most typical of the fiction which usually appeared in *Young Folks*, being a 'Tale of the Olden Times' written in the cod-medieval style of swashbuckling that Stevenson described as 'tushery'.[341] *Scribner's Magazine* forms a sharp contrast to this style of publication, oriented as it was to both a more mature and a more 'sophisticated' market. *Scribner's Magazine* itself was launched in 1887, the second attempt by the publisher to capitalise on the growing market for illustrated periodicals in the United States.[342] In seeking to distinguish itself in the crowded market, *Scribner's* made extensive use of new technologies of production and printing, especially in its

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[338] Harman, p. 335.

[339] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*' in *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Swanston Edition, 25 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912), vol 16, pp. 341-344 (p. 342).

[340] *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. IV no. 5 (November 1888).

[341] See, for example, Captain Frederick Whittaker, 'Gentle Deeds; or Serfdom to Knighthood: A Tale of the Olden Times, Chapter XVII' in *Young Folks,* vol. 28 no. 813 (26 June 1886), 409-410; 'Letter: To W. E. Henley, June 1883'.

[342] See Cornell University's '*Making of America* online archive', <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/s/scri/scri.1887.html> [Accessed: 12 October 2016].

abundant use of detailed illustration.[343] The journal's investment in quality engraving was innovative in the market, but came with excessive production costs: later editions had to devote nearly half of their pages to advertising in order to recoup the money spent in producing each issue.[344] In terms of the content these engravings were illustrating, the emphasis in *Scribner's Magazine* was on 'learned' subjects, featuring detailed articles on history and art. Literature was also well represented in the *Scribner's* of the nineteenth century, but in contrast to periodicals of the like of *Young Folks* or *Blackwood's Magazine*, serial fiction was much more sparsely represented, with emphasis instead placed on poetry and *belle-lettrist* essays.

Scribner's was lavishly produced and extensively illustrated, and its content was weighted more toward history, politics and reflective writing than to fiction. Though the magazine was one of the main publishers of Stevenson's later essays, such as 'The Education of an Engineer', *The Master of Ballantrae* is one of only two pieces of Stevenson's long-form fiction to appear in the journal.[345] *The Master of Ballantrae* was thus invested by the paratextual and contextual surroundings of its serialisation with a certain gravity denied to *Kidnapped*. There is even a suggestion of other articles being published to supplement and interpret the novel: a long article on 'Winter in the Adirondacks' appears alongside the second part of the story, casting light on the very specific milieu in which the novel will climax and in which the author was writing it, with Saranac itself being described in some detail.[346]

The publication histories of Stevenson's two eighteenth-century based fictions in their serial form indicate something significant about the changing reception of Stevenson between the publication of *Kidnapped* in 1886 and the publication of *The Master of Ballantrae* in 1890. Stevenson was recognised in 1886 as a major literary figure – a fact testified to by the admonitory comments by the

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[343] Richard J. Hill, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Pictorial Text: A Case Study in the Victorian Illustrated Novel* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 33, 143.

[344] *The Modernist Journals Project* <http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?view=mjp_object&id=1233672898402506> [Accessed: 12 October 2016].

[345] See Ian Duncan, 'Stevenson and Fiction' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 11-26 (p. 14). The other novel to be serialised in *Scribner's Magazine* is *The Wrecker*: much of the following observation on the generic 'unplaceability' of *The Master of Ballantrae* could equally be applied to this later novel, which similarly displays a serpentine complexity behind a superficial similarity to more simplistic forms of fiction.

[346] Hamilton Wright Mabie, 'Winter in the Adirondacks' in *Scribner's Magazine*, vol IV no. 6 (December 1888), 641-656, (esp. p. 644).

editor responding to the lukewarm reception of *Kidnapped* in the *Young Folks* letters page.[347] However, the momentum of the literary celebrity generated by the publication of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* at the beginning of the year was still building, and the difference between the successful popular author of 1886 and the internationally lauded *littérateur* of 1890 is testified by the company *The Master of Ballantrae* keeps in *Scribner's Magazine.*[348]

However, there is a wider matter to consider beyond the issue of presentation. There are qualitative differences between *The Master of Ballantrae* and Stevenson's earlier fiction which elude simple generalisations as to genre and style – the presence of the novel in *Scribner's Magazine* is not merely a question of arbitrary literary categorisation, but indicates that there is a level of complexity to the text which supports its inclusion in a more self-consciously cerebral (and adult) paper. Yet, the presentation of the story within the pages differs, too, from the conventional style of *Scribner's Magazine* content, as perhaps best indicated by the evocative illustrations by William Hole, which emphasise the more outlandish and vivid episodes of the narrative (fig. 1).

[347] Madeleine B. Gagnes, 'Material Romance: *Kidnapped* In and Out of *Young Folks Paper*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol 53 no 2 (Summer 2020), 183-213.
[348] 'Our Letter Box' in *Young Folks,* vol. 28 no. 806 (8 May 1886), 304.

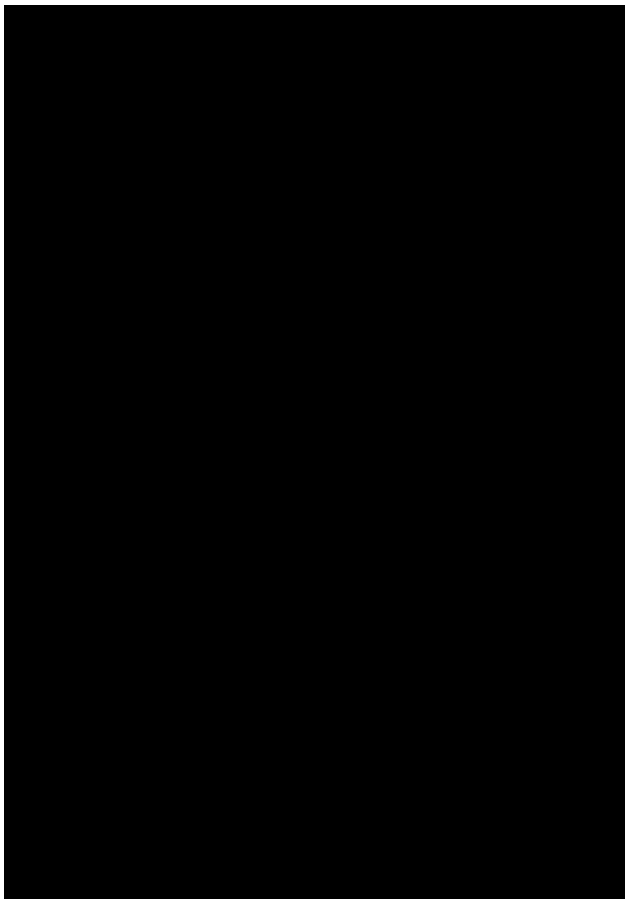

Figure 1: An example of the dynamic style of William Hole's original illustrations to The Master of Ballantrae, *illustrating Chapter IX: 'Mackellar's Voyage with the Master'.*

These discordances point towards the curious place *The Master of Ballantrae* occupies in the Stevenson canon; the superficialities of its fantastical plot and its exoticised settings could lead to it being placed in the category of adventure fiction, but this is a position it occupies rather ambiguously. There are elements present which cloud and distort the certainties of historical fiction of Scott and, in an earlier stage of his career, Stevenson himself. For all its specificity of historical setting, *The Master of Ballantrae* is oddly dislocated in both space and time. There is a surreal, even mythological element to the contents of the plot: the duelling brothers, the diablerie and the supernatural (or insufficiently explained) resurrections are closer to the Gothic than to any 'realist' fiction. Unlike most historical fiction, the events of the book could freely be relocated to another time and place without any harm being done to the credibility (or otherwise) of the plot. *The Master of Ballantrae,* much like *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* before it, occupies the mythological

space of the psycho-drama: the real events which motivate the plot are determined more by the psychology or metaphysics of the characters than by the external, contingent realities of historical events. *The Master of Ballantrae*, it could be contended, has less of a debt to Scott than to the interior dramas and Gothic nightmares of James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner.* The complex interactions with, and impositions of, in Richard Walker's terms, a 'psychopathalogically narcissistic' Calvinism to events which involve temperamentally distinct and mutually antagonistic brothers clearly draw upon Hogg's earlier work.[349] Stevenson openly admitted the extent to which he drew upon the *Justified Sinner* in his conception of *The Master of Ballantrae*. In appropriately Gothic language, Stevenson writes of how 'the book since I read it, in black pouring weather on Tweedside, has always haunted and puzzled me'.[350] The unreliable narrator and the fragmentary form of the text, as much as its thematic content, clearly had a particular impact upon Stevenson, given how he co-opts these for *The Master of Ballantrae.* The attraction for Stevenson of a text of the Romantic period which anticipates his attempts to reform and reframe the romance novel would also have been inviting: indeed, it can be argued that *The Master of Ballantrae*, by so following *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, instals itself within an alternative Scottish tradition. Douglas Gifford suggests that Stevenson's novel represents 'the finest expression of Scottish fiction's deepest concerns in the nineteenth century'; if this is so, it does so by building directly and deliberately on Hogg's earlier novel.[351] And yet, *The Master of Ballantrae* is part of a broader context: 'this fine and neglected Romantic and symbolic novel' is 'in the tradition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Moby Dick*', as Gifford also notes.[352] In its outline, *The Master of Ballantrae* shows little sign of the sophistication such comparisons suggest. Its tale of Jacobites, moonlit duels and pirate vessels suggests a 'boy's own' adventure of the simplest and most direct form: a fiction of 'incident' over interiority. In practice, however, the novel quickly deviates from this line, and from

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[349] Richard J. Walker, *Labyrinths of Deceit: Culture, Modernity and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 99.
[350] 'Letter: To George Saintsbury, 17 May 1891'.
[351] Douglas Gifford, 'Stevenson and Scottish Fiction: The Importance of *The Master of Ballantrae*' in Jenni Calder, ed., *Stevenson and Victorian Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), pp. 62-87 (p. 62).
[352] Gifford in Calder, ed., p. 62.

any chain of events intelligible to rational causality. Where adventure fiction tends to have archetypal, emblematic or (less charitably) one-dimensional figures, who occupy simple roles and embody particular characteristics (the brave knight, the pure damsel, the wrathful villain), the characterisation of the two protagonists in *The Master of Ballantrae* are complex, mercurial and, in some instances, apparently arbitrary.

The Master of Ballantrae, then, has proven dangerous straits for those who try to steer a critical course through its waters, as its seeming shallows are crossed with a complex system of undercurrents. This chapter provides an examination of the difficulties that the critical reception has encountered in trying to categorise this most protean and deceptive of novels. In considering the categorisation of *The Master of Ballantrae* this thesis argues that, as with so much in Stevenson's work, it can be classified in more than one way. It is, for example, both adventure fiction and a psychologically complex novel. It is also an inheritor equally of both Scott and Hogg, and a book that fits comfortably in the tradition of Scottish fiction, whilst also belonging to a broader cultural context.

The Master of Ballantrae is, as Roderick Watson has noted, 'a challenging book'.[353] The challenge does not lie in its language, which is largely direct and accessible, nor are there any insurmountable difficulties in engaging with its structure. Rather, what has made 'numerous readers […] puzzle[…] over its dynamics' is the gap between its 'final effect' and the generic indicators found 'on the surface [of] the novel'.[354] The book, as Watson notes, 'looks like an adventure epic – a marriage of *Kidnapped*, *Treasure Island* and Fenimore Cooper's leatherstocking tales, with something of the later Kipling, perhaps, in the mysterious Secundra Dass'.[355] This categorisation has influenced how the novel has been presented and adapted throughout its history, with a tendency to highlight aspects of its plot which conform to elements found within Stevenson's 'boy's fiction', with images of warfare (fig. 2) and piracy (fig. 3) frequently recurring.

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[353] Roderick Watson, 'Introduction' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1995), pp. vii-xii (p. vii).
[354] Watson, 'Introduction', p. vii.
[355] Watson, 'Introduction', p. vii.

Figure 2: The thumbnail of a contemporary digital edition of The Master of Ballantrae

Figure 3: The cover of a 1911 edition of The Master of Ballantrae

The 'puzzle' described by Watson lies in the fact that there are elements to the novel, in what might nebulously be called its atmosphere, 'which did not seem to fit the adventure conventions at all'.[356] The pervasive sense of dread which haunts Henry is one such element, as is the sense of chill which affects much of the narrative and its sense (as will be discussed further in chapter six). Indeed, for much of the novel, events are directed by and focused upon the psychology of the principal characters. Most of the events containing the 'derring-do' that might appeal to the palate of a typical *Young Folks* reader are limited to the text-within-a-text which is 'The Memoirs of Chevalier de Burke'.[357] That these events occur in the accounts of a character given to braggadocio and self-aggrandisement represent a significant challenge to the 'authenticity' of the events in relation to the internal consistency of the story: Burke is, indeed, one of several 'unreliable narrators' through whom the

[356] Watson, 'Introduction', p. vii.

[357] Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae* (London: Cassells and Company, 1891), pp. 40-83, 190-195.

events of the narrative are related.[358] In a piece of ironic recursiveness, the principal narrator of the novel, Ephraim Mackellar, declaims against the reliability of Burke's account of events, apostrophising on the Irish soldier's text with disparaging asides in footnotes. So, for example, early in Burke's account we have his record of meeting 'an Appin man, Alan Black Stewart (or some such name, but I have seen him since in France)', which is annotated by Mackellar with 'Should not this be Alan *Breck* Stewart, afterwards infamous as the Appin murderer? The Chevalier is sometimes very weak on names'.[359] Or, later, still more dismissively, when Burke suggests that Henry was married in November 1747, Mackellar comments 'A complete blunder: at this date there was no word of the marriage: see above in my own narration'.[360] These notes are a strategy which seeks to undermine the reliability of Burke's narrative, while reifying the authority of his own. The use of commentary, of scholarly apparatus, presents an image of disinterested verisimilitude when, in fact, Mackellar's own narrative is every bit as invested in a partisan portrayal of events as Burke's.[361]

Mackellar's own unreliability as a narrator, and the manner in which he contests for the right to control and govern the 'truth' which will be passed down to posterity, is central to understanding the deeper effect of *The Master of Ballantrae*. The fragmentation of narrative perspective and the explicit presentation of it as being conditional on the narrator's subject position is but one example of a phenomenon which literary criticism has traditionally identified as being characteristic of the Modernist movement, and which is featured in *The Master of Ballantrae*.[362] Indeed, the novel is rich in such textual phenomena and techniques which leads Alan Sandison to identify Stevenson as being a key figure in 'the appearance of modernism'.[363] The narrative frequently makes use of foreshadowing and other inversions of chronology, most notably in the premature disclosure of Henry Durie's

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[358] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 339.
[359] Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 41. Note the inter-textual intrusion!
[360] Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae,* p. 81.
[361] *The Master of Ballantrae* (1891), pp. 41, 81, 82.
[362] Booth, pp. 339-376; David Lodge, 'The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy' in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 481-496 (p. 481).
[363] Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism: A Future Feeling* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996), p. 12 *et passim.*

death, made casually by Mackellar.[364] These examples of a 'modernist chronotype', appearing, fittingly, *avant la lettre*, function to destabilise the narrative, dislocating it from a single centre of authority.

This displacement of time, and of conventional narrative structure, suggest the emergence of a new form, rather than the adherence to an existing formula. For while the novel appears to conform to the mode of the romance, it is infused with these new techniques in a manner which offers a radical reconstruction of the genre.

5.3 'A Romance that Subverts Romance': *The Master of Ballantrae* and Historical Fiction

The vexed question of how far and in what sense *The Master of Ballantrae* is of a conventionalised genre is one that exercised almost all critics who wrote on the novel in the twentieth century. David Daiches took a line which has remained influential among those seeking a unified theory of Stevenson's development as a writer by describing *The Master of Ballantrae* as the 'transition[al]' point between 'the adventure story' of his earlier career and the 'much more profound form of fiction' represented by his later work such as *The Ebb-Tide* and *Weir of Hermiston.*[365] This line of argument is directly addressed by Robert Kiely in his *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure*, which challenged the idea of this transition by suggesting that:

> it is a mistake to assume that the events and properties associated with popular romance must give way, or are giving way in Stevenson's fiction, to different material. Stevenson may have begun to *treat* the props and incidents of open-air adventure differently, but there is no indication in the fiction written up until the day of his death that he was about to leave them alone. To make the externals of adventure serious and meaningful seems to be the uneven, but unmistakable, trend in his fiction after 1888.[366]

[364] *The Master of Ballantrae* (1891), p. 276.
[365] David Daiches, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (Norfolk, CT: New directions, 1947), p. 79.
[366] Kiely, p. 216.

To Kiely, then, Stevenson does not seek to 'develop' beyond the writing of adventure fiction, with all the denigration of genre fiction which this implies: rather, he seeks to enhance the qualities of adventure fiction and to augment them with complexities of motivation and refinements of atmosphere. Indeed, the reading of Stevenson's later fiction as 'transcending' adventure fiction requires an extremely selective reading: *The Ebb-Tide* and *Weir of Hermiston* may be, in Daiches's terms, a 'much more profound form of fiction' than Stevenson's earlier work, but this is not to the exclusion of the 'incident' and pace of an adventure narrative: there are duels, shipwrecks and peril enough in Stevenson's fiction of the 1890s.[367] Rather, these elements are in place, but refined with a far deeper sense of consequence and psychological impact. The gulf between the largely affectless violence of *Treasure Island*, as in, say, the assault on the stockade, and the massacre at the climax of *The Wrecker*, so vividly described in terms of its metaphysical and moral impact on the perpetrators speaks to the extent to which the description of action was increasingly intermingled with questions of character, motivation and theme in Stevenson's later work.[368] In this scheme of progression, *The Master of Ballantrae* is, indeed, as Daiches suggests, a vital hinge-point between two phases of Stevenson's literary career, but rather than abandoning adventure, *The Master of Ballantrae* represents the first protracted attempt to invest adventure with a greater emotional impact. This is perhaps most visible in the 'moonlit duel' between the brothers. The description of this scene is at first redolent of countless scenes of vim and daring in countless *Boy's Own* adventures, all salutes, 'contained and glowing fury' and swords ringing upon each other.[369] It is the type of violence also seen in the fight in the roundhouse in *Kidnapped*, made anodyne by its stylisation.[370] This dissociative atmosphere begins to erode with a phrase making plain the physical and emotional intensity of the strain, as 'the Master leap[s] back with a little sobbing oath' from his brother's assault, before breaking down entirely at the moment of the fatal blow, as Henry

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[367] Daiches, p. 79; see, for example, the exploits of 'The Four Black Brothers' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), pp. 110-117.
[368] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1915), pp. 146-147; Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Wrecker* (London: Cassell and Company, 1892), pp. 390-394.
[369] *The Master of Ballantrae,* p. 56.
[370] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1921), pp. 64-71.

feels 'the hilt dirl on his breastbone'.[371] If, as Roderick Watson claims, *The Master of Ballantrae* is a romance that subverts romance', it is in the epiphanic moment after this mortal act that we see this most clearly: the depiction of Mackellar's horror and the fugue like state of Henry's initial reaction give a credible depiction of the traumatic consequence that acts of adventure would, if deromanticised, entail.[372]

The paradigm shift represented by Stevenson's deromanticisation of the romance speaks not only to his own prior work, but to the continuities and traditions in which he wrote. W. E. Henley shows an awareness of how Stevenson was working in a recognised tradition of historical adventure fiction, whilst also destabilising it when he describes *The Master of Ballantrae* as 'a romance which differs from the romances of Sir Walter as a black marble vault differs from a radiant palace'.[373] *The Master of Ballantrae*, it is clear, was seen as a novel of troubling complexities within a conventional generic structure. Rather than attempting to assimilate 'the black marble' of *The Master of Ballantrae* into the Romance tradition, critical response instead has tended to partition it off, both from the main body of Stevenson's work and from the genre it could be said to occupy: it is 'unrepresentative'.[374] Indeed, an unsigned review expressly denies that *The Master of Ballantrae* should be considered with the other work of Stevenson.[375] These initial critical reactions represent some of the first instances of Stevenson's bibliography being selectively edited or partitioned so as to remove texts which do not conform to the prevailing narrative of how some of his expositors wished him to be viewed as writer. This represents a perennial issue in the consideration of genre or popular fiction: hostile criticism tends to decry genre fiction as derivative and formulaic, but should a novel working recognisably with genre characteristics prove to be innovative and inventive, it is said not to be genre fiction. This recursive argument is perhaps most often seen in Speculative Fiction, where certain works are 'de-

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[371] *The Master of Ballantrae,* pp. 138-139.
[372] Roderick Watson, '"You Cannot Fight Me with a Word": *The Master of Ballantrae* and the Wilderness Beyond Dualism' in *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, 1 (2004), 1-23 (p. 2).
[373] Both quoted *ibid.*
[374] W. E. Henley, 'On *The Master of Ballantrae* as "a Masterpiece in Grime", Unsigned Review, *Scots Observer* 12 October 1889' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981), pp, 349-352 (p. 350).
[375] 'An Unsigned Review, *Glasgow Herald*, 17 October 1889' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981), pp, 352-354 (pp. 353-354).

generified' if perceived to have 'literary' merits.[376] The formulation of the same arguments in relation to historical fiction were influentially made by F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition*. Leavis did much to contribute to the reversal of critical favour Walter Scott experienced in the early- to mid- twentieth century, and in *The Great Tradition*, the rejection of the previously eminent man of letters is explicitly tied to genre – and its presumed formularity. The estimation that Scott's merit 'was primarily [as] a kind of inspired folk-lorist, qualified to have done in fiction something analogous to the ballad-opera' compounds the offence by being patronisingly approving of, yet diminishing, the Scots vernacular narratives of 'Wandering Willie's Tale' and 'The Two Drovers', which Leavis offers the back-handed compliment of singling out as 'the only live part of *Redgauntlet*' and as 'remain[ing] in esteem' respectively.[377] When it comes to 'the heroics of the historical novels', Leavis abandons any attempt at equivocality, suggesting that they 'can no longer command respect'.[378] Leavis suggests that Scott is in hock to 'the bad tradition of the eighteenth century romance': lacking 'the creative writer's interest in literature' Scott 'made no serious attempt to work out his own form'.[379] Stevenson too is placed by Leavis in this 'bad tradition': he declares that 'with Stevenson it took on "literary" sophistication and fine writing'.[380] This is the pithy statement which Edwin Eigner describes as encapsulating the 'two prejudices that have deprived Robert Louis of a critical audience'.[381] One of these 'prejudices' is that 'he composed English prose rather too well', a damning-by-praise which suggests the complexities, paradoxes and frank self-contradiction which characterised the schools of critical thought of the mid-twentieth century, which valued form over function, but only when the form was of a form of which the critics approved.[382]

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[376] See Edward James, 'The Arthur C. Clarke Award and its Reception in Britain' in George Slusses and Gary Westfahl, eds, *Science Fiction, Canonization, Marginalization, and the Academy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), pp. 67-78 (p. 70).

[377] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Penguin: London, 1962), p. 14, n. 1.

[378] Leavis, p. 14, n. 1.

[379] Leavis, p. 14, n. 1.

[380] Leavis, p. 14, n. 1.

[381] Edwin Eigner, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Romantic Tradition* (Princetown, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 4.

[382] Eigner, p. 4. Eigner traces this appraisal of Stevenson to George Moore's critical account in *The Daily Chronicle,* 24 April 1897. For more on the often arbitrary Leavisite approach to form, see Chris Baldick, 'The Novel in Theory, 1900-1965' in Stephen Arata and others, eds., *A Companion to the English Novel* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), pp. 256-270 (p. 266).

The second prejudice identified by Eigner is that 'Stevenson was a mere Romantic fabulist'.[383] Eigner suggests that such an appraisal is related to the perennial problem of Stevenson being read as 'a mere scribbler of boy's own adventure fiction', articulately suggesting that such a response 'derives largely from our own and Leavis's nursery experiences, for it was in the nursery that most of us last encountered Stevenson'.[384] The broader question as to why, in the mid-twentieth century, Stevenson's adult fiction had disappeared for Anglophone readers will be addressed elsewhere in this thesis; more pertinent at this moment is the notable fact that in resisting 'prejudice' against Stevenson, Eigner perpetrates one of his own against Scott: Eigner's statement that, in describing Stevenson's work as being 'in the Scott tradition', Leavis was being defamatory suggests the extent to which Scott's reputation had declined by this period.[385] Indeed, both of the major critical reappraisals of Stevenson take it as necessary to defend Stevenson from the implication that his work has a connection or affinity with that of Scott. Just as Eigner labours to prove the 'disavowal' of Scott and his tradition by Stevenson, so too does Robert Kiely stress, in *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure* the need to reject the 'shorthand hieroglyphic significance' Scott took on as 'the indefinable pivot around which all Stevenson criticism must turn'.[386] For much of the following three decades, Stevenson criticism did indeed reject this fixation, with studies tending to focus on internal patterns within Stevenson's own work rather than on finding his historical antecedents.[387] There is a tide in the life of criticism, however, and this has now ebbed back to seeing Scott as being central to understanding Stevenson's methodology and style. In 'Stevenson, Scott and Scottish History', Alison Lumsden notes that 'Scott is Stevenson's most obvious literary precursor' and that 'the two writers may not be as different as recent criticism suggests'.[388] Certainly, there is truth in Lumsden's suggestion that a 'pattern of

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[383] Eigner, p. 4.
[384] Eigner, p. 5.
[385] Eigner, p. 4.
[386] Eigner, p. 43; Robert Kiely, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 15.
[387] Perhaps the most representative example of such criticism is Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism: A Future Feeling* (Houndmills: Macmillan,1996).
[388] Alison Lumsden, 'Stevenson, Scott and Scottish History' in Penny Fielding, ed., *the Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 70-85 (p. 70).

rejecting and emulating Scott is evident throughout Stevenson's approach to historical fiction'.[389] Stevenson's description of *The Ebb-Tide* as 'having "not much Waverley novels" about it' is adduced by Lumsden to support this claim, but examples of Stevenson explicitly connecting his work to that of Scott can be found for almost every one of his major fictional works.[390] Yet this awareness of Scott haunting his novels can be taken as another instance of how Stevenson adopts the genre only to augment it by bringing deeper complexity to its themes. This reorientation is perhaps most apparent in the disparate ways in which the momentum of history is represented in Scott, as compared to its presence in *The Master of Ballantrae.*

5.4 Chaos, Reversible Interpretation and the Struggle for History

Stevenson writes of being 'moved with the spirit of emulation' to 'attempt a familiar and legendary subject' in *The Master of Ballantrae*, and the source text he has so taken to use in respect of the complex doubling of the brothers is the Biblical narrative of Jacob and Esau.[391] Jacob and Esau are, like Henry and James, disputatious brothers.[392] Sons of Isaac, they are said to have been born in contention, indeed to have 'struggled' even in their mother's womb.[393] But, as in Stevenson's novel, the dichotomy between the brothers is confused by disputes over rights and roles, by performativity and the adoption of identity. The manner in which they contend in the novel reflects the competing interpretations of the text by later mediators and critical commentators.

When James requests the right to 'go out' in support of the Jacobite uprising, Henry contends that he has the right to go in his place, sourly stating that James's

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[389] Lumsden, p. 71.
[390] Lumsden, p. 71, quoting Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Bradford Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven, CT: : Yale University Press, 1994-1995), vol 8, p. 68.
[391] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*' in *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Swanston Edition, 25 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912), vol 16, pp. 341-344 (p. 341).
[392] Genesis 25:22.
[393] Genesis 25:22.

duty is to remain in the family home, given that he is their father's favoured son.[394] James's response directly invokes the Biblical narrative: 'And there spoke Envy! Would you trip up my heels - Jacob?'.[395] James here refers to Jacob grasping the heel of his twin as they are born, with all its symbolism of contested primogeniture. This is a somewhat confused metaphor for James to use – and not always one that flatters him. The sense that he is Jacob – in the sense that his given name is ultimately derived from Jacob – is perhaps an apt metaphor for the way in which the tenor of the metaphor can shift and be applicable at times to both brothers. In addressing Henry as 'Jacob', James is bestowing his own name on his brother, and highlighting the shifting roles the brothers take in their antagonism.[396]

The image antagonises Henry, underscoring as it does his cadet status and making visible the abiding grievance of his life, that his brother should have title and authority over him.[397] James, like Esau, has sold his birthright to his brother, in his case by joining the Jacobite rebellion and so being disentitled, but Henry remains apprehensive that, as in the Biblical precedent, James remains the father's favourite and will receive the final blessing of a father who has grown old and 'knows not the day of [his] death'.[398] It is perhaps a particular indication of how the events of the novel are refracted through Ephraim Mackellar's particular religious concerns that it is this Old Testament narrative of duplicity and filial antagonism which shapes the perception of James and Henry: the imagery of the prodigal son. The metaphor, with all its ameliorative opportunities in its message of forgiveness and reconciliation, is offered to Mackellar by James himself, who applies the label to himself in a rebuke to Mackellar for his hostility on the elder Durrie's unexpected return. Mackellar's ruminations expose the hypocrisy of his use of the tropes of 'reversible interpretation':

> I sat there, silent, till my usual hour; and might have been almost deceived in the man's nature but for one passage in

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[394] Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae: A Winter's Tale* (London: Cassell and Company, 1891), p. 6.
[395] *The Master of Ballantrae* (1891), p. 6.
[396] *The Master of Ballantrae* (1891), p. 88.
[397] Note that it is his morbid obsession over this that leads him, in Mackellar's words into 'lunacy' and sets him on his final, fatal course into the wilderness: *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 163.
[398] Genesis 27: 2; *The Master of Ballantrae* (1891), p. 103.

> which his perfidy appeared too plain. Here was the passage, which […] the reader will consider himself.[399]

The irony of what follows is that the passage involves James' seeming attempt to be conciliatory in the face of his brother's dejection at his return: the reader would not be considering whether there was 'perfidy' in the words without Mackellar's editorial apostrophising.[400] In the name of 'spiritual surveillance', Mackellar is attempting to mould the narrative to conform to his own social biases.[401] The catechetical list of questions which Mackellar then produces manufactures suspicions and prejudices the reader's own interpretation of events:

> Was the man moved by a particular sentiment against Mr Henry? or by what he thought to be his interest? or by a mere delight in cruelty, such as cats display and theologians tell us of the devil?[402]

Such construction of the narrative, the refraction of the events through association with particular religious imagery and rhetoric, represents, as much as the generated chaos of James Durie's fidelity to the spin of a coin, a response to the inevitable flow of history. Where James seeks to disrupt, Mackellar seeks to divert, to reinterpret and direct the narrative of history into a pattern which conforms to his own biases. Despite his diabolical language, as Cairns Craig notes, 'Mackellar's struggle is not a struggle with the devil in the form of the Master, it is a struggle for mastery over the form of history, so that he might be its beneficiary'.[403] It speaks of the obtuseness of the character that he fails in this, despite his account being the sole source of the main events of the story. In this, the work of Mackellar within the novel prefigures a process within the critical reception of Stevenson's own work. The attempt to impose a unitary narrative of the author's own life which favoured the moral and ideological predispositions of the earliest mediators of his reputation come

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399 *The Master of Ballantrae,* p. 108.
400 *The Master of Ballantrae,* p. 109.
401 Runions, p. 113.
402 *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 109-110.
403 Craig, p. 80.

startlingly to mind. The assembling of sources which are then carefully selected, edited or even suppressed recalls both the work of Colvin, in his bowdlerised and censored version of the *Letters* and Lord Guthrie in his amassing of, and selective display of, materials related to Stevenson's life.

5.5 Conclusion: 'A Mosaic of Fragmentary Reminiscences'

Amongst the early critical responses to *The Master of Ballantrae* there is a review of rare – and seemingly inadvertent – perceptiveness. The review for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, unsigned, but attributed by Paul Maixner to William Archer, recognised that the narrative strategy of having Mackellar as the principal narrator is key to the novel, and to its effect. 'We seem', the reviewer writes, 'always to hear the dredging-machine of Mr. Mackellar's memory at work, shooting out the facts bucketful by bucketful'.[404] The reviewer, almost alone among contemporary responses, recognises this as a stylistic choice, even if it is taken to be a negative one, 'impart[ing]' as it does 'a certain laboriousness to the narrative'.[405] In this recognition, he offers a crucial definition of the central quality of the novel: 'so scrupulously is the fiction of Mr. Mackellar's authorship kept up' the reviewer writes, 'that his narrative is apt to assume the appearance of a niggling mosaic of fragmentary reminiscences'.[406] Discussions of what Linda Hutcheon labels postmodern 'historiographic metafiction' describe the means by which these narratives challenge a unitary idea of the past by instigating a 'dialogic relationship between fiction and history'.[407] Stevenson affects the same here, so achieving much

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[404] 'An Unsigned Review, *Pall Mall Gazette* 14 September 1889, xlix, 3' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 341-343 (p. 343).

[405] 'An Unsigned Review, *Pall Mall Gazette* 14 September 1889, xlix, 3' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 341-343 (p. 343).

[406] An Unsigned Review, *Pall Mall Gazette* 14 September 1889, xlix, 3' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 341-343 (p. 343).

[407] Linda Hutcheon, 'Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History' in Patrick O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis, eds., *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 3–32 (p. 3); Nishevita J. Murthy, *Historicizing Fiction/Fictionalizing History: Representation in Select Novels of Umberto Eco and Orhan Pamuk* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), p. 15.

the same as authors like Eco and Byatt *avant-la-lettre* of the postmodern. For this is precisely what *The Master of Ballantrae* is: it is a text which shatters narrative authority and displays a clear sense of the variability and contingency of knowledge. While some contemporary critics, such as W. E. Henley and George Moore did note the complexity of the novel behind the 'gloom', recognising the book as 'a triumph [...] of the literary art', this was matched by an equal number which saw it merely as a failed Romance, as discussed above.[408] These superficial reactions to the novel, based on extra-textual assumptions derived from the previous work of the author, may have viewed this as a failure, weighing the novel against a metric of success based upon the ease of reading, the affectless presentation of the drama. *The Master of Ballantrae* is, instead, a novel of awkward angles and snags which break up the restless forward momentum of the typical adventure novel. This is a formal aspect which reinforces the key themes of the text, concerned as they are with the disruption of the inevitable and predictable current of history by the chaos of chance. This chapter has argued that this reshaping of formal modes offers a critique of single, unitary authority, be that in text or in history: in showing the contingency of 'truth' in narrative, Stevenson anticipates the Modernist - and even the Postmodern - novel in its favouring of the polysemous and the multivalent narrative.

Archer, in saying that 'the element of adventure in *The Master of Ballantrae* is of no great importance [and] the strength of the book lies in the combined subtlety and poignancy of its spiritual drama', is thus correct to a degree; but what *The Master of Ballantrae* represents is not the sidelining of 'the element of adventure', but its enhancement.[409] Far from being a failed adventure novel, the book represents an early example of the use of elements of what would come to be seen as modernist techniques, utilising fragmented and subjective accounts to question received certainties about history, knowledge and moral certainty. In doing this, Stevenson was striking out in a new direction from the complacent historicising of Scott and his successors and drawing on a separate tradition in Scottish literature, represented by Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, which saw history a contestable and unstable field.

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[408] W. E. Henley in Maixner, ed., pp. 349-352 (p. 350); George Moore, 'Review, *Hawk*, 5 November 1889' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981), pp. 344-359.

[409] 'An Unsigned Review, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 September 1889' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 341-343 (p. 342).

6. Uncharted Water- Stevenson and the unplottable emergence of Modernism

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will again focus on *The Master of Ballantrae* and intends to deepen the reflection on the text. It will move through discussions of questions of verisimilitude and narrative ambiguity, before going on to suggest that the novel begins to meld the values of both realism and romance, and so begin to realise a new narrative form.

6.2 *The Master of Ballantrae* and the Spectre of Modernism

The Master of Ballantrae is a text that lies at the heart of Stevenson's literary development, occupying a key place in the centre of his writing career. Published in 1889, it represents a crucial point in what has been perceived as a transition from Stevenson's more direct style of the early 1880s and the complex, involuted narrative strategies which he pioneered in the 1890s.[410] There are qualities beyond this which recommend its study. It is, as André Gide writes, a 'curious book: on the whole excellent, if heterogeneous, to the point where it seems like a sample-book of everything in which Stevenson can excel'.[411] Moreover, *The Master of Ballantrae* is a rich and complex text, ironically juxtaposing unreliable narrators, ambiguities, uncertainties and mysteries with strong images and motifs of unsealing, unveiling, and illuminating.

The novel is concerned with the fallout of a fateful decision made during the events of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, a period which Jenni Calder describes as 'that quintessential split of Scotland's historic personality' – a split which is

[410] This rather reductive model of Stevenson's literary development has come to be challenged by contemporary scholars: see Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 48; Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science and the* Fin de Siècle (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 32.
[411] André Gide, *Journal: 1889-1939* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 393. Translation my own.

reflected in the thematic and narrative content of the novel.[412] It is a novel of shifting identities and competing narratives: a subject which provides a figuration of the competing literary forms at work in the text which, this chapter, will argue, are resolved – or almost resolved – with the emergence of new, nascent form which anticipates the Modernist approach. The Lord Durrisdeer, a member of the gentry in Galloway, seeks to hedge his bets between the Hanoverian and the Jacobite claimants to the throne: by sending out one son to fight for the rebels and one to fight for the crown. Whichever side is victorious, only one son will have forfeited the right to claim the Durrisdeer land and title, and so the legacy of the family will be secured. The two sons dispute who should serve with whom, and the decision is made by a fatalistic toss of a coin. In the event, the decision of fate is fitting: James Durie, presented as cavalier, charismatic and amorally self-absorbed, serves with Bonnie Prince Charlie; Henry Durie, shown as staid, prudent and with a fixation on probity and duty, takes the government's side – though is spared being called up for service. With the supposed death of James at Culloden, the final engagement of the failed insurrection, Henry's name comes to be calumniated in the lands his family governs, with James being romanticised in death, even by those whom he had (the narrative tells us) abused and wronged. Seven years later, James, the Prodigal Son returns to the House of Durrisdeer from an exile in France, reclaiming the prime place in the affection of his father and of Alison, the woman who had loved him but had made a reluctant, dutiful marriage to his brother, Henry, after his supposed death. The ensuing conflict between the brothers is fought across continents, the two opponents engaged in a continuous psychological and physical struggle which encompasses a violent duel, a second apparent death and a final moment of animosity in which the two brothers, in a dark doubling, expire at the same moment in the bleak midwinter of the Adirondack Mountains.[413]

The setting and themes, when so superficially stated, match the formula of a Scott-aping historical romance, but to approach *The Master of Ballantrae*, as the preceding chapter of this thesis does, as merely as a text defined by its inheritance of a past tradition is to overlook perhaps the key aspect by which the novel may claim

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[412] Jenni Calder, 'The Eyeball of the Dawn: Can We Trust Stevenson's Imagination?' in William B. Jones, Jr., ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson Reconsidered: New Critical Perspectives* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2003), pp. 7-20 (p. 17).

[413] Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae* (London: Cassell's and Company, 1889), *passim*.

to speak to a significant transitional moment in literature. Indeed, Andrew Lang describes the novel as '"more akin to the temper of M. Zola than of Scott", and suggest[s] affinities with the naturalistic novel in its manner of drawing characters with a "curious care and minuteness", and in its oppressive atmosphere'.[414] This is a significant comparison, not just for supporting the claim made in the previous chapter of the thesis that Stevenson's later style represented a synthesis of the dominant modes of romance and realism; it is also significant to the consideration of Stevenson's critical reception. The naturalism of Zola is recognised as being a major contributor to, and precursor of the Modernist movement in literature: indeed, this has been a critical convention for almost as long as Modernism has been recognised as a distinct form.[415]

Far from being 'only' a work in the Scott-tradition, then, a reification of a moribund historical style, *The Master of Ballantrae* can claim to prefigure some of the major trends of the literature of the succeeding century. By this estimation, far from 'setting the clock back fifty years', as William Archer claimed, Stevenson's writing may be said, in part, to anticipate the thematic trends of Modernist fiction by some forty years.[416] This despite the obvious generic signifiers and stylistic concessions to the adventure romance of an earlier period: indeed, there is a sense in which *The Master of Ballantrae* represents a liminal space in which romantic models of self and of literature intermingle uncertainly with the norms of realist fiction. Oliver Buckton describes this as 'the confusion of narrative modes' of the novel, its blending of physical detail, acutely described and the extremes of plotting, especially in the return of Durrisdeer from the grave.[417] In this contact between these narrative forms, Stevenson begins to shape a new form which develops them both, and begins a shift to a mode that prefigures elements of Modernism. This chapter will consider

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[414] Paul Maixner, 'Introduction' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 1-46 (p. 34).
[415] See, for example, Michael Levenson, *Modernism* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 65; Alfred Fawkes, *Studies in Modernism* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1913), p. 164.
[416] This assumes that the 'moment of Modernism' was indeed 'located' in the immediate post-first world war period: more recent scholarship on Modernism has done much to challenge this parochial metropolitan-western-European version of the movement. See, for example, Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).
[417] Oliver Buckton, 'Reanimating Stevenson's Corpus' in William B. Jones, Jr., ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson Reconsidered: New Critical Perspectives* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2003), pp. 37-67 (p. 56).

how this determinative shift is made visible in the novel, focusing on the agonistic and unstable relationships between the central actors, and the polysemous mediation of the narrative and its meaning.

6.3 Veracity, Instability and the Modernist Mood

Nels C. Pearson notes that *The Master of Ballantrae* is characterised by a 'strained relationship between narrative and the "Truth" of subjective experience'.[418] The tension arises from the novel's structure as a mediated text, presented as the testamentary account of the events of the narrative as 'faithfully recorded' by Ephraim Mackellar, whose repeated insistences of fidelity are undermined by a loyalty of a different sort, with the retainer doing nothing to obscure his partisan preference for Henry Durie.[419]

The dependency of the narrative – of the reader's perception of the 'factual' – on Mackellar's individual (perhaps invidious) account dramatises what Pearson suggests 'we might call the horrifying moment' where the romantic modality, 'belief in the supremacy of the philosophical subject and the individual imagination', is fatally undermined. It is, indeed, 'shattered by Modernism's dark contention' that individual perception is inherently suspect.[420]

By this definition of Modernism as being located primarily in the psychological dimension by which characters are represented (and, especially, represent themselves), Pearson is in close accord with Alan Sandison. Sandison delineates how Stevenson prefigured the 'appearance of Modernism' as much in his thematic concerns as in his stylistic choices: the recurrent motif of, for example, filial conflict and the emotionally inaccessible father which recurs ceaselessly in Stevenson's work are highlighted as an anticipation of the Freudian theory of the Oedipal.[421]

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[418] Pearson, Nels C. 'The Moment of Modernism: Schopenhauer's "Unstable Phantom" in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae'*, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, vol. 31:1 (1999), 182-202 (p. 182).
[419] Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 204.
[420] Pearson, p. 182.
[421] Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism: A Future Feeling* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996), pp. xii-xiii.

By a more developed reading, there is a deeper meaning to the recurrent motifs of anxiety surrounding male authority in the work of Stevenson: often the figure of the father speaks more of the symbolic role of duty than of the literal father with whom Stevenson so long contended.[422] Sandison provides a comprehensive catalogue of the problematic fathers (and father figures) who people Stevenson's writing: the weak fathers, the duplicitous fathers, the tyrannical fathers, and, as a climax and culmination of them all, the Lord Weir in *Weir of Hermiston*, whose over-mastering personality and paternal tyranny is symbolised in his placing of legal authority ahead of the life of his son.[423] Stevenson's fiction and poetry speaks of the idea of authority in identity: fatherhood, for example, is a role, one whose capacity to perform haunted Stevenson, as testified to in his lines to his cousin where he speaks of his 'fear of heredity'.[424]

It is by this light that we must understand Durrisdeer in *The Master of Ballantrae*: the master, as should be, who has renounced his title, abdicating his responsibility to the management of his estate and his family.[425] Mackellar describes this as a premature senescence:

> my old lord was not old in years, but he suffered prematurely from the disabilities of age; his palace was at the chimney side; there he sat reading, in a lined gown, with few words for any man, and wry words for none: the model of an old retired housekeeper.[426]

The Master of Ballantrae is he who performs the role, Stevenson suggests, and the man who has the right and the means to do so (for Mackellar emphasises that 'his mind [was] very well nourished with study' and that he 'was more cunning than he seemed'), but rather than performing his duty he 'weakly declined', to appropriate

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[422] For Stevenson's troubled relationship with his father, see Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), *passim*, but especially pp.33-36, 79-80.

[423] That is, if Sidney Colvin's account of the intended completion of the novel is accurate: see the editorial note in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1896), pp. 267-286; Sandison, pp. 18-47.

[424] 'Letter: To R. A. M. Stevenson, 18 October 1894'.

[425] Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 24.

[426] Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae,* pp. 2-3.

a phrase from elsewhere in Stevenson's work.[427] It is the right to perform this duty that their father foregoes, and so the two brothers compete for it, and the authority that it confers.

With Stevenson perceiving identity as being not essential but contingent to the performance of a role, the implications of this for the hierarchies and structures of relationships came increasingly to haunt his fiction in the 1880s.[428] It is this feeling that also informed *Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), with its dark revelation that 'man is not truly one' and may be seen as 'a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens'.[429] Both works are dramas of the instability of identity and the deceptiveness of appearance. Identity, in *Master of Ballantrae* is far more centrally connected to title – reflected in the name of the novel itself, whose referent is ambiguous, applicable to both Henry or James (or, indeed, their father). The title, too, carries connotations of authority and rectitude belied by the person who holds it, just as the title of 'doctor' held by Henry Jekyll is belied by the alter-ego which hides behind the respectable exterior. This (to again use a phrase of Pearson's) 'staggering challenge to centrality and identity' is vital in understanding the shift to the modern, as the ontological absolutes of the philosophical dispensation which had prevailed for centuries were undermined and questioned on numerous fronts.[430] Stevenson was precocious in this sense: the undermining of the narrow certainties of his legalistically conservative Calvinist upbringing was rooted in his exposure to works of philosophy and scientific theory which exposed reality not as immutable but as inchoate, indeterminate and constantly shifting. Stevenson's first encounter with such works in the 1870s, then, redefined the paradigm of how he interpreted the world. Indeed, his father would state 'I lay all this'– Stevenson's agnosticism, his bohemianism, his renunciation of the faith and morals of his parents – 'at the door of Herbert Spencer'.[431] The

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[427] Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae,* p. 3; Robert Louis Stevenson, 'XXXVII' in Roger C. Lewis, *The Collected Poems of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p. 98, l. 1.

[428] See Jefferson A. Singer, *The Proper Pirate: Robert Louis Stevenson's Quest for Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 130-131.

[429] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886), p. 108.

[430] Pearson, p. 183.

[431] Quoted in William Gray, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Literary Life* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 78.

progression of the author from the conventional, if fervent, pieties of *The Pentland Rising* (1866) to the 'Darwinist sermon' of 'Pulvis et Umbra' (1888) is, in a sense, a progression from a pre-Modern world to one inflected with doubt and chaos; from the language of 'martyrs' who 'sacrificed their lives' for truth in religion and the glory of God, to descriptions of humanity as a 'disease of the agglutinated dust'.[432]

This progression should not be taken as an indication of an untroubled and simple sloughing off of previous values as 'outmoded', for Stevenson remained troubled by the implications of these beliefs, and pined for a lost certainty of moral value throughout his mature life. His fiction perfectly encapsulates the Modernist response to the anxiety of uncertainty, in that it represents as much, in Pearson's phrase, 'an attempted retrieval of lost essentialisms', as it does an embracing of the potentiality of thought.[433] This tension, the cognitive dissonance which at once reifies and rejects traditional moral certainties, is another aspect in which Stevenson's writing prefigures the work of Modernism. The impulse to assimilate and synthesise previous forms, to shore up fragments of a philosophical past against the ruin of contemporaneity, has been studied in detail in the context of, say, James Joyce's Classicism and Ezra Pound's Orientalism, but has not so been done with Stevenson's Romanticism.[434] As fractured, historicizing and critical as it is, this reconfigured Romanticism persists in being perceived merely as a looking back in trite nostalgia.[435]

The thematic link between *The Master of Ballantrae* and 'Pulvis et Umbra', both written during Stevenson's wintery isolation at Saranac in 1888 is to be found in this paradox.[436] Both texts offer a 'vision of contingency and existential disaffection', which Roderick Watson suggests is a 'prefiguring of Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical nausea', with its vacillation between horror and exhilaration at the

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[432] Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Pentland Rising* in *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 23 vols (London: Chatto and Windus et al, 1911-1912), XXII (1912), pp. 3-24 (p. 16-17); Robert Louis Stevenson, *Across the Plains, with Other Memories and Essays* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 289-301 (p. 293).

[433] Pearson, p. 183.

[434] See, for example, Samuel Louis Goldberg, *The Classical Temper: A Study of James Joyce's Ulysses* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), Zhaoming Xian, *Ezra Pound and China* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

[435] Robert Kiely touches briefly on this connection: see Robert Kiely, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 190.

[436] Roderick Watson, 'Modernism' in Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2013), pp. 69-75 (p. 72).

groundlessness of being.[437] However, such thematic complexities in *The Master of Ballantrae*, with its dread of the fluidity of moral identity and the loss of prior certainties were – and often remain – overlooked in favour of the superficial identities of its plot. Contemporary reviews, for instance, view it solely within the ambit of the generic signifier of the romance, praising the 'passion and romance' of its 'flights of fancy', and condemning the elements unfamiliar to the genre not as experiments in style and depth but as 'grime'.[438]

By contrast, Pearson gives *The Master of Ballantrae* a rightful place in the tradition of Modernism and its problems in that

> [it] deal[s] significantly with the human emotions and sensations – dislocation, fear, and even physical deterioration – that we must face when we are forced by our own intellect to consider the possibility that there is no purposeful or verifiable truth in the objects we perceive, or in the tales we tell about human experience.[439]

However, it is not quite the case that *The Master of Ballantrae* is either disassociating itself entirely from the idea of objective truth, nor is it the case that it is entirely and securely a Modernist work. Rather, as this thesis has contended, it is a work which *anticipates* Modernism while containing and working within the modes of realism and romance. The emergence of Modernism cannot be plotted so simply here. The recognition of the emotional conflicts and obscurities of the novel as being essential to the theme of the text is vital. *The Master of Ballantrae* depicts a world in which the moral certainties defined by 'the tales we tell' is not 'verifiable truth': motives can be opaque and certainties – even the certainty of death – cannot be relied upon. The significance of this was lost even on George Moore, a writer who

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[437] Watson, 'Modernism', p. 72.

[438] [Andrew Lang], 'An Unsigned Review, *Daily News*, 5 October 1889' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 344-348 (p. 346); [W. E. Henley], 'An Unsigned Review, *Scots Observer,* 12 October 1889' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 349-352 (p. 352).

[439] Pearson, p. 183.

has been far more securely tied to the formation of Modernism than Stevenson.[440] Moore lacked the capacity to see the novel in this light: to him it was 'an adventure tale', weak and derivative and – vitally – disconnected.[441] Rather than recognising a new process at work in this fiction, a process of the kind which Moore sought to achieve in his own writing, he only recognises a failure to conform to the generic conventions – the novel is not a success in the terms of a form which Moore finds redundant.

6.4 Veracity and Verifiability in the Account of Ephraim Mackellar

If one of the key conditions of the Modernist text, then, is its unknowability, for *The Master of Ballantrae* to have a claim to be advancing this form requires indeterminacy to be at the centre of its narrative strategy. And, indeed, it is – for all its seeming simplicity of form, its directness, compared by Moore to the disinterested narrations of Defoe a century and a half earlier, there is a veridical instability to the tale: or rather, to the teller.

With the events of *The Master of Ballantrae* being relayed by Ephraim Mackellar, the reader is limited to his perception of events. As Craig puts it, 'we are trapped inside a document – Mackellar's narrative – which is deeply involved in the oppositions which it is constructing'.[442] That is to say, Mackellar's narrative is not merely unverifiable and potentially partisan: it has, as Pearson remarks, a 'consequential inconclusiveness'.[443] The absences and exclusions of, for example, the required explanation for the return of James Durie from the grave are invested with particular significance: far from being artless, this is a significant choice in the relation of the novel on the author's part.

The removing of the central explanation to account for the events of the novel, firstly, leads to an instability of categorisation: the struggle to account for the

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[440] See, for example, Jim Shanahan, '"Vivid Irish History": Frank Matthew's *The Wood of the Brambles* and the Prehistory of Irish Modernist Fiction' in Edwina Keown and Carol Taffee, eds, *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 31-46 (p. 44); Peter Childs, *Modernism*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 92.

[441] George Moore, 'Review, *Hawk,* 5 November 1889' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 354-359.

[442] Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 77.

[443] Pearson, p. 190 n.

events rationally on the evidence provided lead to responses that the novel is far-fetched, or, alternatively, require a re-categorisation of the narrative, a recasting of it as a supernatural or gothic tale in order to relieve the unease of the central indeterminacy.

More significantly still, however, the absences in the plot make a vacuum where the motivations of James Durie ought to be. Mackellar describes the Master as being 'a man of pasteboard – as though, if one should strike smartly through the buckram of his countenance, there would be found a mere vacuity within', but, as the reader receives him, it is the absences in the narrator's account that make him a hollow man.[444] Mackellar speaks of this as the 'horror'; the horror of a groundlessness to James Durie's motivation.[445] Yet this claim is rendered disingenuous only a few lines before, where Mackellar attests that Durie's villainy has its root in the hypocrisy whereby his outer appearance belies his internal motivation:

> This outer sensibility and inner toughness set me against him; it seemed of a piece with that impudent grossness which I knew to underlie the veneer of his fine manners.[446]

The selectiveness of Mackellar's vision removes the core around which the events of the novel should gravitate: without an insight into James's psychology the centre cannot hold and the narrative breaks up into the 'disjointed narratives', decried by Moore in his review.[447] If, as Moore contends, the reader goes through the book 'without receiving one distinct impression' of the aims and achievements of James Durie, it is precisely because the narrator of the book is determined not to present an impression which may induce a response other than that he intended. Mackellar leaves the Master empty, so that he might paint an image of villainy on his surface. Durie forfeits his claim to the title, Henry refuses it, and their father, in several senses, has abdicated it.

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[444] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 232.
[445] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 232.
[446] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 232.
[447] George Moore, 'Review, *Hawk,* 5 November 1889', p. 355.

Sandison finds that the metaphor of the hollowness of the novel's chief antagonist extends to the novel itself, in that the title is empty of meaning: there is no 'Master of Ballantrae', for the rightful claim has been forfeited and is extinct.[448] This is another sense in which, as first noted above, the title of the novel is unclear in its referent. In this instance, indeed, it has no referent at all, but points to an absence. This also speaks to the nature of the text and the author's attitude towards it. Subverting the metonymic function of the title *vis-à-vis* the text is immediately to undermine any presumption of 'reality' or 'truth' the latter may be thought to embody.[449]

The text has no centre; its title refutes its own authority; the absolute structures of narrative (defeat, even death) do not, here, provide closure: again and again the novel defies the conventions which define certainty in its narrative. In this, it dramatises a sense of the loss of authority of the text and suggests that truth is elusive, refracted into disparate fragments and perspectives. The tale is untellable, and it is Mackellar's attempt to unify this disparateness into an authoritative account which, ironically, draws the attention of an attentive reader to this fact: he has, in the common idiom, 'hung a clock on it' and made obvious the very thing he was trying to obscure.

The centre of the narrative is, then, as 'arbitrary [a] construct' to Stevenson as 'the centre of the self', and this is the crux of *The Master of Ballantrae* which, as Pearson notes, 'demonstrates the deconstructive relationship between an arbitrary essence and a narrative that desperately tries to unveil it, or pin it down to a single cause'.[450]

The instability of the text, however, extends beyond Mackellar's narrative, for *The Master of Ballantrae* is a network of interconnected narratives. Mackellar is the principal voice, but he re-presents a substantial portion of text, equally idiosyncratic in its perspective, written by Colonel Burke, James Durie's companion.[451] Mackellar peppers the account with annotations and parenthetical observations which challenge Burke's reliability, undermining the Colonel's credibility and so mitigating its risk to Mackellar's perspective on Durie. He

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[448] Sandison, p. 271.
[449] Sandison, p. 271.
[450] Pearson, p. 192.
[451] *The Master of Ballantrae*, pp. 49-83, 190-195.

suggests, for instance, that Burke deliberately glosses over Durie's excesses: otherwise, the gallant, if cynical, figure of Burke's narrative could hardly be reconciled to the near-demoniacal character that Mackellar's account is invested in.[452] In a similar manner, his presentation of the varying accounts given by the Durrisdeer household of the events before his arrival are also manipulated and selectively presented.[453] Mackellar, then, is an editor as much as he is an author, and a selective one at that. His use of the accounts of others is a means by which he can assimilate the authority of their narrative where it comports with his aims, only to undermine or entirely efface it when it challenges his own.

The passage in which Mackellar chances upon James Durie's stash of documents is germane here:

> One after another I carried his portmanteaux to a loft in the top of the house which we kept locked; went to my own room for my keys; and returning to the loft, had the gratification to find that two fitted pretty well. In one of the portmanteaux, there was a shagreen letter case, which I cut open with my knife; and thenceforth (so far as any credit went) the man was at my mercy. Here was a vast deal of gallant correspondence, chiefly of his Paris days; and what was far more to the purpose, here were the copies of his own reports to the English secretary, and the originals of the secretary's answers: a most damning series: such as to publish, would be to wreck the Master's honour and to set a price upon his life. I chuckled to myself as I ran through the documents; I rubbed my hands, I sang aloud in my glee.[454]

Here is the novel's clearest description of the management of the text as being the means to authority. Mackellar marshals Burke's text, and assimilates the accounts of the servants as he would this incriminating correspondence. Just as with the correspondence, the access to the accounts comes with James's (seeming) death,

[452] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 56.
[453] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 19.
[454] *The Master of Ballantrae,* p. 158.

the making of an authorial void with which Mackellar can put forward his own statement of the case unimpeded. There is symbolism which might be derived from this passage: the keys as the access to the narrative as well as the knife, the means of violent ingress into what remains legitimately inaccessible, and a tool with which to cut and excise. To adapt a Stevensonian phrase, Mackellar's 'one art is to omit', and by editing the accounts of others, he is able to exclude that which contradicts his own reports and to appropriate the authority of other witnesses in confirming his own perceptions.[455] 'So far as any credit went': Mackellar's credit would be scant indeed without this appropriation.[456]

This image of Mackellar as the unreliable editor, to coin a phrase, raises an interesting challenge in considering the metatextual significance of how the novel is presented. As Penny Fielding notes,

> *The Master of Ballantrae* is, like *Jekyll and Hyde*, composed of fragments, partial narratives, reports, interpellations and, in the case of *Ballantrae*, missing parts that an "editor" has removed. Neither story ends with a clear conclusion that explains the past: Jekyll's supposed "full statement" of his case censors the details of his early life and refuses to explain how his transformation into Hyde is brought about. *Ballantrae* ends with the impromptu tombstone Mackellar has erected over graves of the brothers inscribed with puzzling and inconclusive summaries of their lives that don't seem to correspond very accurately with the events we have witnessed.[457]

Wayne C. Booth describes the development of the unreliable narrator from 'reflector to subject'.[458] Works which destabilise the objectivity of the narrative

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[455] 'Letter: To Bob Stevenson, 30 September 1883'.

[456] It is striking how this recalls Stevenson's own textual afterlife, as his literary effects were reframed to reinforce the moral vision of his own editors.

[457] Penny Fielding, 'Robert Louis Stevenson' in Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 159-172 (p. 164).

[458] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd edn (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 340.

voice begin, paradoxically, by reifying that perception of objectivity: thus, the teller of the tale is presented as a neutral 'reflector' of events, recalling Christopher Isherwood's formula of 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking'.[459] As the narrative develops, the compromised perspective is revealed through the depiction of the projections of the bias onto interpretation of events, and the action *in* the events.[460] Booth uses as his example in developing this theory James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), but the analysis could equally be based upon the earlier novel of James's close friend, Stevenson. Just as is required by Booth's model, Mackellar makes great claims of his *bona fides*, stating that he will speak, in his account, 'like a witness in court'.[461] Mackellar's bias is soon made evident, with little attempt to dissemble; within pages, Mackellar baldly states that 'Mr. Henry had the chief part of my affection', and the narrative throughout testifies to that affection, and so too to a desire to disparage and vilify James accordingly.[462] Furthermore, as Alison Lumsden points out, deeper reflection on Mackellar's account will prove that even before the point of declaring his intention to state the case accurately and as he has witnessed it, he has already undermined this, in that he 'has already related a "summary of events" which he can only have gathered from hearsay, or from Henry himself'.[463] This destabilisation of the narrative, with its complex engagement with questions of fact and verisimilitude represent a major shift from the monolithic, omnisciently related historical fictions of 'the Scott tradition'.

It is more than the unreliability of Mackellar that destabilises *The Master of Ballantrae*: its unity as a document, as a discrete and uniform object, is also uncertain. In the novel, as Sandison notes, 'everything is textual', with each element of the story – Mackellar's account, Burke's 'memoirs'– having its ostensible source in an external physical document.[464] The use of imaginary sources, the production of fiction from a series of fictions, harks back to the trend for 'simulating a documentary foundation' in eighteenth-century fiction and was carried through to a

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[459] Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (London: Vintage, 2012), p. 3.
[460] Booth, pp.331-334.
[461] *The Master of Ballantrae* (1891), p. 16.
[462] *The Master of Ballantrae* (1891), p. 19.
[463] Alison Lumsden, 'Stevenson, Scott and Scottish History' in Penny Fielding, ed., *the Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 70-85 (p. 77).
[464] Sandison, p. 271.

notable example in the early nineteenth century (James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), as mentioned in chapter five), and then forward to the ludic, theory-informed games with pseudo-historical texts which feature in postmodern novels such as Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983) and A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990).[465] Strikingly, it is with the latter movement that Stevenson's use of imaginary documents seems to have most affinity. According to Linda Hutcheon, the 'historiographic fiction' of the postmodern period shows a 'concern for the multiplicity and dispersion of truth(s), truth(s) relative to the specificity of place and culture'.[466] This is an aspect clearly identifiable in *The Master of Ballantrae*, with the disparate accounts being refracted through disparate cultural perspectives, and so leading to radically different interpretations of events, and of the motivations of characters. Ultimately, too, the narrative dramatises the resistance of certain sites to such attempted impositions of perspective: this is key to understanding the central tensions in the novel, which are deeply involved with questions of how 'truth' is constructed by those who provide the most influential narrative. This too, ultimately, is a question of historiography: historical fact is determined by the documents which survive and thus, to use a well-worn paraphrasing of an idea of Walter Benjamin, 'history is written by the victors'.[467] Glenda Norquay finds in Stevenson's reference to the assemblage of historical documents here an attempt to refigure 'his own Calvinist heritage', in that the process of assembling the fictional sources diegetically within *The Master of Ballantrae* recalls Stevenson's earliest published work in *The Pentland Rising* (1866), in which he assembled a prose narrative stitched together from disparate primary historical accounts.[468] In revisiting this, alluding to the amateur antiquarianism of his method, Stevenson is both questioning his ambiguous feelings towards the Covenanters and their history, and reexamining the way in which historical 'truth' is contingent on, and often compromised by, the construction of narrative around preserved documentary evidence.[469] Reflecting on this, Stevenson

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[465] Everett Zimmerman, *The Boundaries of Fiction: History and the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 52.
[466] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 108.
[467] See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. By Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 248.
[468] Glenda Norquay, *Robert Louis Stevenson and Theories of Reading: The Reader as Vagabond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 115, 120.
[469] Norquay, pp. 120-129.

produces 'his most interesting speculations on the relationship between the event itself, the writer's account and the reader's experience'.[470]

In a preface first published posthumously as an appendix in the Edinburgh Edition of 1898, Stevenson develops these insinuations still further.[471] Stevenson, writing to Charles Baxter, describes this preface in the following terms:

> I must tell you what I just remembered in a flash as I was walking about dictating this letter – there was in the original plan of *the Master of Ballantrae* a sort of introduction describing my arrival in Edinburgh on a visit to yourself and your placing in my hands the papers of the story. I actually wrote it and then condemned the idea as being a little too like Scott, I suppose.[472]

The notion of this preface as being 'a little too like Scott' is a telling detail, but in its essence, the passage is most significant as a *ludibrium,* in its specific sense of a fictitious history which is at once both plausible and yet ironic.[473] Several elements of the preface conform to the patterns Hutcheon notices in the faux-histories of postmodern fiction, from the presence of the author as a fictionalised version of himself, to the use of pseudo-sources to provide a superficial appearance of historical verisimilitude.[474] Stevenson's game with the truth is evident in the pseudo-source used: 'You may find it in Law's "Memorials", I think', Johnson declares.[475] This is Robert Law's *Memorialls; or, The Memorable Things that Fell Out Within this Island of Brittain from 1638 to 1684*, a range of dates far outwith the events of the fictional 'documents' of the narrative.[476] This is not likely to be an error on Stevenson's part: he had read Law's memorials extensively, and was enthusiastic

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[470] Norquay, p. 115.
[471] Elsie Noble Caldwell, *Last Witness for Robert Louis Stevenson* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 76.
[472] 'Letter: To Charles Baxter, 18 May 1894'.
[473] Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 68.
[474] Hutcheon, p. 108; Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae* in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Scottish Novels* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1995), p. xvi.
[475] *The Master of Ballantrae* in *The Scottish Novels*, p. xvi.
[476] Robert Law, *Memorialls; or, The Memorable Things that Fell Out Within this Island of Brittain from 1638 to 1684*, ed. by Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1818).

enough about the text to request that it be sent out to him in Samoa.[477] Instead, it must be taken as another instance of subtly undermining the authority of the text, to challenge and question the stability, indeed the perceptibility of the truth in the text.

Curiously, the idea of the 'fragmentary text' haunts contemporary critical reactions to the novel. One anonymous example read:

> Readers who have done Mr. Stevenson the injustice of following the Master's career in monthly instalments, may be inclined to cry 'Oh, oh!' and shrug their shoulders. 'Able work,' they may say, 'and even subtle, but scrappy and lacking in form.' That was our own impression until we came to read the book through at a sitting, when we found it no less nicely proportioned than skilfully sustained.[478]

In light of Stevenson's strategies in breaking the monolithic cohesiveness of the text, this criticism is strikingly malapropos, and perhaps suggests that the fragmented form of serial publication was perhaps the best means of dissemination for a text where this fragmentation is mirrored in the narrative.[479] James wrote in an unusually sardonic key to Stevenson, dismissing critical reception of this sort to *The Master of Ballantrae*. 'The fine old featherbed of English taste *has* thrilled with preternatural recognitions', James remarks, such that 'the most unlikely number of people *have* discerned that *The Master* is "well written"'.[480] It is clear that the target of James's sarcasm is the inanity of the critical response which diminishes the content and thematic strength of Stevenson's work by considering only its formal style. The early estimation of Stevenson as a trivial *belle-lettrist*, was repeated so often as to become a cliché and continued to be applied long after it was

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[477] 'Letter: To Charles Baxter '16 April 1893'.

[478] 'An Unsigned Review, 'Pall Mall Gazette' 14 September 1889, xlix, 3' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 341-343 (p. 341-342).

[479] Robert E. Bond elaborates on the structural significance of the serial publication of *The Master of Ballantrae* emphasising that much of its 'pattern of circumstances' depends on the 'suspense' of the narrative between issues. Robert E. Bond, 'The Mystery of *The Master of Ballantrae*, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol 7 no 1 (January 1964), 8-11.

[480] Henry James, '26: James to Stevenson, April 28th 1890' in Janet Adam Smith, ed., *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), pp.186-190 (p.188).

appropriate.[481] As such, though, in Paul Maixner's words, 'James found that *The Master of Ballantrae* did show Stevenson's genius', much contemporary criticism responded to the novel in these terms.[482] Critics were looking for the smooth and dynamic, and the absence of this was responded to with, at best, bemusement and, at worst, outright hostility. Moore provides the best example of the latter, in which he describes himself as 'like the child in Hans Andersen's tale of [The Emperor's New Clothes]' in failing to share the opinion of the 'many erudite admirers' of *The Master of Ballantrae*.[483] His review, he quite openly states, is a 'condemnation of [the] work', but the terms of the condemnation may surprise coming from so influential a naturalist writer: it is the want of 'story' which damns *The Master of Ballantrae* in Moore's eyes.[484] Moore's description of the novel as 'after all only a story of adventure with the story left out' speaks to the fundamental problem of the reception of *The Master of Ballantrae* throughout its history, the perennial problem of its genre: taken as 'high literature' its use of the conventions of adventure fiction lead to it being dismissed; taken as adventure fiction, its narrative and thematic complexities lead to it being seen as unsuccessful in its kind.[485]

The proliferation of perspectives represented by the *matrushka* doll structure offer a proliferation of truths. With each new layer comes a further awareness of how the text is mediated, even manipulated, and the prospect of coming to *the* truth, the unitary, authentic account recedes still further. The novel becomes, in Pearson's striking phrase, 'a puzzle that seems to have more "solutions" than it has pieces'.[486] Mackellar develops the line of his narrative as a case for the prosecution, as indicated in the earlier quotation: his aim is to expose and 'defame' the Master in order to do justice to his own master, Henry Durie. But the dramatic irony of the novel is that Mackellar's reticence on the motivations of James Durie, the hollowness at the centre of the narrative previously described, mean that the

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[481] See, for example 'From an Unsigned Review, *Scotsman*, 21 January 1879' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 59-61 and Grant Allen, 'From a Review, *Fortnightly Review*, July 1879', in Maixner, ed., pp. 64-66.
[482] Paul Maixner, 'Introduction' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 1-46 (p. 32).
[483] George Moore, 'George Moore, Review, 'Hawk' 5 November 1889, iv, 489-90' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 354-359 (p. 354).
[484] Moore, p. 354.
[485] Moore, pp. 354-355.
[486] Pearson, p. 194.

proliferation of sources, the development of his case, do not unveil the Master, but render him more opaque – James has been made a hollow man by Mackellar's account. The ostensible journey of Mackellar's narrative is inwards, to expose the metaphysical darkness of James Durie's evil – but in making a vacuum at the heart of the Master, this journey ends only in obscurity, to a Kurtzian heart of darkness in an altogether different sense. What Mackellar has been engaged in, in this pursuit, is not a disinterested exposition of a documentable truth, but a construction of the truth he aims at through the manipulation of the documentary record.

The contrast between Mackellar's editing as interpretation as, indeed, Discourse in its sense of defining the power of interpretation, can be contrasted by the manner in which the editor of the preface is presented. It is striking to note, incidentally, the way in which the theme of the 'unlayering' of identity is applicable to the consideration of the person of the editor.

It is notable that there is a degree of disingenuousness in the claim that the documents have been presented just as they were received, for omission is a habit performed by the nominal editor, who declares that he excises several pages of Mackellar's account which are said to have 'no concern for the reader'.[487] Already we have an undermining of the authority and implied trust of the editor's statement of the case – we have caught him in a lie. But there is a second shift in authority, in verifiability, for the 'editor's note' is signed by 'Robert Louis Stevenson'.[488] Here it is as if a mask has slipped, and the persona of Johnstone, adopted by Stevenson in his carnivalesque letters to Charles Baxter, is exposed as pasteboard and veneer as much as the plausible, placating outward appearance of the Master. The truth of the matter is made still more opaque by this revelation – indeed, the concord of the willing suspension of disbelief is entirely severed as Stevenson exposes the construction of the narrative, quietly yet insistently taking away the final veil to reveal that this is all but fiction.

In discussing Stevenson's earlier work, *New Arabian Nights* (1882), Sandison notes its qualities of 'burlesque': the novel (if that is what it is) is characterised by ludic uncertainty, by the text's tendency, as Sandison notes, 'to constantly call […] attention to itself: posing, impersonating, playing stylish

[487] *Master of Ballantrae*, p. 185; see Pearson, p.195.
[488] *Master of Ballantrae*, p. 185.

tricks'.[489] In this, he follows Robert Kiely, who points to the passage in *New Arabian Nights* where Colonel Rich, attending a party at a house which had been lavishly decorated and abundantly peopled, leaves the room to find the fixtures and fittings of the entire property in the process of being dismantled, and the 'servants' leaving.[490] Colonel Rich asks of himself 'Was the whole establishment a sham?', and Kiely provides the answer:

> Yes, Lieutenant Rich, the whole establishment was indeed a sham and so, in a sense is the story. [Stevenson] insists upon presenting an illusion, often a very compelling one, and then turning to the reader and saying, "This is a fraud. Not one word of it is true". He is the magician who stops in the middle of his most convincing act to show his audience where the trap door is; or, what is more unthinkable, the priest who announces at the moment of consecration that he does not believe in transubstantiation.[491]

Kiely recognises the aim of *New Arabian Nights* as being 'comic satire', and yet the tone of moral censure, of disillusionment with the author is clear. Sandison's response to Stevenson's frantic signalling of the constructedness of his narrative takes a different direction. Finding Stevenson's unwillingness to dissimulate to be a fault is only possible, as Sandison notes, 'if his work is judged on a theory of fiction quite different from the one he, in fact, espoused'.[492] Sandison suggests that this theory is the same one 'for which Modernist and even postmodernist writers receive praise': a careful, self-examining consideration of the artificiality and contingence of narrative.[493] Eugene Lunn locates this 'radically altered aesthetic form and perspective' in an increasing alienation between writers and their public in the late nineteenth century, highlighting the 1880s and 1890s as the period in which this

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[489] Sandison, p. 93.
[490] Robert Louis Stevenson, *New Arabian Nights* in *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Swanston Edition, 25 vols (London: Chatto and Windus et al, 1911-1912), vol IV (1911), p. 72.
[491] Kiely, pp. 122-123.
[492] Sandison, p. 87.
[493] Sandison, p. 88.

specialisation of (aesthetic) labour had been achieved.[494] This 'modernist stress upon art as a self-referential construct instead of a mirror of nature or society', as Lunn has it, was pioneered by Stevenson, his work a liminal point between the exterior reflections of Romanticism and the internalised anxieties of Modernism.[495] Between the publication of *New Arabian Nights* in 1882 and *The Master of Ballantrae* in 1889, the sophistication with which Stevenson conveyed this awareness had developed significantly: the declarative, self-conscious breaches of the fourth-wall found in *New Arabian Nights* are, in *The Master of Ballantrae*, more subtly conveyed. This, then, is the meaning of the layering of editorial presence, of the author's 'inadvertent' exposure of himself.

These strategies of textual mediation (or rather, the illusion of it), are, then, one of the principal claims that can be made for Stevenson being a contributor to the stylistic logic of Modernism. Far from a 'failed Romance', *The Master of Ballantrae* can be claimed as a work of the *avant garde*, questioning the limits and legitimacies of narrative accounts.

6.5 Darkness Visible: Illumination and Evasion in the Imagery of Mackellar's Account

To signal the constructedness of the narrative is to signal its contingency; to signal its contingency is to signal that it is fragmented, provisional and limited. The disavowing of authorial omniscience has long been taken as a key element in defining the shift into Modernism, so to find Mackellar opening his account by claiming to offer 'the full truth' is immediately suspect in a text which has already begun to show its inflections of Modernist technique.[496] The omissions in Mackellar's account have already been discussed, but the veracity of his account is still more marred by the declared biases and loyalties he presents himself as having. For Mackellar to claim that 'there does not live one man so able as myself to make these matters plain, or so desirous to narrate them plainly' is a perceptive act of irony

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[494] Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 41-42.
[495] Lunn, p. 41.
[496] Peter Childs, *Modernism,* 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 21; *The Master of Ballantrae,* p. 1.

on Stevenson's part, for Mackellar's fidelity is not to the truth but rather, as he approaches admitting, to 'his lord's memory'.[497] To, once more, wrest a Stevensonian phrase from its original context, Mackellar is 'The Living Partizan': his emotional investment in Henry Durie motivates the entirety of his account, and it is the lens through which all his perceptions are refracted.[498] As Kiely notes,

> the reader's own vision of Ballantrae is so distorted by Mackellar's puritanical prejudices, which themselves are obscured by gossip and legend, that he seems large partly by virtue of the variety of incongruous things which may be said of him […] the most damning evidence against the master is hearsay that is never fully explained.[499]

Here is a return to the language of limited vision, of opacity and obscurity: Mackellar professes to speak of the truth in its entirety, but he is wilfully blind to all but the narrowest of perspectives. As Pearson notes, this lends a certain symbolism to the central crisis of the novel, the midnight duel between the two brothers, for it is Mackellar who holds the candelabra, by the light of which the fatal contest is fought.[500] 'The symbolism', as Pearson continues, 'intensifies [when] Mackellar returns to the site of the murder and finds the body gone'.[501] The fact that the 'circle of light' made by Mackellar's candle is described as illuminating not a presence, but an absence, in that the body of James Durie has – impossibly – vanished is suggestive.[502] Pearson, however, does not explore the full significance of this passage: he speaks more of Mackellar's pretence, his claim to provide illumination when in truth he makes only darkness visible.[503] This is a valid, and significant observation, returning to the imagery of the hollowness at the heart of Mackellar's narrative, the point of obscurity when the reader most expects the illumination of the

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[497] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 1.
[498] 'Letter: To J. M. Barrie, 2 or 3 April 1893'.
[499] Kiely, p. 201.
[500] Pearson, p. 195.
[501] Pearson, p. 195.
[502] Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 151; Pearson, p. 196.
[503] Pearson, p. 196.

subject: the unexpected absence of James Durie is potently symbolic of this. What Pearson overlooks is the imagery earlier in the passage:

> From quite a far way off a sheen [from the left candle] was visible, making points of brightness in the shrubbery; in so black a night it might have been remarked for miles, and I blamed myself bitterly for my incaution.[504]

Here we see Mackellar express an anxiety that the light which he has brought has inadvertently illuminated more than he had intended, made visible that which he did not wish to be seen. Once again, we have the suggestion of authorial 'slippage', of the narrative as a controlled object of discourse with a power to define, yet as being vulnerable to escaping this containment and of revealing much that the narrator wished to keep hidden. The candle, in this sense, becomes a potent metaphor for Mackellar's anxious attempts to contain and define the narrative, and of his constant awareness of how easily the control of this authority can be lost. Indeed, the imagery of light and illumination proliferates in Mackellar's account, and all can sustain this symbolic interpretation. For instance, there are several instances in which Mackellar describes himself as bearing a candle through the darkened House of Durrisdeer, one such instance leads to a suggestive exchange. After the Master's apparent death in the fratricidal duel, Mackellar seeks out Alison, wife of his lord and love of his enemy.[505] After reporting the 'death' of James, with a satisfaction which he dissembles with self-righteousness, Mackellar delivers a sanctimonious evocation of Alison's duty to her husband.[506] An exchange then follows:

> "God strengthen you, and make you merciful", said she. "I will go to my husband".
> "Let me light you there", said I, taking up the candle.
> "I will find my way in the dark", she said, with a shudder, and I think the shudder was at me.[507]

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[504] Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 151.
[505] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 144.
[506] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 145.
[507] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 145.

The wish Mackellar has to light the reader to the point to which he directs us to is, due to his control of the sources, the only secure option available. The alternative – to speculate, to roam unaided, to disavow the certainties of a preconstructed narrative is to try and find a way in the dark.

6.6 Order in Identity, Order as Identity: Subversion of Imagery and Form

Penny Fielding notes how, in *The Master of* Ballantrae, 'history seems to have become altogether cast loose from the tradition of the historical novel represented by Scott in which the forces of history can be read through the experiences of the individual'.[508] In its place, Stevenson 'represents a history that swirls almost chaotically around its characters and even its readers'.[509] Willed action to further a particular end, then, is largely absent. In its place we have the symbolism of the chaotic and inchoate triumphing over order and structure, as James Durie determines his actions and even his affinities based upon the flip of a coin.[510] James's willingness to have his choices dictated by the arbitrary tossing of a coin is a statement of rebellion, a fidelity to anarchy over the rigid hierarchies and structure of his feudal society. It is, likewise, a rebellion against the structures of the rational, as witnessed in the Chevalier Burke's description of the habit:

> Ballantrae often deciding on our course by the spinning of a coin; and once, when I expostulated on this childishness, he had an odd remark that I never have forgotten. "I know no better way," said he, "to express my scorn of human reason.[511]

The Master, then, is driven by a kind motiveless motivation – James professes to 'go [his] own way with inevitable motion', and to 'never fight with the

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[508] Penny Fielding, 'Robert Louis Stevenson' in Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 159-172 (p. 164).
[509] Fielding, p. 164.
[510] *Master of Ballantrae*, p. 54.
[511] *Master of Ballantrae*, p. 54.

inevitable', but it is exactly the idea of the inevitable that the making arbitrary of his choices resists.[512] All the seeming choices that one must make and that are in fact determined by the strictures of social consequence or conditioning are burlesqued by a flip of the coin: this may appal Henry as being arbitrary and fatalistic, but this is precisely James Durie's point: that all choices are predetermined. To flip a coin in order to determine one's choice merely makes it more contingent, recovers one small act of agency in the face of the pressures of social or historical momentum. In its final summation, as Watson observes, 'the spinning coin stands at the heart of this tale' as a 'marker of the ultimate indifference of the universe'.[513] James, that is to say, displaces the deterministic role of history with chaos and radical indeterminacy.

This act of resistance, of James refusing to surrender himself to be a victim of history, represents the point where, as Gerard Carruthers remarks, 'we see Stevenson develop Scott's fiction of historical conflict: he proposes that sometimes human nature is mysteriously motiveless, or might not make sense simply in historical context. In other words, human nature perhaps produces historical conflict as much as history produces human conflict'.[514] As such, the image of historical progress as inevitable and irresistible is destabilised. This leads to a narrative fracturing which has sometimes led to accusations of lack of control on the part of the author. Douglas Gifford, for example, describes a possible superficial reading, which sees Stevenson as 'committing the final artistic sin of changing his vision in mid-stream', based upon the alteration of Henry's character after the duel, 'reborn', as he is, as 'a malevolent adult-child, crippled by guilt and warped into a new shape which increasingly rival[s] the degradation of James'.[515] To Gifford, the more sophisticated reading is to take this as an instance of the 'reversible interpretation' typical of Presbyterian and Puritan traditions, the capacity of these to contain 'alternative meanings'.[516] In this sense, it is not Henry's character which is reversed, but rather Mackellar's contingent and biased representation of it. The dualities and parallels in the text are all, in a sense, the projections of Mackellar's Calvinist anxieties and the desire to, in the language of contemporary apocalyptic rhetoric, 'root out "hidden

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[512] *Master of Ballantrae,* pp. 225, 103.
[513] Roderick Watson, 'Introduction' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae* in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Scottish Novels* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1995), pp. vii-xii (p. xi).
[514] Gerard Carruthers, *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 116.
[515] Gifford, p. 75.
[516] Gifford, p. 75.

evil"'.[517] All of Mackellar's account is conditioned by the Scottish Presbyterianism in which Stevenson's own childhood was saturated, and the imagery and the themes of *the Master of Ballantrae* reflect the obsessions of the morbidly pious books such as *A Cloud of Witnesses* which were a particular study of Stevenson's own childhood.[518]

As such, darkness becomes a key term in considering the atmosphere of *The Master of Ballantrae,* and one freighted with particular historical weight. As Lumsden notes, 'twilight and darkness, day and night' are used as 'rhetorical patterning' in the novel, but not as a simple binary.[519] Darkness instead has a complex semiotic significance in the text, one which is closely tied to the novel's conception as, in the words of its sub-title, 'A Winter's Tale'. In his short essay on 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae'*, Stevenson writes of the 'fine frosty night' on which the idea of the novel came to him, while he was living in the high mountains at Saranac.[520] As Lumsden observes, 'much of the coldness and darkness of the northern winter survives in the text, contributing to its general sense of sterility'.[521] Indeed, the manner in which this 'sense of sterility' pervades the text is essential when considering why the novel, for all that it has many of the appurtenances of the typical romance – 'exotic' settings, conflict, motion – does not ultimately have the atmosphere of such fiction. Perhaps the semiotic weight of darkness and cold outweighs the less pervasive significance of the more superficial trappings of romance. The description of the night of the duel between the Brothers Durie, does describe darkness and cold, as Lumsden mentions, but greater emphasis is put on light.[522] 'The fraternal duel in the shrubbery', to use Mackellar's irresistible phrase, is lit only by candlesticks, yet, improbably enough, these are sufficient not only to illuminate the scene, but to blind and dazzle the fighters.[523] Throughout the episode there is a curious inversion of the typical metaphoric values attached to both

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[517] Erin Runions, 'Desiring War: Apocalypse, Commodity Fetish, and the End of History' in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 112-128 (p. 113).
[518] See Harman, pp. 21-22.
[519] Lumsden, p. 73.
[520] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*' in *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Swanston Edition, 25 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912), vol 16, pp. 341-344 (p. 341).
[521] Lumsden, pp 73-74.
[522] Lumsden, p. 74.
[523] *The Master of Ballantrae* (1891), pp. 270, 137-138.

light and darkness. It is darkness which is associated with security ('the blackness was like a roof over our heads') while the light is sinister, emphasising the danger of the duel as 'it run[s] along the steel' and 'mak[es] the blade glitter' on James's sword.

These subversions of standard polarised imagery speak of a resistance on Stevenson's part to surrender to the pat dichotomies of characterisation of the type which had previously been imposed by many on his *Jekyll and Hyde*, with the complex moral fable reduced to a crude opposition between elemental good and evil.[524] Moral absolutes of this kind are, however, employed by Mackellar in his attempts to justify Henry's animus against his brother. The justified Henry is, by Mackellar's account, locked in conflict with something 'diabolical'; indeed, at James's provocation, he makes of the brother's duel a literal conflict between Henry and the devil: 'I have met the devil in these woods and seen him foiled there'.[525] As Craig notes, Mackellar's rhetoric speaks of how 'the actual James disappears out of history to be replaced by a Satanic figure who is the projection of his creator'.[526]

The Master of Ballantrae, then, does not depict a 'manichean conflict', as has been sometimes claimed, but has a shifting and unstable moral centre.[527] As David Robb argues recent years have seen a shift in our understanding and assessment of *The Master of Ballantrae*. Where once the focus was almost solely on the two brothers and the implications and interpretative possibilities of their different temperaments and mutual antagonism, an alternative duality has crept into the discussion and with it a different focus of interpretation'.[528] Robb notes that critics such as Alan Sandison and Adrian Poole hold that this 'alternative duality' can be found by merely shifting 'the principal dualism' from an opposition between Henry and James to one between James and Mackellar.[529] A more sophisticated response, however, and one that accommodates the complexities of the text, would acknowledge that the axis of reflection is seldom static. *The Master of Ballantrae* is

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[524] Stevenson's passionate refutation of the crudeness of this reading is expressed in a letter to John Paul Bocock: 'Letter: To John Paul Bocock, Mid-November 1887'.
[525] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 120.
[526] Craig, p. 80.
[527] John Bowen, 'The Historical Novel' in Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing, eds., *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 244-259 (p. 257).
[528] David Robb, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2016), p. 96.
[529] Robb, p. 97; see, for example, Sandison, p. 286.

supremely concerned with doubling, but never in a simple and stable way. The manner in which, for example, Henry's manners and motivations alter so radically in the middle of the book, represent a shift from the polar opposition of the brothers to something resembling an identity between them: here we have the double less as the moral antithesis (as in Edgar Allan Poe's 'William Wilson' (1839)) and more as the *alter ego* (as in Conrad's 'The Secret Sharer' (1910)).

The tension experienced by Mackellar in confronting this realisation is manifested in the growing morbidity of Mackellar's feelings towards James, which combine hostility with a certain fixation or even attraction. The episode of the journey across the Atlantic, in which James Durie and Mackellar are trapped together in the small circumscribed world of the ship can be read as a temptation narrative. Mackellar clearly perceives it as such, and resists what he sees as the Master's attempts to ingratiate himself to the steward. The language suggests a return to the theme of the diabolical: the saintly Mackellar tempted by the 'devilish' James Durie in the wilderness of the Atlantic Ocean. But the claim that James makes on Mackellar is not one of obedience, but merely of respect. Mackellar's response is telling: 'you weary me with claiming my respect', he exclaims; 'your brother is a good man, and you are a bad one-neither more nor less'.[530]

Mackellar's moral and, indeed, ontological, absolutism is laid bare in this: Durie must be shunned as the devil would be shunned and has no claim to respect for he is baldly, 'bad'. Mackellar's is the logic of the Free Church catechist, at least of Scottish cultural stereotype, reducing the complex network of moral responsibilities to absolutes. It is this absolutism, and the contrast between the sourness of Mackellar and the charm of James Durie, that contributes materially to 'the shifts of sympathy between the protagonists' that Glenda Norquay describes as 'complicat[ing]' the novel.[531] It is in his 'ambivalence to such moral binarism', Pearson continues, that James Durie is able to resist Mackellar's attempts to define him, and so subsume the Master to his narrative authority.[532] This resistance to definition leads to Mackellar using greater precision, as if specificities of accusation might better adhere, and might better justify his moral repugnance. He defines, for example, 'vanity' as the motivator for the 'great force of evil' which is James Durie – but in doing so, in

[530] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 249.
[531] Norquay, p. 129.
[532] Pearson, p. 197.

particularising a vice rather than accusing the Master in nebulous metaphysical abstracts, he leaves himself vulnerable to a riposte from Durie:

> 'Vanity, vanity!' I moralised. 'To think that this great force for evil should be swayed by the same sentiment that sets a lassie mincing to her glass!'
> 'There are double words for everything,' replies the Master, 'The word that swells, the word that belittles; you cannot fight me with a word! It is your pretension to be un homme de parole; 'tis mine not to accept defeat. Call it vanity, call it virtue, call it greatness of soul-what signifies the expression? But recognize in each of us a common strain: that we both live for an idea'.[533]

We have here a return to the Master's submission of his will to chance, the thumbing of his nose at order (especially the divine order of predestination) with his radical commitment to chaos. If James Durie is the devil, he is not the vaunting upstart, the tyrant of Hell, but rather a more Miltonic figure, the rebel angel defying the absolutes of order, refusing to subserve his will to that of another. Indeed, Stevenson clearly stated that James was 'all [he] knew of the devil' but his is a complex, even Romantic notion of Satan. This is dramatised in the narrative, for we do have in the novel an instance of the Devil as ruler: the counterfeit Teach, wreathed literally in sulphurous flame and ruling with fear over his miniature Hell:

> Their leader was a horrible villain, with his face blacked and his whiskers curled in ringlets; Teach, his name; a most notorious pirate. He stamped about the deck, raving out and crying out that his name was Satan, and his ship was called Hell.[534]

[533] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 251.
[534] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 46.

This is the devil of a mediaeval rood-screen, or of the pantomime: in the context of the psychological depths of a realist narrative, such a figure seems absurd and risible rather than fearful. As Burke says 'there was something about him like a wicked child or a half-witted person': when the Chevalier admits to being 'daunted' by him, it is clear that this has nothing to do with 'the terror' Teach believes he instils, but rather due to the disturbing, even pitiable, derangement of his pretence.[535] The symbolism afforded by the ease with which James Durie supplants Teach, and the pirate's impotence when challenged speaks of Stevenson's conceptions of evil: James Durie is 'the very devil' in his amorality, his cynicism and [….] more insidious, more threatening than the bluster of 'Blackbeard'.[536] The letter is but 'play-acting', as Durie puts it; the Master is genuine.[537]

The attempt by Mackellar to impose upon the Master a unitary identity as the villain is fatally undermined by this episode: Teach's presentation of himself is, within the wider context of the novel, almost parodic of Mackellar's attempt to make of his nemesis a one-dimensional villain: the strain to make the paper-mâché mask of Blackbeard fit the Master is marked in the contrast we see between this image and James' reality. James is not simple, but Mackellar's purposes require him to be so: Mackellar attempts to contain his inchoateness: to define him, control him and to 'fight [him] with a word'.[538] James is to Mackellar a text, which he seeks to limit, circumscribe and pronounce an absolute interpretation on, but the Master is too fractured, too multivalent and too indeterminate to do so.[539] The Master of Ballantrae, that is to say, is a Modernist text.

6.7 Conclusion: An Inconclusive End

The Master of Ballantrae reaches its conclusion with a horrifying inversion of expectation, drawing on the same necromantic imagery Stevenson had previously used in the uncanny subversions of 'The Body Snatcher'.[540] The 'resurrectionist' of

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[535] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 46.
[536] *The Master of Ballantrae*, pp. 50-52.
[537] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 51.
[538] *The Master of Ballantrae*, pp. 251, 259, 317, 330.
[539] Pearson, p. 198.
[540] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Body Snatcher' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Tales and Fantasies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920), pp. 87-114.

The Master of Ballantrae is so in a more literal sense than the grave-robbers of the earlier work: Secundra Dass, 'decayed gentleman of India' and James Durie's 'familiar spirit' claims to have the ability to raise his master from the grave.[541] There is no supernatural element to this, merely an Orientalist belief in this colonial Other's access to strange knowledge for, as Dass says of the buried Durie, 'he bury, he not dead'.[542] The Master, in an induced comatose state, is disinterred, and this follows:

> Secundra uttered a small cry of satisfaction; and, leaning swiftly forth, I thought I could myself perceive a change upon that icy countenance of the unburied. The next moment I beheld his eyelids flutter; the next they rose entirely, and the week-old corpse looked me for a moment in the face.[543]

'For a moment' only, for – due to some unforeseen error in the conditions – Dass's method has failed, and the revenant dies – his death, at last, final and unequivocal.[544] But in the horror of this return, his resurrection becomes the death of his brother and antagonist, 'for at that first disclosure of the dead man's eyes, my Lord Durrisdeer fell to the ground, and when I raised him up, he was a corpse'.[545]

The climax of the novel, then, resolves the malignant dependency of the two brothers in a conclusive and decisive manner, but it is only in this mutual extinction that it might do so: all other resolutions would leave an irreconcilable series of discordant motivations, logical contradictions and narrative uncertainties. Death is absence, is certain: any other end to the novel would be inconclusive. It is in this sense that, as Pearson notes, the novel 'defies its own telling' while it is being told.[546] This is the fundamental crisis of *The Master of Ballantrae*: the gulf between the seeming and the being, or, as Stevenson expressed it:

> For the Master I had no original, which is perhaps another way of confessing that the original was no other than myself.

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[541] *The Master of Ballantrae*, pp. 259, 317.
[542] *The Master of Ballantrae,* p. 328.
[543] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 330.
[544] *The Master of Ballantrae*, pp. 330-331.
[545] *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. 331.
[546] Pearson, p. 201.

> We all have a certain attitude toward our own character and part in life; we desire more or less identity between the essence and the seeming […] and the secret of the Master is principally this, that he is indifferent to that problem.[547]

It is this 'indifference' in both the Master and the novel to which he bestows his name that subverts the moral characteristics of the typical nineteenth-century romance novel, which tends towards the unsophisticated in its representation of both moral issues and character motivations, to the extent that it could be said to often work in reductive moral binaries of right and wrong or good and evil.[548] The truth is not absolute and containable here: rather it is subjective, shifting, its authority open to being claimed and misappropriated. As such, as Sandison notes, though the 'psychological realism' of the novel 'might seem to be responding to […] expectations [of] purveying moral truth' there is always carried with it 'an accompanying subversive, deconstructive undertow'.[549]

It is in this that we see that while Stevenson 'may seem to belong to a different epoch' he, as Joseph Farrell notes, 'owe[s] allegiance to a different mode of thought': Stevenson 'was a contemporary of Pirandello, Strindberg, and Ibsen, as well as of Schopenhauer, Freud, and other writers and thinkers who probed the irrational'.[550] The periodic stratification that sees these writers as being securely modern (and Modernist), and their coeval, Stevenson, as Victorian is an inheritance of the generation of critics which came up after Stevenson's death: it is an estimation that is belied by his literary innovation. *The Master of Ballantrae* reveals this, displaying as it does a complex engagement with structure and theme which reconfigures the pre-exisitng modes of realism and romance in a single narrative, and frames from them a text which offers one of the first intimations of the Modernist method in fiction.

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[547] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Note to *The Master of Ballantrae*' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Sketches, Criticisms, Lay Morals and Other Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1923), pp. 475-481 (p. 479).
[548] Julian Lovelock, *From Morality to MAyhem: The Fall and Rise of the English School Story* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2018), pp. 40-47.
[549] Sandison, p. 4.
[550] Joseph Farrell, *Robert Louis Stevenson in Samoa* (London: Maclehose Press, 2017), p. 303.

7. The Island of Midway: Imperial Knowledge and Postcolonial Reputation in Stevenson's Pacific Writing

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter contended that *The Master of Ballantrae* was an important transitional point for Stevenson's style. This chapter will suggest that the final years of his life saw the incipient style first advanced in this novel perfected. It will be argued that there is a strong causal link between Stevenson achieving the full maturity of his style and his experiences travelling, and ultimately settling in, the South Pacific. As John Kucich has it, 'when Stevenson travelled to the margins of the empire, he suddenly found new ways of organizing his narratives'.[551] If *The Master of Ballantrae* was a liminal text which adapted and expanded the potentials of the romance form, then *The Wrecker* crosses more fully over the threshold. Much critical attention has been bestowed on *The Ebb-Tide* (1894) and 'The Beach of Falesá' (1892), discussing their place in a 'nexus […] contribut[ing] to the emerging trend towards modernism', but this chapter will study the place of *The Wrecker* in considering this shift.[552] Where Stevenson's other Pacific fiction is valued as describing the complexities of colonial contact and undermining imperialist binaries, *The Wrecker* is, most often, ignored.[553] Where it is not, its value, and its quality as literature, are severely deprecated. Frank McLynn's description of it as 'in some ways the oddest and most intriguing' piece of fiction by Stevenson, lacking 'proper

[551] John Kucich, *Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy, and Social Class* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 59.
[552] Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells: The Fin-de-Siècle Literary Scene* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 15.
[553] See, for example, Anne Maxwell, 'Building Friendships: 'Civility' and 'Savagery' in R.L. Stevenson's "The Beach of Falesá" and *The Ebb-Tide*', *International Journal of Scottish Literature,* 9 (Autumn/Winter 2013), 38-50 (p. 47).

story structure' and 'clogged' by 'far too many diversions and irrelevancies' is a fair summary of the typical response.[554] McLynn is representative, too, in his attribution of a reason for the 'failure' of *The Wrecker*, suggesting that Stevenson 'did not approach [the novel] in the mood of high seriousness.[555] *The Wrecker*, then, has been seen as a reversion to the simplicities of Stevenson's earlier fiction, a work which compares unfavourably to the more weighty, worthy postcolonial insight of *The Ebb-Tide.* This, however, is to overlook the suggestive connections between the novels, and also the considerable merits that *The Wrecker* has in itself. While the thematic and structural similarities between the two may be masked by the lack of focus in *The Wrecker*, its drift from place to place, its inconsistencies in style and tone, there is nonetheless a likeness between it and the later novella. In the Pacific episodes both novels provide an important interrogation of the mechanisms of predatory capitalism in the South Seas, and *The Wrecker* does this with a particular clarity and dark humour. Both works depict a mercantile world of colonial venture and exploitation, validated by while at the same time reinforcing political expansion. There is an emblematic significance to the ships in these books – the *Farralone* and *The Flying Scud* are both detached from ownership by legitimate authority; both are appropriated through guile and commandeered for the purpose of fraud and commercial deception. But there is more to reward close analysis of *The Wrecker* than the fact that it offers a parallel to *The Ebb-Tide*. The work in itself provides access to Stevenson's insights into the mechanics of the imperialism of the Pacific. The novel draws extensively on the author's direct experience of colonial *realpolitik* in Samoa, as recounted in his journalistic account *A Footnote to History* (1892). *The Wrecker* is a novel which reframes the formula of the romance, which utilises elements of it only to challenge its assumptions and norms. *The Wrecker*, in this sense, is a hybrid form, utilising aspects of realism to suggest the nature of imperial expansion, with its contingent realities of violence and exploitation, while elsewhere remaining within the romantic mode and so undermining its typical platitudes. In this, Stevenson is again developing the modes of writing which predominated in his time towards new forms which anticipate the modern. By incorporating journalistic *verisime* and cultural commentary which critiques the ideology of empire, he makes

[554] Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1994), p. 361.
[555] McLynn, p. 362.

a text which is more urgent and contemporary than any of the fiction which precedes it in Stevenson's corpus.

7.2 Modernism, Place and the Imperial Romance

The Wrecker is a peripatetic and wandering novel, as suggested by its outline. It begins with a brief prologue set in Tahiti, where Loudon Dodd, American captain of a ship arrives in harbour to the assembled attention of the whites involved in trade on the island. This introduces a frame narrative (swiftly abandoned, seemingly forgotten) in which Dodd narrates his history. From an education in a commercial college in Muskegon, based on absurd pantomimes imitating the practice of the stock trading apparatus of Wall Street, Dodd reacts into a desire to be a sculptor, much to his father's chagrin. A journey to Paris, interrupted by a protracted stay with his respectable extended family in bourgeois Edinburgh, leads to life in the bohemian communities in the city and in the artistic colonies of the south-east. Here he meets Jim Pinkerton, a speculator, entrepreneur and fantasist who inducts Dodd into a more venturesome version of the commercial world. This takes the two to America and then, after a rash investment in a wreck which they purchase under the assumption that it carries a lucrative, abandoned cargo of opium, to the Pacific. The latter sections of the novel develop into something between the South Seas fiction of Jack London and Herman Melville and a poorly realised and underdeveloped detective novel, as the history of the ship they have acquired is revealed to be coloured by commercial exploitation, mutiny and murder. The erraticness of the novel's plotting and focus can be attributed to the looseness of the collaboration between Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, the book's second author, whose enthusiastic suggestions for new locations and situations were taken up by Stevenson and accreted to the core of the story.[556] Stevenson, after working enthusiastically with Lloyd Osbourne on their first collaboration, *The Wrong Box,* expressed a certain amount of frustration with the process as they worked collaboratively on this longer novel.[557] Additional

[556] The process of writing the novel is developed at length by Stevenson in a series of letters: it can be clearly inferred that Osbourne's assiduousness at suggesting new events was not matched by a discipline in helping develop them in the writing. See 'Letter: To Edward L. Burlingame, 11 March 1890' and 'Letter: To Charles Baxter, 9 or 10 November 1891'.

[557] See Audrey Murfin, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Art of Collaboration* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. 150.

financial pressures (and pressures of expectation within the family) clearly contributed to this, not least because Stevenson felt more keenly than Osbourne this reality: as Glenda Norquay puts it, 'Osbourne strove to retain the writing process as pass-time, not trade'.[558] Doubtless the first indications of dissatisfaction with Stevenson and Osbourne's previous collaboration also had a negative influence: reviews of *The Wrong Box* were lukewarm at best, with most decrying Stevenson's work with so inexperienced a writer as a major misstep.[559] The commercial implications of this were significant: *The Wrecker* received far fewer royalties, at least on American sales, than Stevenson had come to expect, and a far lower advance than the (astronomical) £1500 the two authors had asked for.[560] In a frank letter from the publisher, Charles Scribner, this is explicitly accounted for by the reaction to the previous work written with Lloyd Osbourne.[561] *The Wrecker* was the second of three collaborations between Stevenson and Osbourne. The third collaboration, *The Ebb-Tide* (1893), is, like *The Wrecker*, a 'South Seas fiction' with suggestive or significant links to the themes of the earlier novel. By contrast, *The Wrong Box* (1889) was an anarchic black comedy set in England. *The Wrong Box* was largely met with frustration and confusion by reviewers who attributed its perceived flaws to Osbourne's contribution.[562] This doubtless contributed to a sense of frustration at the relatively little input Osbourne had to the production of the book (a distinct contrast to the close collaboration on *The Wrong Box*): Stevenson was seeing harm done to his critical reception and his income due to his working with Osbourne, without the ameliorating fact of his stepson contributing to the writing of the novel in any meaningful way.[563]

Reflection on *The Wrecker* is dependent on a consideration of its geographies. Much like the *Master of Ballantrae*, the novel is set in a diversity of

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[558] Glenda Norquay, *Robert Louis Stevenson and Theories of Reading: The Reader as a Vagabond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 183.
[559] Murfin, pp. 151-152.
[560] This introduces an interesting counter-factual: the high amount asked for the advance was earmarked for the purchase of a schooner in which, it was proposed, Stevenson and Stepson would have set themselves up as South Sea traders. Had they been successful, the direction of Stevenson's career could have been strikingly different. See Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), p. 385.
[561] See Murfin, p. 151.
[562] See Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 335-338.
[563] Harman, pp. 386-391.

locations – and, as such, it invites criticism for its *dis*locations. In a structure which radically destabilises the classical unities, the events of the novel are scattered across the globe, from the artists' colonies of France, to San Francisco, Scotland and Midway.[564] The absence of a fixed and stable centre point to the novel lends confusion to its placement, to the establishment of its political or aesthetic meaning. *The Wrecker*, that is to say, resists definition by its locus. Franco Moretti suggests in *An Atlas of the European Novel*, that 'literary forms […] are place-bound'.[565] 'Each of them', Moretti continues, has 'its peculiar geometry, its boundaries, its spatial taboos and favourite routes.[566] This conforms to traditional configurations of the imperial romance, which define the genre as confined to a circumscribed external or 'Othered' space upon which a unitary interpretation can be imposed.[567] By comparison, *The Wrecker* is unbounded, structured in a way that Phillip Steer describes as 'archipelagic, Borderless', reflecting 'maritime space'.[568] Steer suggests that this distinguishes *The Wrecker* (and, indeed, *The Ebb-Tide)*, 'from [these] influential accounts of the romance and its ideological significance'.[569] *The Wrecker*, by this estimation, is disconnected from theoretical constructions of the imperial romance. As Nicholas Daly describes it, 'spatial mastery', and the definition of the 'imperial space' against the metropolitan centre is the definitive (and necessary) mechanism in the imperial romance, the spatialities of *The Wrecker* in their diffusion provide a space to question these hegemonies. Stevenson's novel, that is to say, offers a critique of the norms of the imperial romance by providing a form which superficially matches it, but in reality shifts its location and undermines its imperialist, ideological certainties. There is an interesting point of comparison in 'The Beach of Falesá' (1892), published in the same year as *The Wrecker,* which similarly is set in the colonial space but rather than being a mobile work, that is, one whose setting shifts across a broad expanse of territory, 'The Beach of Falesá' is contained, almost claustrophobically on one small, unnamed island. It also

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[564] Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Wrecker* (London: Cassell & Company, 1892).
[565] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 5.
[566] Moretti, p. 5.
[567] Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 195-196.
[568] Phillip Steer, 'Romances of Uneven Development: Spatiality, Trade, and Form in Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific Novels', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 43, 2 (2015), 343-356 (p. 344).
[569] Steer, p. 344.

interestingly inverts the effect described above in that it begins superficially as a realist text grounded in close, unromanticised description of the traders and their environment only to alter in later stages to something with the trappings of a typical imperial romance with its knife fights and "native superstitions".

The effect of challenging the norms of imperial romance is enhanced still more by the fact that what Steer calls 'the relentless discontinuity' of *The Wrecker* is found not only in its spatial chaos, but in its inconsistencies in plot, character motivation and tone. These features have been recorded as flaws, both in contemporary critical responses, such as that of Phillip Steer, and in the appraisals of the first reviewers of the work.[570] The decadent poet Lionel Johnson, in a review more retrospective of Stevenson's career than focused on the novel in question, speaks of Stevenson's method as 'obscur[ing] the central facts of the story'.[571] Johnson describes the inchoate, restless nature of the narrative as both 'the charm and the defect of *The Wrecker*: the suggestion is that this is a novel less than the sum of its parts, in that 'the charm lies in single episodes', rather than in the organic unity of the whole.[572] However, *The Wrecker* can be read as prefiguring the proliferation of multiple perspectives characteristic of Modernism.[573] Just as it is suggested that the multiple narrators of, for example, Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* or T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* offer a challenge to epistemological certainty, creating 'a shifting composite established on the foundation of uncertainty' in its place, so can the temporal and geographical fracturing of *The Wrecker* be argued to be doing the same thing.[574] Indeed, the significant shifts in the characterisation of the protagonists, noted by Claire Harman as an inadvertent effect of the chaotic production of the novel, are better seen in this light.[575] Thus, the earliest chapters present Dodd and Pinkerton as confident in the complacencies of their secure lives in an Arcadian California, while the later chapters have them expressing a ruthless colonial mercantilism, with no development between: they 'morph' rather than evolve, as

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[570] Steer, p. 350; Lionel Johnson, 'Review, *Academy,* 6 August 1892' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 402-407 (p. 407).
[571] Johnson in Maixner, ed., p. 405.
[572] Johnson in Maixner, ed., p. 405. A similar sentiment is, again, expressed by McLynn: see p. 361.
[573] Michael North, 'Visual Culture' in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*, ed. by Walter Kaldjian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 177-194 (p. 187).
[574] Maroš Buday, 'The Quest for Unity', *English Matters*, VII (2018), 7-16 (p. 7).
[575] Harman, pp. 386-387.

Harman has it.[576] Yet this makes of them polyvocal subjects, ventriloquizing the dominant voices of each *milieu* they move through – and, in this, they often expose the hypocrisies of the ideologies they espouse. Inadvertent or not, *The Wrecker* thus becomes a polysemous text, just like the Modernist texts which succeed it.

Stevenson's reputation as a romance writer led people to expect that his work would persist in conforming to that genre. And so, when his work developed a different style, people saw this as a flaw in his romance writing rather than what it was, the development of a new style.The notion that this decentring challenges the absolutes of narrative certainty is especially applicable when considering how romance defined absolute value, in its metaphysical sense, in specificity of place.[577] Stevenson's early adventure fiction was printed with a map as a frontispiece; if *The Wrecker* were to have such a thing, it would show a disparate network of locations. It would look, to borrow Phillip Steer's term, 'archipelagic'.[578] The novel is, in a sense, an image of the Pacific world, a disguised reflection in fiction of Stevenson's environment as he was writing. By locating *The Wrecker* in these contexts, the seeming flaws identified in its critical reception of diffuseness and lack of a coherent centre can be seen as deliberate, figurative choices on Stevenson's part. The novel is, as Julie Gay puts it, a 'wreck[ing] of the tropes associated with' Stevenson's earlier adventure fiction, and which responds to and questions the absolute, binary power structures of the typical imperial romance.[579] In its place, *The Wrecker* offers something fluid, 'borderless', as Steer notes, which emphasises the reality of the colonial experience as predicated on trade, capital and contingency.[580] Indeed, this is, if anything, inadequate to the realities expressed in the book; for, just as Dodd and Pinkerton begin with a naive attitude to the simplicity and innocence of their money-making scheme, only to find that it leads them ultimately to a reality of extreme violence (as will be discussed below), so this characterisation of trade and

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[576] Harman, pp. 386-387.

[577] See Chapter 3.

[578] Steer, p. 334. The term inevitably recalls John Brannigan's conception of the literature of 'British' Modernism as being likewise archipelagic, its forms and shapes defined by the literal and figurative channels divide the marine territory of 'the north west Atlantic archipelago': John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

[579] Julie Gay, '"From place to place and sea to sea": The Art of Relating in R. L. Stevenson's *The Wrecker*', *E-Rea: Revues Electronique d'etudies sur le monde anglophone*, 19.22 (2022), loc 12 [https://journals.openedition.org/erea/13480].

[580] Steer, p. 334.

openness quickly closes down to the realities of imperialism as coercion and expropriation.To understand the extent to which *The Wrecker* deviates from the form of the typical imperial romance, it is necessary to consider the development of the form – and Stevenson's contribution to this.

7.3 From *Treasure Island* to Midway: Stevenson's Evolution of Romance

Stevenson's role as the originator and populiser of what has been termed 'the new romantic fiction' has been discussed in detail in chapters three and four of this thesis.[581] To recapitulate, however: the early 1880s saw the rise to prominence of a new literary genre drawing upon a range of prior forms, most particularly the medieval epic and the historical novels of Walter Scott.[582] These romances took the 'exotic' spaces recently opened up to exploration and exploitation by the expansion of empire and made of them a zone of adventure – a place where the (white) sons of empire could test their mettle and worth.[583] Africa, India and the Pacific became, in these narratives, something between a gymnasium and a gauntlet, a place for the imperial hero to undergo the figurative *catabasis*, the descent into hell, from which he will arise purified and fit to take his place at the apex of the racial and gender hierarchy.[584] The plots of imperial romance depended strongly on dichotomy, contrasting the character of the English positively against a negatively defined and homogenised foreigner.[585] Coupled with this is a further hierarchy, which privileges the 'virile' masculine qualities of decisiveness, action and force over cerebration and discourse.[586] As such, the Victorian writer and critic Andrew Lang, one of the most enthusiastic proponents of the new romance, summarised the form as being principally concerned with 'the love of adventure, and of mystery, and of a good

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[581] Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 22.
[582] Neil E. Hultgren, 'Haggard Criticism since 1980: Imperial Romance Before and After the Postcolonial Turn', *Literature Compass*, 8/9 (2011), 645-659 (pp. 645-646).
[583] Hultgren, p. 647.
[584] Angela Woollacott, *Gender and Empire* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 60.
[585] See Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 79.
[586] Lindy Stiebel, 'Imagining Empire's Margins: Land in Rider Haggard's African Romances' in *Being/s in Transit: Travelling, Migration, Dislocation*, ed. by Liselotte Glage (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 125-140 (p.132).

Fight'.[587] The fight, it scarce need be noted, was to be carried out against the 'savage' other: violence is routinely effected against the native population as a means to achieve the function of the quest or even as a mere incidental detail in the narrative.[588] The new romance is, by this light, the parallel form to imperialism, justifying the incursion of colonial forces into other territories, and trivialising and normalising the use of violence against their populations. The imperial romance as a form, as Susan Jones observes, 'developed within a complex political context' related to the rapid extension of colonial reach and the concomitant development of imperialist ideology.[589] Expansionism is intrinsic to the logic of the imperial romance, concerned as it is with acquisition, the occupation of territory and the securing of commercial opportunity. *Treasure Island* encapsulates this interest in a single phrase: 'X marks the spot'.[590] The representation of a new territory is inscribed by, and reduced to, the place where material wealth can be secured; the island is the treasure. What the genre represents is, as Steer terms it, 'the extractive logic' of appropriation.[591]

By fictionalising the process of material acquisition at the heart of empire, these novels romanticise venture into adventure. This is a process of sanitisation or, as Franco Moretti suggests, 'sublimation' of 'the bloody profits of the colonial adventure […] into an aesthetic […] object'.[592] A vivid example is found in one of the most influential of the 'new adventure' novels, *Treasure Island*. When the hoard is at last retrieved, Jim Hawkins takes an almost sensual pleasure in it, speaking of how he 'never had more pleasure in sorting them [ie. the coins]', and enumerating with rapt joy all their variety and diversity.[593] *Treasure Island* has a psychological

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[587] Andrew Lang, 'Realism and Romance', *Contemporary Review*, 52 (November 1887), 683–93 (p. 685).
[588] Stiebel, p. 129.
[589] Susan Jones, 'Into the Twentieth Century: Imperial Romance from Haggard to Buchan' in Corinne Saunders, ed., *A Companion to Romance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 406-423 (pp. 406-407).
[590] The phrase is one with 'Elementary, dear Watson!' as being a widely known phrase which does not actually occur in the work in which it is supposed to appear. See Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), pp. 47-48 for the actual description of the cross(es) on the map.
[591] Steer, p. 346.
[592] Moretti, p. 62.
[593] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), pp. 267-268.

sophistication that is easily overlooked, a fact witnessed by the contrast between this moment of pleasure and the closing passage of the novel:

> Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island; and the worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts, or start upright in bed, with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: 'Pieces of eight! pieces of eight!'[594]

The events of Jim's 'Boy's Own' adventure revisit him as trauma, the island becoming, in retrospect a place of horror. This dread is emblematised in the treasure once sought with such pleasure, now become something akin to the iterative and intrusive symptom of a traumatic disorder in the hallucinated cry of 'pieces of eight'. It is questionable, however, if this is enough to retrieve *Treasure Island* from a conformity to the more typical adventure form, with its glib resolutions and denatured violence: this final passage does not alter the atmosphere of all that has preceded it, which unproblematically displays all the key features of adventures of imperial exploitation. That the pacing, consistency in characterisation, and resonance of language is strikingly superior to other instances of the genre, such as the stiff and stilted sea adventures of Frederick Marryat, is immaterial, a question of degree rather than kind. For, whatever its comparative merits, *Treasure Island* largely conforms to the conventions of its genre, with all the implications this entails.

This, however, raises the question as to whether the same may be said of *The Wrecker*. The later novel certainly seems to contain all the visible elements of the imperial adventure genre. It remains, when considered at its most basic level, a quest narrative, featuring the pursuit of a lost bounty. It is, further, set, in large part in the colonised location of 'exotic' imperial territory, and features male European characters using this space as a means for personal growth. Yet *The Wrecker*, just as with Conrad's fiction and Stevenson's own *The Ebb-Tide,* is most fruitfully read as a subversion of the genre it superficially conforms to: it take the elements of the romance novel and reframes them in a narrative which becomes increasingly grounded in realistic detail that confounds the disconnect from reality that is seen in

[594] Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, p. 273.

the genre. In this, it expands on the effect first attempted in *The Master of Ballantrae* and, by moving it into Stevenson's contemporary world of imperialism and mercantile commercialism, it more effectively challenges and interrogates the values underlying this society. It is, in this, more modern and, in form, more incipiently Modernist. This fact has been recognised by Patrick Brantlinger, who numbers *The Wrecker* among those works which 'read like botched romances in which adventure turns sour or squalid, undermined by moral frailty'.[595] This effect is derived not solely from what Steer calls a 'thematic turn', but also from 'a number of formal divergences from genre norms'.[596] The fractured, 'archipelagic' structure already described is one element of this, with its lack of centre and proliferation of geographic locations. This contrasts sharply with the progression of the typical imperial romance, with its closed and contained loop. The adventure or (the motivation for the adventure) will begin in the imperial centre, such as Curtis and Good departing from England in *King Solomon's Mines*, or the embarkment in the major trading (and slaving) port of Bristol in *Treasure Island*.[597] From here, it will pass to the territory which will become the zone of adventure, via the liminal process of the voyage across a space coded as empty – typically the sea (as in *Treasure Island*), but the *terra nullius* of the frontier (as in the high veldt of *King Solomon's Mines*) also frequently features. Beyond this void space lies what might be termed the zone of desire, the place of action which contains the sought for treasure – the unknown island, the lost kingdom. After overcoming an impediment (typically resisting 'natives', who will be overcome with extreme violence, as at the conclusion of Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* which sees the massacre of hundreds of the Zu-Vendis), the territory becomes a place of consummation – the treasure found, the kingdom won.[598] The adventure invariably finishes with a return to the imperial centre and 'normality'. This is as much a return from the unfixed, achronic *temporal* space which Bakhtin terms 'adventure time' as it is from a different geographic

[595] Patrick Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic: Atavism and the Occult in the British Adventure Novel, 1880-1914' in *Reading* Fin de Siècle *Fictions*, ed. by Lyn Pykett (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 184-209 (p. 194).
[596] Steer, p. 345.
[597] H .Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901), p. 4; Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, pp. 53-59.
[598] H. Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain* (London: Capuchin Classics, 2009), pp. 292-293.

space.[599] Adventure time is as exotic or other a configuration in time as the unknown territory is topographically – to depart from it is to return to the conventional flow of sequential progression and causality, suspended narratologically while in the other place.[600]

The Wrecker replaces this linear structure with a network of interconnections. For all that it is a quest narrative, it is open, digressive and fractured. The central characters never escape into the adventure time of romance – the action remains contingent on the processes and regularised time of contemporary commercial society. Time, indeed, is pinned to every element of the story by the pervasiveness of technologies of order, be they the ship's 'standardised clock' with its insistent ticking or the telephone lines linking the market to a network of bidders when the *Flying Scud*/*Currency Lass* is sold.[601] Indeed, the world of 'civilization', the metropolitan centre of trade, is defined by networks as much as by the Pacific fringe, but these networks are centralising, and the imagery associated with them claustrophobic. Loudon Dodd's description of San Francisco with the 'hundred-fold wires of telegraph and telephone matting heaven above my head' suggests bondage or entrapment, part of a description of a city oppressively anarchic in its application of emancipating technologies.[602] This typically Stevensonian irony serves as a sharp contrast to the way that the open networks of Pacific geography are reflected in the loose nature of the novel's structure, as it drifts from destination to destination. The locations so linked, furthermore, reflect Pacific culture in its multivalency and polyvocality.

The Wrecker, then, is a product of Stevenson's experience in the Pacific environment, his journey in a meandering and circuitous route across the 'South Seas', encountering islands and their cultures at random.[603] This random contact is then translated just as haphazardly into the narrative of *The* Wrecker: locations

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[599] M. M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' in M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. By Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-258 (p. 95).
[600] Bakhtin, p. 95.
[601] Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Wrecker* (London: Cassell & Company, 1892), pp. 174, 331.
[602] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 90.
[603] As recorded in Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896).

appear in Stevenson's factual accounts only to be replicated in *The* Wrecker. Tai-o-hae, for example, is described thus in *In the South Seas*:

> Here dwell together, and share the comforts of a club (which may be enumerated as […] one of the most agreeable verandahs in the tropics), a handful of whites of varying nationality, mostly French officials, German and Scottish merchant clerks.[604]

All of this comports directly with the presence of the club with its verandah and mixed mercantile audience of the opening of *The Wrecker*.[605] Strikingly, the place of the indigenous Marquesans in the society of the island is represented by the presence of 'Queen' Vaekhu in both works. *The Wrecker* describes the Marquesan leader almost incidentally, in the picturesque description of the town of Papeete:

> The sleeping city awakened by enchantment. Natives appeared upon all sides, hailing each other with the magic cry 'Ehippy' – ship; the Queen stepped forth on her verandah, shading her eyes under a hand that was a miracle of the art of tattooing.[606]

By comparison, *In the South Seas* recounts Stevenson's description of his own meeting with the '*Grande Cheifesse*' in her 'house […] on the European plan': 'Here […] Her Majesty received us in a simple gown of print, and with no mark of royalty but the exquisite finish of her tattooed mittens.'[607]

Vaekhu's reduced role in *The Wrecker* can charitably be read as a 'cameo'; Stevenson offers only a fleeting glance of a figure who would be well-known to those who had travelled in the Marquesas. A less indulgent reading might assume that the individuated and remarkable woman profiled at a chapter's length in *In the South Seas* had been reduced to merely a piece of local colour. This, in fact, is a

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[604] Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, pp. 67-68.
[605] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* pp. 1-13.
[606] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* p. 3.
[607] Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, p. 78.

problem in much of Stevenson's South Seas fiction: Stevenson's assimilation of environment and character, it should be noted, is typically only developed for European characters. By contrast, characters indigenous to the Pacific – especially women – are typically without agency: they are de-individuated or made purely symbolic.[608] Stevenson describes the habit in his account of how he and his co-author, Lloyd Osbourne, populated their novel. Writing to his publisher, Edward L. Burlingame, Stevenson confesses:

> I am sorry to say that Dodd, Pinkerton, Nares […] and all the minor characters, are portraits, almost undisguised. This is not, as you know, my method of work; and has sprung partly from the scope of the book, partly from convenience in collaboration, when it is so easy to say to your collaborator, 'O, make him so and so!'.[609]

While Stevenson expresses anxiety over both 'the success and […] the decency' of this mode of authorship, he did not make the effort to correct it.[610] The writing of *The Wrecker* is a process of co-option and assimilation, redirecting the digressive chance movements of Stevenson's time in the Pacific. This style of travelling as free movement, wandering and looking for potential contact, is described by Stevenson as 'cruising', a suggestive term parsed and developed symbolically by Oliver S. Buckton in his study *Cruising with Robert Louis Stevenson.* 'Cruising' is taken by Buckton to suggest travel which is 'not a planned journey towards a specific destination'.[611] It is the antithesis, then, of the closed loop of the typical imperial romance, with its defined terminal destination, and hastened return to the imperial centre. Still more, cruising as an epistemological approach carries with it a sense of imperial logic defied, an undermining of the purpose of expansion into the South Seas: here there is no commercial or civilising mission,

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[608] This is discussed in detail in Alice Michel, 'Women Others in the South Seas : Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Beach of Falesá" and Elinor Mordaunt's "Father and Daughter"' in Fleming, Fiona, Loison-Charles, Julie, eds., *Construction/déconstruction de l'altérité dans le monde anglophone* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2017), pp. 175-192.

[609] 'Letter: To Edward L. Burlingame, 11 March 1890'.

[610] 'Letter: To Edward L. Burlingame, 11 March 1890'.

[611] Buckton, p.3.

merely a will to encounter. Harriet Gordon notes how this approach informs *The Wrecker*, with its 'suspicions toward mobility'.[612] It is, in fact, a novel which describes 'how the developments in mobility have altered the nature of time and space in an increasingly connected world system', a hyper-mobility bound up in avarice and mercantile zeal.[613] The double-named-ship is meaningful here: the *Currency Lass* is also the *Flying Scud*, with fast motion and fervent commercialism being so entangled – and the violent end that the ship has suggests how fatal Stevenson finds such approaches.

Ultimately, however, *The Wrecker* is motivated by a desire for wealth as ruthless as in any other imperial excursion. The novel depicts a cruise for treasure, a paradoxical state that suggests the contingencies of appropriation, that a mercenary attitude can be as responsive to incidental and chance encounter as a bohemian one. The paradox, too, is present in Stevenson's own travels. For all his notions of journeying at leisure, to 'travel for its own sake', Stevenson did, as Buckton observes, travel with a purpose in that the writer 'sought to commodify and commercially exploit his travels'.[614] It is possible, in fact, to go still further in this, for Stevenson's first cruise was funded by an advance from a publisher in New York, an advance offered for a series of 'letters' to be published in the *New York World* describing his Pacific journey.[615] The aimlessness, then, might be argued to be illusory and the suggestion made that, as digressive and haphazard as it was, this remained a journey after treasure. This would suggest that the notion that a journey by an imperial actor in a colonial space is never innocent of the commercial contingencies of empire. And Stevenson, for all his sympathies, was an imperial actor, if only by dint of his origin, and by his access to the systemic privileges of class, race and wealth that allowed him to make his excursions in the South Seas.[616] The neutrality of Stevenson's cruising is suspect, his very presence in the Pacific allowed and defined by the currents of trade which are oppressing and eroding indigenous power and autonomy. The satire of the central conceit of *The Wrecker*

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[612] Harriet Gordon, 'At Home in the World': Robert Louis Stevenson's global literary networks' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cardiff, 2019), p. 23.
[613] Gordon, p. i.
[614] Buckton, p. 4.
[615] Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 239.
[616] 'Excursion', in fact, privileges a European perspective: from that of the Pasifika, it is an incursion.

might be turned as fairly on Stevenson as it is on Pinkerton and Dodd, who assume that they can implicate themselves in the profits of the South Seas trade without consequence, and without being contaminated by its brutal realities.

As views and attitudes changed in the twentieth century, Stevenson's status as a white British man, travelling in the South Seas led to him being read as implicitly, even necessarily colonialist as he benefited from a type of exploitation of the area. This impacted the way his work was read. As such, the subtle critique of imperialist ideologies were overlooked as it was read only as an instance of imperial romance fiction, without there being sufficient recognition of how the novel subverts the values underpinning this worldview, nor how it is innovating new stylistic modes by how it reconfigures genre norms.

7.4 Commercial Travel and Colonial Contact in the South Seas

This section will show how Stevenson discussed his travels in the South Seas through his book, *In the South Seas.* Stevenson acknowledges the fragility of the territory, and displays an awareness of the complex significance of his presence there: he is at once sceptical and antagonistic to colonial venture, while simultaneously present in the South Seas only because he is himself a beneficiary of imperial structures, both physical and in terms of social advantage. This work of reportage aimed to demonstrate that the Pacific was vast, and its cultures so disparate and diverse that the people comprising them could not be reduced to one monolithic stereotype. This indicates that Stevenson was self-aware, and consciously attending to themes of cultural interaction – if not to his right to narrate other cultures. In this, he is far from being the traditional colonialist. His sensitivity to the plurality of cultures of the Pacific (and to their vulnerability to 'Western' incursions from the east) equally informed his fiction. As Ann C. Colley suggests, Stevenson's identification with the Samoans as being a people who have suffered the cultural imperialism of others may be responsible for the 'tensions and incongruities' which can be seen in his work with colonial settings.[617] With this in mind, therefore, *The Wrecker* should be interpreted with the knowledge that he was not writing from the

[617] Ann C. Colley, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 5.

position only of a romance writer but with an awareness of the reality fostered by a close and receptive contact with Pacific cultures. *The Wrecker* largely focuses on the role that the British, Americans, and Germans play in the South Seas but this should not be interpreted as a dismissal of the natives; rather, the indigenous people of the Pacific are the implicit concern of the narrative as it excoriates the abusive practices of expropriative colonialism. This attempt to acknowledge colonial experience is a challenge to the single, unitary voice in narrative: it is a reach towards plurivocality and multiple perspective, and so anticipates one of the central methods of Modernist fiction.[618] As such, *The Wrecker* represents a migration away from the imperial romance, whilst still containing many of its modalities and tropes. However, the success of this transition is severely hampered by how limited the centering of colonial voices is here – it is not until Stevenson's later South Seas fictions, such as *The Ebb-Tide* and 'The Beach of Falesá' that this limit begins to be overcome.

In the South Seas is the first work by Stevenson that begins to work out the complex interactions between trade, empire and exploitation of indigenous culture. The journeys it describes represented a point of reorientation in the author's life: after this point he resolved to settle in Samoa and to integrate himself within South Pacific society. Indeed, the departure of the *Casco* from California in 1888 represented the last time Stevenson was to be in either Europe or America.[619] Stevenson's receptivity towards his new geographical and culture landscape, and his awareness of the ambiguities of his presence there, would, by process of sublimation, emerge in the themes and forms of his later fiction. *In the South Seas*, as the first step in narrating this interaction, is a work clearly attuned to the diversity of the Pacific world, with Stevenson doing much to undermine the reductive stereotypes of an homogenised 'exotic' South Seas culture, current in the imperial repertoire since the voyages of Cook and Joseph Banks. The work is a piece of reportage, at once more loose and unfocused than his typical travel narratives, yet more specific in the phenomena described. Developed from his diaries of his two cruises in the Central and South Pacific in 1888 and 1889, it combines observational commentary on the islands, cultures and significant figures of the Pacific with broader reflections on the history and anthropology of the region. Stevenson's

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[618] Pertti J. Anttonen, *Tradition Through Modernity* (Helsinki: Finnish Literary Society, 2005).
[619] Bryan Bevan, *Robert Louis Stevenson: Poet and Teller of Tales* (London: The Rubicon Press, 1993), p. 135.

description of the geographic breadth of the Pacific might be taken as metonymic here, observing first the scale of the area 'called loosely the South Seas', noting how it 'extends from tropic to tropic, and from perhaps 120 degrees W. to 150 degrees E., a parallelogram of one hundred degrees by forty-seven, where degrees are the most spacious'.[620] This exact delineation of the Pacific as defined space, calculated and termed in the technical language of European modes of knowing is a striking imposition: it counterposes Carla Manfredi's descriptions of the 'precariousness' and ambiguity of the extent of territories in the Pacific.[621] This sense of vastness is then made populous with diversity, with Stevenson concluding that the geographical distinctions between islands are the most 'broadly marked in nature', declaring that 'the Himalayas are not more different from the Sahara' than the 'high islands' are from the 'low'.[622] Coupled with this observation on geographic dimension and ratio is what Steer describes as a 'granular sense' of each island as being appreciable as a 'new province of creation', as Stevenson has it, with its own unique *genius loci* and particular cultural inflections.[623]

To travel the South Seas, then, is to move in a network of cultural plurality and divergence, with no fixed imperial or metropolitan centre. Nonetheless, Stevenson also shows a keen awareness of the fragility of this state, and a recognition that geopolitical changes were already affecting a destructive change on the island cultures. The spread of the appropriating presence of both the British and the Americans in the region carried with it linguistic changes that Stevenson saw as emblematic of a cultural standardisation in the region. The spread of 'Beach-la-Mar' is described in a passage from *In the South Seas:*

> the natives themselves have often scraped up a little English, and in the French zone (though far less commonly) a little French-English, or an efficient pidgin, what is called to the westward 'Beach-la-Mar', comes easy to the Polynesian; from the multiplicity of British ships, and the nearness of the

[620] Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, p. 151.
[621] Carla Manfredi, *Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific Impressions: Photography and Travel Writing, 1888–1894* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 106.
[622] Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, p. 152.
[623] Steer, p. 346; Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, p. 151.

> States on the one hand and the colonies on the other, it may be called, and will almost certainly become, the tongue of the Pacific.[624]

Beach-la-Mar offers an ambiguous boon to the societies of the Pacific. It is the language of a trade, and an instrument of its aims: it has a function of assimilating the linguistic diversity of the islands into an easily operable market.[625] It is an extrinsic cultural imposition and imposes a homogeneity, replacing the specificities of cultures with a single pan-oceanic norm. Equally, however, the language can be read as a resistive form, reappropriating the language of the coloniser. By this light, the homogenisation of Pacific languages can be read, rather, as the construction of a lingua franca of the colonised, one which does not reflect the subsuming of indigenous forms beneath the imposition of an imperial language. Vanessa Smith notes the freight that interactions of language could carry during the cultural contacts between colonisers, especially missionaries, and the people of the Pacific. Layerings of semiotic significance are applied to such interactions, primarily in contesting authority: the language of the missionary being presented as 'authentic' English as compared to indigenous adaptations of it; the infantilising constructions of phonetic renderings of 'native' speech in beach-la-mar and other lingua francas; the counter-vailing significance of eloquence and articulacy in speech having an elevated social significance in Samoan culture: all of these indicate that the use of language was freighted with a more than usual tension on the boundaries of these colonial interactions.[626]

These precarious hierarchies of linguistic power are clearly discernible in *In the South Seas.* Note the discussion in the above quotation of the 'reluctance to learn French': there is a slight tone of chauvinism in the suggestion that Stevenson makes that Beach-la-Mar is an indicator of the will and the facility to learn English instead, for Beach-la-Mar is linguistically distinct, and macaronic, as willing to absorb vocabulary from French as English (as, indeed, Stevenson indicates here). It is an

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[624] Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, p. 9.
[625] See Terry Crowley, *Beach-la--Mar to Bislama: The Emergence of a National Language in Vanuata* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p 29.
[626] Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-Century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 97, 31, 61, 203.

emergent language, not an imposed one, borne of utility and with a lexicon and grammar, described in Jean-Michel Charpentier and Darell T. Tyron's taxonomy of the language, as reactive rather than prescribed; that is to say, it is a demotic language, its limits and functions defined by those who use it rather than by a central authority.[627] In this sense, the very existence of Beach-la-Mar is a resistive act against the imposition of colonial authority. Furthermore, in its assimilation of the exogenous language into indigenous forms (or vice-versa, as it may be), the language speaks to the concept in postcolonial theory of 'hybridity'. Homi Bhabha describes 'the margin of hybridity' as a zone 'where cultural differences "contingently" and conflictually touch' and 'which resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups'.[628] Beach-la-Mar, with its adaptive melding of grammars and the veritable salmagundi that is its vocabulary vividly illustrates this democratic intermingling of contacting cultures. This speaks of contact not as (inherently) agonistic, but as formative, even constructive. Hybridity suggests new forms of culture which react to and absorb an external cultural influence, without being subsumed by it.

Tania Zulli describes the encounter between the Pacific world and extra-territorial incomers from Europe and America in terms of hybridity, noting that it serves as a marker of 'the inherent complexity of the colonial experience'.[629] This was the complexity experienced by Stevenson in the diversity of the Pacific, with its existing cultures and their myriad reformulations in response to new cultural contacts.

At the same time, however, Stevenson's writing on the South Seas shows a tendency to construct Pacific historicity through the lens of a stadialist construction of history, coding the Pacific as 'primitive' and pre-modern.[630] The descriptions of the island of Honolulu in *The Wrecker* are redolent with the stereotyped imagery associated with Pacific cultures. Dodd describes 'enjoy[ing] some pictures of the native life: wide-eyed, naked children, mingled with pigs; a youth asleep under a tree; […] the somewhat embarrassing spectacle of a lady at her bath in a spring; and

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[627] See Jean-Michel Charpentier and Darell T. Tyron, *Pacific Pidgins and Creoles: Origins, Growth, Development* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyer, 2004), pp. 32-37.
[628] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 296.
[629] Tania Zulli, 'Identities in Transition: Hybridity in R. L. Stevenson's Colonial Fiction' in *Hybridity: Forms and Figures in Literature and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Vanessa Guignery and others (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), pp. 41-48 (p. 42).
[630] 'Stadialist' in the sense of conceiving of history as an onward progression of distinct stages, an idea discussed at greater length in the previous chapter in relation to Walter Scott's 'whig history'.

the glimpse of gaudy coloured gowns in the deep shade of the houses'.[631] Traces of such imagery run through the history of Western depictions of the Pacific: the very first European contact with the Pacific islands is recorded in what was quickly to become the clichés of 'slender limbed', 'timorous' and – the prevailing European obsession – 'stark naked' natives living 'languid' lives of idleness and ease among the green palms.[632] The imagery was kept alive in popular works of fiction on the Pacific, such as Herman Melville's *Typee* with its '"Happy Valley" of childlike and delightful simplicity' in which 'savages […] stumble in good natured idleness'.[633] This remained the dominant image of South Seas in popular culture into Stevenson's time. Indeed, Carla Manfredi's study of Stevenson's own contribution to the imagery of the Pacific in his photography, highlights the risk of 'reinforc[ing] asymmetrical power relations' which Stevenson had to navigate in his choice of subject.[634] For every instance that Manfredi can record of Stevenson reframing his photography as a balanced 'social encounter', there can be found counter examples which reinforce the objectifying and minimising impulse of the colonial lens.[635] It was, indeed, this latter attitude which endured beyond Stevenson's lifetime, as testified in the Polynesian paintings of Paul Gaugin and in popular culture such as Rodger and Hammerstein's *South Pacific.*[636]

Understanding the motivation behind such representations of the peoples of the Pacific requires a consideration of the influential idea that imperial adventure fiction presents 'anachronistic space', as was developed by Anne McClintock. Imperial writing, both fiction and travel narratives, tend to present the journey from Europe to the colonial periphery as also being a journey to the historical past, with the traveller traversing time as they traverse space.[637] The same movement, indeed,

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631 Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 259.

632 Joseph Banks, 'To the Comte de Laraguais, 6 December 1771' in Neil Chambers, ed., *The Letters of Sir Joseph Banks: A Selection, 1768-1820* (London: Imperial College Press, 2000), pp. 17-24 (p. 19).

633 As per Sterling Leonard's summary of the novel: Sterling Andrus Leonard, 'Introduction' in Herman Melville, *Typee* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), pp. v-vii (p. v).

634 Manfredi, p. 4.

635 Manfredi, pp. 4, 51, 56-57.

636 George T. M. Shackelford and Claire Frèches-Thory, *Gauguin Tahiti: The Studio of the South Seas* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004); see Judith van Trigt, 'Reflecting on the Pacific: Representations of the Pacific and Pacific Island Women in Five Dominant Cinematic Texts' in *Women's Studies Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (January 1996), 99-124.

637 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 40.

is made in *The Wrecker*, its central characters leaving an America coded with the apparatus of modernity – telephones, steam-ships, business exchanges – and journeying into the 'primitive' imperial territory of the Pacific. Balanced against what may seem at first flush to be a reductive and chauvinist representation of the two territories is the thread of bitter commentary with which Stevenson ironises the motives of his protagonists. Just as in *The Ebb-Tide*, the central characters of *The Wrecker* are motivated by commerce in a corrupt and nefarious form. Loudon Dodd and Jim Pinkerton differ more in degree than in kind from the 'beach-combers' of Stevenson and Osbourne's later novel: the affectation of bohemianism accounting for a lack of capacity to conform to, or survive in, the bourgeoisie's mercantile world is shared between both sets of protagonists. It might be suggested that Dodd and Pinkerton are merely further up the scale of decay than Herrick, Davis and Huish, with only the earlier appearance of a commercial opportunity arresting Dodd and Pinkerton's spiral into poverty seen in the indigence of the 'beach-combers' of the latter novel. The said commercial opportunity in both novels involves the seizing of the means of trade in the acquisition of a ship with a spurious history. Both books, too, involve a plan to continue contributing to these spurious histories by making a fortune in a criminal trade. So, in *The Ebb-Tide* the *Farralone* is to be deliberately sunk – wrecked, in point of fact – in order to defraud the insurers. *The Flying Scud* in *The Wrecker* is assumed to be carrying an illicit cargo of opium, with Dodd and Pinkerton purchasing the derelict from the unwitting auctioneer in order to sell this on at a large profit. These novels, then, give in place of the typical quest narrative of the imperial adventure, ones which are far more obviously morally compromised, their corruption and amoral avariciousness clearly displayed in advance. These are criminal enterprises, without the language of crusade to dignify them as anything else; without the typical language of justification, then, but still with the language of romance.

Consider the language of Dodd as he projects his journey to the remotest point of the Pacific:

> I stood there on the extreme shore of the West and of to-day. Seventeen hundred years ago, and seven thousand miles to the east, a legionary stood, perhaps, upon the walls of Antoninus, and looked northward toward the mountains of the Picts. For all the interval of

> time and space I, when I looked from the cliff-house on the broad Pacific, was that man's heir and analogue: each of us standing on the verge of the Roman Empire (or, as we now call it, Western civilisation), each of us gazing onward into zones unromanised.[638]

This strikingly recalls the meditation of a later fictional narrator of the imperial space, Marlow, and his declamation 'and this also has been one of the dark places of the earth'.[639] Just as in *Heart of Darkness*, there is a projection of an historical archaism on to the zone of colonial contact, a projection which at once legitimises and problematizes the imperial venture. Indeed, Dodd's romanticising 'gesture', as Philip Steer observes, is a recapitulation of the stereotyped presentment of the 'anachronistic space' of imperial adventure fiction.[640] But this should be set in the wider context of the novel: *The Wrecker,* does not, in general, offer this. Far from being decoupled from reality in an 'imagination of [...] other space', as Daly typifies the romance, *The Wrecker* is grounded in material specificity.[641] The world of mundane contemporaneity is carried into the Pacific: there is no liminal space transcended, no transfigurative moment of change to another space. The European adventurers carry the commercial world of the San Francisco exchange with them, and transmute all they see into its capitalist calculus. They are, in a sense, a new kind of Mephistopheles: 'I, myself, am the Market, nor am I out of it yet', as it were.[642] The Pacific as a zone of enterprise becomes depopulated, the voices of those who can offer a different narrative and interpretation silenced. It need hardly be observed that there are no major 'native' characters in *The Wrecker*: as Gayatri Spivak puts it 'in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak'.[643] And, for all Stevenson's attempt to subvert certain constructions of

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[638] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* p. 125. Note, too the depiction of Scotland: this is one of many instances of Stevenson making an equation between the historic past of his own nation and the present of the Pacific nations. See Anne C. Coley*, Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 137-140.

[639] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Paul B. Armstrong (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 5.

[640] Steer, p. 348.

[641] Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the* Fin de Siècle*: Popular Fiction and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 148.

[642] Cf. Christopher Marlowe, 'Doctor Faustus' in i.ii.80.

[643] Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 271-316 (p. 287).

imperialist ideology, *The Wrecker* (necessarily) remains a colonial production. So, we have a challenge to the European perspective, but without a Pasifika or Polynesian one offered in its place. There is no indication of what a cultural world with radically divergent roots looks like: there are no comparable institutions or social constructions displayed. This suggests that, for all that the novel is advancing towards Modernist forms, it remains on the margin of attaining them, for though the solitary privileged viewpoint is undermined here, it is not replaced with the fragmentary, polysemous range of voices which a Modernist text would provide in its place.[644]

Israel Zangwill, in a contemporary article on *The Ebb-Tide* discusses how the later novel points up some of the '*leit-motifs*', as he puts it, of 'Mr Stevenson's later work'.[645] Zangwill emphasises how this work adds to 'the deserted islands and the hidden treasures which have always fascinated him', the 'romance of the modern'.[646] Stevenson, Zangwill notes, travels to the South Seas 'paradoxically' to find this when it may as easily found in 'the prosaic streets' of Britain.[647]

The Wrecker is a novel which overturns the typical structure of imperial adventure fiction, with its closed geographical loop from metropole to exoticised territory and back again. In its place is a diffuse, decentred narrative, as scattered as the Pacific archipelagos that it describes and figuratively represents. The quest narrative of 'there and back again' is replaced by a chaotic and reactive journey which suggests not directed progress of the medieval, but the chance speculativeness of the itinerant island trader: the pursuit, here, is capital. The conscious construction of this theme, this building of quiet chaos, suggest how far Stevenson is deviating from the typical structures of the imperial romance, as described in chapter two.

7.5 'Far from the Money-Hunger of the West': The South Seas as Market

This section will illustrate that Stevenson was writing from an informed position in his representation of the imperial Pacific. He took his lived experience of

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[644] See Peter Childs, *Modernism and the Post-Colonial: Literature and Empire 1885-1930* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), p. 78.
[645] Israel Zangwill, 'In Defence of *Ebb-Tide*, Review, *Critic* (New York)' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 459-463 (p. 462).
[646] Zangwill, p. 462.
[647] Zangwill, p. 462.

the South Pacific as meticulously recorded *In the South Seas* and transmuted it into fiction which reflected the reality of Pacific politics and culture at the time. This was in marked contrast to previous fiction of the South Seas of the kind that Stevenson describes as 'sugar candy sham epic' such as that of R. M. Ballantyne, who had never travelled to the Pacific, or of Herman Melville, who had, but nonetheless writes of it as the sort of edenic and primitive world which would flatter the preconceptions of European readers.[648]

The Pacific was, to Stevenson, a pointed contrast to the world of commerce and industry which he had known (at a remove, of course) in Europe, yet without his recoursing to stereotyped portrayals of the region. As Rod Edmond observes, Pacific cultures were routinely given as 'the reflex comparison with industrial capitalist Europe' in representations of this period, being shown as places of 'constant surplus' with 'a prelapsarian dispensation from labour'.[649] So, when Stevenson, writing in November 1891, immediately after the completion of *The Wrecker,* states 'I do begin to know something of life in the XIXth century, which no novelist either in France or England seems to know much of', his emphasis that the South Pacific is the essential locus for understanding modernity is doubly striking.[650] The conditions of contemporary capitalism are, then, highlighted by contrast and made visible by their ancillary effect on the expansion of markets through empire. *The Wrecker* is saturated in commercial interest – the prevalence of terms related to finance and speculation attests to this. Stevenson in his epilogue to *The Wrecker*, describes the novel as 'full of the need and the lust of money, so that there is scarce a page in which the dollars do not jingle; full of the unrest and movement of our century, so that the reader is hurried from place to place and sea to sea'.[651] By his own admission Stevenson explains that the chaotic nature and style of *The Wrecker* is intentional and therefore it should be considered as a writing technique to convey a particular feeling.

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[648] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, 28 September 1891'; for a detailed discussion of Melville's Pacific, see John Sampson, *White Lies: Melville's Narrative of Facts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); for a counter-argument, suggesting positive qualities in Melville's representations, see Jeffrey Geiger, *Facing the Pacific: Polynesia and the U. S. Imperialist Imagination* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), pp. 43-46.

[649] Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)), p. 242.

[650] Indeed, the letter was written so soon after the completion of *The Wrecker* that it was sent by the same mail: see 'Letter: To Charles Baxter, 9 or 10 November 1891'.

[651] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 425.

This is almost literally true: 'Money', for instance, features with striking frequency; the word appears 113 times in 427 pages. Modernity is a commercial exercise here, and the destabilising effect that trade and the exploitation it bears with it are embodied in the protagonists of *The Wrecker.* There is, as Stevenson sees it, an inversion of expectation here: the chronicle of the actions of Dodd and Pinkerton are 'full of details of our barbaric manners and unstable morals'.[652] Dodd and Pinkerton bring barbarism to the 'Cannibal Islands': far from being 'the civilising influence' of imperialist rhetoric, the white traders are given as representatives of a 'modern caste' who bring immorality and anarchy in their wake.

Modernity in the South Seas means the mercantile and the mercenary. At the same time as writing *The Wrecker,* Stevenson was producing an account of the mechanism by which commercial modernity was being effected in – or, rather, upon, the Pacific. Written within a year of Stevenson settling on Samoa, his account of its recent past, *A Footnote to History,* lays particular emphasis on the operation of the colonial administration of the island. Samoa, from 1889, was, while nominally independent, governed by a triumvirate of three representatives from the 'interested' imperial powers: namely, the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom. Holding the balance of power was a chief justice appointed by Sweden (as a neutral, disinterested party). This position was held, from 1890, by Conrad Cedercrantz, whose role as an independent arbiter was designed to prevent abuses and ensure the adherence of the imperial parties to the agreements of the Treaty of Berlin. Upon his appointment, Cedercrantz spoke of the self-government guaranteed to the Samoans by the latter and his intention to hold to this principle, before immediately undermining this sentiment by suggesting the need for the Europeans to determine who is the appropriate heir in the disputed succession for the over-kingship of the island.[653] '[I] must make a thorough investigation before proclaiming to the Samoans the name of their monarch' Cedarcrantz declares, entirely abandoning the pretence that the islanders have any franchise or agency in choosing their leader.[654]

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[652] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 425.
[653] 'Samoa's Chief Justice: King Oscar's Appointee Arrives at Washington en Route to the Islands', *San Francisco Call*, Volume 67, Number 174, 21 November 1890, p. 1.
[654] 'Samoa's Chief Justice: King Oscar's Appointee Arrives at Washington en Route to the Islands', *San Francisco Call*, Volume 67, Number 174, 21 November 1890, p. 1.

Stevenson's description of the operation of the protectorate suggests much about the motive and manner in which it was actually operated. His description of the diplomatic capital carries an echo of the 'jingle of dollars':

> all the money, luxury, and business of the kingdom [is] centred in one place, that place excepted from the native government and administered by whites for whites; and the whites themselves holding it not in common but in hostile camps, so that it lies between them like a bone between two dogs, each growling, each clutching his own end.[655]

The operation of these competing foreign powers – each with their own appropriative aims, and each bound to forego them by a treaty forbidding imperial expansion makes of Samoa, as Phillip Steer observes, 'a microcosm'.[656] Samoa in the early 1890s provides a single instance of the reality in contested colonial territories throughout the globe at this time, as the age of imperial expansion ossified into a period of tense stability and armed peace, with the active colonial nations tending to their acquisitions and negotiating the new world order. As such, Samoa is a microcosm not only of how colonised territories looked, but what they would become: it is a prefiguring of a twentieth and twenty-first century imperialism of global influence, a jockeying for control of trade and defence of national interests. Just as the spread of the copra and rubber plantations of state sponsored German industry precipitated the colonial tensions of 1888 onwards, so too does the increase of commercial development by China in the contemporary Pacific cause diplomatic lobbying and undue political influence on independent national sovereignty.[657] Military expansion and development by other international powers in the region to counter this perceived threat to their sovereignty through a show of force also echoes the arrival of the main force of the German and American navies, as well as a significant fleet of British ships, in the southern Pacific in 1891. It was this naval

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[655] Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), p. 25.
[656] Steer, p. 349.
[657] See Terence Wesley-Smith, 'China's Pacific Engagement' in Terence Wesley-Smith and Edgar A. Porter, eds., *China in Oceania: Reshaping the Pacific?* (New York and Oxford: Berghan Books, 2011), pp. 27-48 (pp. 31-32).

buildup that leads to the events described in perhaps the most arresting chapter of *A Footnote to History*, where the numerous battleships inadequately harboured in the shelter of Apia Bay are dashed against each other, severely damaged and, in one instance, sunk by the force of the hurricane that struck the island in March 1889:

> The agitation of the sea […] surpassed experience and description. Seas that might have awakened surprise and terror in the midst of the Atlantic, ranged bodily […] and almost without diminution into the belly of the flask-shaped harbour; and the war-ships were alternatively buried from view in the trough, or seen standing on end against the breast of the billows.[658]

The passage is vivid, and recalls the episode in *The Wrecker* where the *Norah Creina* weathers the force of a storm, which likewise describes the 'barbarous mishandling of the seas' in terms of 'mountainous' waves and pounding force.[659] There is, perhaps, a submerged indication in this that the ships of the respective navies are being read by Stevenson as other trading ships, engaged on equally questionable speculation as the *Norah Creina*. Regardless, the destruction of the fleets in Apia harbour was the originary moment for the tripartite operation of power in Samoa in the late nineteenth century. This cataclysm precipitated the need for a commitment by the three imperial powers to co-operate and to maintain peace not for altruistic reasons, but out of pragmatism. The balance of peace ensured was not solely due to the loss of capacity to force claims but also because, if Stevenson is to be believed, it necessitated, even in the moment, co-operation between the crews of the stricken ships. The author records the labours of British seamen in rescuing stricken American sailors on the *Adler* and 'German blue-jackets' risking their lives

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[658] Stevenson, *A Footnote to History*, pp. 250-251.

[659] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 201. There are also striking (and highly specific) parallels between this passage and the description of the typhoon in Conrad's novella of the same name (see Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1902), pp. 165-171). This is highly suggestive in considering the extent to which Stevenson was pioneering a Modernist style, given the critical categorisation of *Typhoon;* Jana M. Giles, 'Conrad's Avant-Garde Sublime: Spectacular Language, Nature, and the Other in *Typhoon*' in *Conradiana*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Winter 2015), 163-210 (p. 163).

to save 'their enemies'.[660] The still more striking image of 'the unfriendly consuls of Germany and Britain' variously working together in 'agonies of prayer' or in the more practical pursuit of 'getting a line conveyed from shore' for the rescue of those imperilled represents an overcoming of national partisanship in shared humanitarian cause.[661] The night of the storm, thus, provides a vignette of the cooperation – contingent as it might be – between the contesting nations. However, it is not merely in crisis that the imperial powers were co-operating: the material realities of governing so diffuse a territory, so remote from the imperial centres of Europe necessitated exchange and mutual endeavour. The Pacific, it must be recalled, was a geopolitical and commercial ecosystem: the islands were connected by networks of trade currents and shipping lanes, the loss of access to which could isolate the 'remoter' islands. The Pacific trade – increasingly maintained by private or even multi-national interests – was the essence of the foreign presence in the Pacific, and direct national interest at times was required to play a subordinate role.[662]

Stevenson often views the process of trade in the South Seas with an ambivalent eye. Trade, indeed, is associated by Stevenson with the worst excesses of imperial exploitation. As has already been indicated, the German plantations were inextricably connected with imperialist expansion, its 'soft' influence carrying the hard threat of military force behind it. Stevenson is clear sighted about what he terms 'the German firm', a local shorthand for 'the *Deutsche Handels und Plantagen Gesellschaft für Sud-See Inseln zu Hamburg'*.[663] This, the German Trade and Plantation Company for the South Sea Islands of Hamburg, is responsible for the vast plantations which Stevenson describes as providing 'zones of cultivation showing in a more vivid tint of green on the dark vest of forest'.[664] At a scale of tens of thousands of acres, the plantation provides the uniformity of a monoculture: Stevenson describes 'walk[ing] for hours in parks of palm tree alleys, regular, like

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[660] Stevenson, *A Footnote to History,* p. 264.
[661] Stevenson, *A Footnote to History*, pp. 254-255.
[662] The complex realities of colonial governance are detailed in John M. Ward, *British Policy in the South Pacific, 1786-1893* (Sidney: Austalasian Publishing Company, 1973), pp. 296-315. Counter-intuitively, the attenuated colonial presence in the South Pacific was also a key factor in the relative absence of direct resistance by the occupied people; see Peter J. Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders Under German Rule* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016) pp. vii-ix.
[663] The misspellings are Stevenson's own. Stevenson, *A Footnote to History*, p. 29.
[664] Stevenson, *A Footnote to History*, p. 29.

soldiers on parade'.[665] The size, ubiquity and influence speak of the possibility of spinning metaphors from this idea of monoculture, of taking the vital indigenous diversity and imposing on it a single, sterile and absolute alien construction. The plantation, as Stevenson has it, carries with it 'the sense of empire': he describes the Germans running the company as being 'oppressed' with this sense, of conflating 'commercial sharpness [with] patriotism'.[666] As Stevenson suggests, such an investiture of the firm with ethnic significance makes its operators 'prepared to oppress rival firms, overthrow inconvenient monarchs, and let loose the dogs of war' in the service of 'the national firm'.[667] Strikingly, however, Stevenson opposes to this not the other empires, his own nation or, significantly, the interests of the colonised islanders, but the unallied and self-interested groups of independent traders on the islands. Stevenson dwells on the diversity of these individuals: the ports of the Pacific, especially of the major trading centres such as Tahiti and Apia, are described in both Stevenson's fiction and in his travel writing as teeming with a mix of nationalities.[668] This diversity is nowhere so clearly (and cynically) described than in the opening passage of *The Ebb-Tide*:

> Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease. Some prosper, some vegetate. Some have mounted the steps of thrones and own islands and navies. Others again must marry for a livelihood […] and there are still others, less pliable, less capable, less fortunate, perhaps less base, who continue, even in these isles of plenty, to lack bread.[669]

This, however, is a refinement of the opening scene of the*The Wrecker*, which similarly fictionalises a trading port described in *In the South Seas*. The prologue to the novel is set in Taioha'e in the Marquesas Islands, where the arrival of

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[665] Stevenson, *A Footnote to History*, p. 29.
[666] Stevenson, *A Footnote to History*, p. 33.
[667] Stevenson, *A Footnote to History*, p. 33.
[668] See, for example, *In the South Seas*, p. 69 with its description of the Taioha'e cemetery with its English, Scottish, French and Scandinavian inhabitants.
[669] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 1.

Loudon Dodd's ship summons a crowd of 'the merchants and clerks of Tai-o-Hae', an audience described by their nationality ('the various English, Americans, Germans, Poles, Corsicans, and Scots') and yet not defined by it.[670] This is a transnational more than an international group, 'not so much divided along national lines as abstracted from them', as Steer puts it.[671] The imperatives of the South Sea trade count for more than national allegiance and, indeed, national indicators can slip, are fluid or transitory. This can be seen in the speculation on Dodd's ship: 'the red ensign' belying the 'American lines', 'Johnny Bull […] by her headsails' yet 'consigned […] from Auckland', the ship defies classification on nationality, but is certain on trade.[672] Still more clearly, trade affects the identity coding of Dodd himself. 'You seem to have become a Britisher' declares Havens, port agent and acquaintance of the American, in reference to the flag the ship sails under.[673] Dodd responds with a description of the commercial arrangement around the trader: added to the British owner and the New Zealand port registry is the funding of a Californian insurer, 'a fool in 'Frisco who […] comes down on us like a wolf on the fold on the profits'.[674] This is the image which highlights both the motive and the operation of trade in the Pacific: it is a predatory pursuit of appropriation and venture. It is the extrapolation of the world-view of the 'commercial college' in which Dodd receives his education, a modern institution connected via 'electric wires […] with "the various world centres"' and full of 'the talk […] of Wall Street'.[675] 'The bulk of [the] day and the gist of the education centred in the exchange', a process which, Dodd says, was 'cold-drawn gambling, without colour or disguise'.[676] The pursuit of the collegians' leisure hours replicate, it is suggested, the hours of their education: 'the pupils', Dodd narrates, 'were principally engaged in rooking or trying to rook one another for nominal sums'.[677] The commercial college repels Loudon Dodd, precipitating a flight from its capitalist norms into the bohemian milieu of the artists colonies of France – yet Dodd is drawn inexorably

[670] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 3.
[671] Steer, p. 349.
[672] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, pp. 3-5.
[673] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 5.
[674] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 6.
[675] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* p. 16.
[676] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 16.
[677] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 16.

back into the vortex of mercantile speculation. His looping, transcontinental course leads to the Pacific, and back to a world of mercenary speculations and shady dealing for which his education has been a fitting apprenticeship.

The Wrecker is, it has been suggested, a 'mock *Künstlerroman*' and it certainly subverts the usual path the genre takes.[678] John D. Pizer describes the *Künstlerroman* as a novel describing the artistic coming-of-age of an artist, his or her 'personal development [into a creative practitioner]' via a process of 'acculturative formation'.[679] In light of this definition, *The Wrecker* is a *Künstlerroman* gone wrong. The initial progress of Loudon Dodd from an unsympathetic and commercially minded bourgeois background into a world of art, creativity and intellectual authenticity is certainly in accord with the genre's norms: indeed, in the outline of the early portions of the novel there are clear echoes of Henry James's *Roderick Hudson*, a seminally influential work which popularised the *Künstlerroman* in English. James was a close associate of Stevenson, and the latter records his impressions of *Roderick Hudson* in an effusive letter of 1887.[680] Dodd's career, it must be noticed, mirrors that of Hudson, comprising a flight from American mercantile conformity into the artistic milieu of Europe.[681] But Dodd fails as a bohemian – the 'acculturative formation' doesn't stick, and Dodd collapses back into a seedy world of commercial speculation far removed from the high financial ambitions of his family. He is less the over-mastering artist flying by the nets flung to hold him back, and more, to misappropriate a term from another work of the 1890s, the 'stickit' artist.[682]

The peregrinations of the novel at first flush seem like a lack of coherence and structure, with the passages on Dodd's education as an artist seeming redundant and digressive. But recast in this light, Dodd is an example of the fate of the failed

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[678] Rivka Galchen, 'Borges on Pleasure Island', 'Sunday Book Review', *The New York Times*, 25 June 2010 <https://www nytimes.com/2010/06/27/books/review/Galchen-t html> [accessed 17 September 2018].

[679] John D. Pizer*, Imagining the Age of Goethe in German Literature, 1970-2010* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), p. 7.

[680] Stevenson's enthusiasm does not spare James from some tactless critical bluntness – the letter closes with a withering assessment of *Portrait of a Lady.* 'Letter: To Henry James, [c. 20 November 1887]'.

[681] Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1907).

[682] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1992), p. 157; The Scottish colloquial term, which forms the title of S. R. Crockett's novel of 1893, was applied to a minister who fails to complete his education or probationary period; he gets 'stickit' or 'stuck. See S. R. Crockett, *The Stickit Minister and Some Common Men* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893).

artist: leaving the securities of his philistine world and then failing as a hellene, he is cast back into the commercial world in the raw, as it is behind the screen of imaginary tradings and distant effect. The world of the exchange – its fantasy version in his education, the genuine article in San Francisco – is made translucent to Dodd as he journeys into a world of trade. The setup of the journey recalls the structure of the imperial romance, as has been noticed, yet it is also, in prospect, a wry reflection of the *Künstlerroman* – a *Geschäftsmannroman*, or businessman's novel, as it were. Dodd's business becomes the business of empire – it is in 'the colonies' that he believes he will find his fortune and construct his identity as a commercial hero, after his failure to construct himself as an artist. The irony of the contrast between Dodd's assumptions about the 'utility' of the Pacific as a ground for financial speculation and modern trade and Stevenson's earlier assumption that it is a world apart from the mercenary norms of what, to him, was contemporary capitalism suggests an evolution of the author's views. Deeper exposure to the realities of the South Seas allowed Stevenson to see beyond the superficialities of an 'exotic' world to see how deeply implicated it was in the contingencies, and inequities, of global trade. In light of this experience, he produced a structurally complex novel which resembles, at least in significant parts, an imperial romance, but which then challenged, even deconstructed, the assumptions and ideological biases which characterised the form. This critical challenge to a form that Stevenson was so integral in popularising represents a significant evolution in his style and prefigures his last works, with their clear intimations of the Modernist forms to come.

7.6 Frenzied by the Gold Hunt: Contesting Depictions of Imperial Violence

This section will discuss how *The Wrecker* subverts the expectations surrounding conflict in the romance. This will be done through an analysis of a pivotal event in the narrative which will suggest how the inflection of realistic depictions of violence serves to subvert the mechanisms of the ideology that underpins imperial romance, which depend on disguising the realities of colonial aggression. The romance tends to feature weightless violence; that is, bloodshed is presented as a casual and inconsequential thing: examples can be found in Stevenson's earlier work, be it in Alan Breck Stewart's giddy cry of 'am I no a

bonny fighter?' as bodies pile up around him, or John Amend-All's picturesque black arrows, which kill suddenly but have so little bearing on the plot that Stevenson forgets to resolve the point of their intended targets.[683] Violence is part of the adventure, rendered anodyne, as play. *The Wrecker* subverts this; for all its jollity in earlier chapters, when violence erupts into the story in the closing chapters it is realistic violence: brutal, shocking and traumatic. This is in itself a subversive act: still more so is that it is perpetrated by figures of a near-fetishised modernity rather than by 'savages', and perpetrated, moreover, in pursuit of material gain.

Critical response tends to relate the loose and wandering structure of *The Wrecker* to a figurative depiction of the progress of empire. An example can be found in Rod Edmond's suggestion that *The Wrecker* is 'a novel whose loose, meandering, improvisational structure expresses perfectly the shifting, opportunistic and illusory aspirations of its characters', of the kind indicated by Dodd's vacillation from prospective artist to would-be merchant.[684] However, the effect of these structures is to dissipate the 'linear movement' that Moretti suggests is essential to the imperial romance genre, and to the expropriative ideology it disseminates.[685] If, as Moretti claims, 'colonial romances have no bifurcations', the dilatory movements of Dodd would seem to preclude *The Wrecker* from conforming to the genre and its logic. Stevenson himself suggested that *The Wrecker* is intended to stress 'the energy and the violence in the men' in the novel, and in Loudon Dodd's progress from artist to speculator to colonial adventurer more of the energy is transmuted into violence.[686] The imperial territory and the imperial project are Dodd's ultimate destination, and they are rendered, both conceptually and functionally, as paradoxically anarchic. This anarchy, and the violence it unleashes are symbolised by the increasing avarice and amorality in the pursuit of the illicit cargo of *The Currency Lass.* The distance in space from the bohemian artist colonies of France of the beginning of the novel is matched by the improbable distance Loudon Dodd's motivations and behaviour have shifted.[687] Loudon Dodd, once so complacent in his

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[683] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 91; Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Black Arrow* (London: Cassell and Company, 1888), pp. 1-20.
[684] Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 179.
[685] Moretti, p. 58.
[686] 'Letter: To Henry James, October 1891'.
[687] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* p. 31.

own ‘taste[,] naturally classical’ and his ‘pleasurable zeal’ for architectural projects, in the end finds himself in the remotest part of the largest ocean, goading on sailors to ransack an abandoned ship for a concealed supply of opium.[688] The Chinese cook (whose stereotyped demeanour and crudely burlesqued speech themselves speak of imperial values) suggests the opium may be concealed in the ship’s cargo of rice.[689] The rice from the ‘disembowelled’ sacks is ‘heaped up’ to overflowing on the deck, the incidental destruction, as Dodd notes, of ‘a hundred and fifty tons of valuable food’.[690] ‘About the wreck, thus transformed into an overflowing granary’, as Dodd reports, ‘the sea-fowl swarmed in myriads’; this prompts a cull – or a massacre:

> The men […] turned savagely on the offensive, drove their knives into the birds, drew them out crimsoned, and turned again to dig among the rice, unmindful of the gawking creatures that struggled and died among their feet. We made a singular picture – the hovering and diving birds; the bodies of the dead discolouring the rice with blood; the scuppers vomiting breadstuff; the men, frenzied by the gold hunt, toiling, slaying, and shouting aloud […] Every man there toiled in the immediate hope of fifty dollars, and I of fifty thousand. Small wonder if we waded callously in blood and food.[691]

The scene, with its suggestive representations of the waste of trade, the greed for wealth, and remorseless violence, is surpassed in its symbolic value by the resolution of the mystery of the missing cargo. The *Currency Lass*, it is revealed, was so glutted with trade from a successful foray through the islands, that it became the victim of an opportunistic moment of piracy when stranded off Midway Island.[692] The arrival of the *Flying Scud* leads not to an altruistic rescue, but to the ‘hard bargain’ of the chapter’s title.[693] This demand – your money or your life, in

[688] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* pp. 23, 236.
[689] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* p. 236.
[690] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* p. 237.
[691] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, pp. 237-238.
[692] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* pp. 365, 373, 382.
[693] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker,* p. 383.

brief – is refused, and precipitates the murderous assault of the marooned crew of the *Currency Lass*:

> The fell business took long, but it was done at last. Hardy the Londoner was shot on the fore-royal yard, and hung horribly suspended in the brails. Wallen, the other, had his jaw broken on the maintop-gallant crosstrees, and exposed himself, shrieking, till a second shot dropped him on the deck. […] Holdorsen, Hemstead, Trent, and Goddedaal were first disposed of, the last still breathing as he went over the side […] The Chinaman was their last task; he seemed to be light-headed, talked aloud in his unknown language as they brought him up, and it was only with the splash of his sinking body that the gibberish ceased.[694]

The violence is as far as possible from the anodyne and denatured violence of the typical imperial romance, foregrounding rather than disguising the shock, fear and agony of the dying. It is a horrific, not an heroic business, and the pirates are not picturesque, but are desperate, violent men. This murderously appropriative act occurs, suggestively, on Midway – the island at the very heart of the Pacific. This is the reality of what the centre of imperialism looks like: not 'zones unromanised', but 'the romance of the modern', where the instabilities and inequities of colonialism and commercial exploitation manifest in predatory violence. Dodd's long and looping journey may seem to have led him as far as possible from his point of origin in the Muskegon Commercial College; in truth Midway is but one node in a commercial network whose threads lead back to the floors of the exchange. It is the reality behind the metonymy and illusion of the 'figures coming and going […] on the [trading] board' and the endpoint of the 'mixture of patriotism and commercial greed' Dodd notes with approval in his father. [695] In the comfortable drawing room of the Dodd family home, this is an abstract: in the imperial zone at the heart of the Pacific, Loudon Dodd is confronted by the brutalities which occur when these values

[694] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 396.
[695] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, pp. 18, 23.

are acted upon in the world. As Roderick Watson suggests, 'Stevenson's proposal' is that 'the true mechanisms of the centres of civilisation can be most clearly discerned out here on the open margins of the new world. This is not a frontier ethic, in other words, but a fair reflection of what lies at home, in London, Paris or New York'.[696] The truth of the commercial process of empire cannot disaggregate the violently expropriative methods employed in the South Seas with the wealth and security it provides in the imperial centre: Stevenson saw the realities of slavery, coercion and exploitation in his travels and *The Currency Lass* is the symbol which stands metonymically for these in his fiction.

7.7 Conclusion: A Romance of Modernity

The Wrecker is a novel, which challenges both the fallacies of the imperial romance genre and the platitudes of colonial rhetoric about the South Seas in order to offer an image of the Pacific trade as being circumscribed by exploitation, mendacity and incipient violence. Romance provides the framework of adventure here, while realism evades the usual denatured representations of violence seen in imperial adventure fiction, and gives a starker image of colonial reality. More simply still: romance takes Dodd to Midway, realism shows him the massacre there.

Ayşe Çelikkol discusses the links between romance and the idealisation of free trade in nineteenth century fiction. Çelikkol suggests that 'the mercantilist mode of colonialism' was dependent on the 'literary capacity to imagine transnationality'.[697] The romance is a form which involves transition between and across boundaries, but this suggests that the motive for such transgressions is not disinterested: the open road leads to the open market. Moreover, as Stevenson's experiences in the South Seas indicated to him, the open market did not equate to a free or a fair market.

In both the factual account of *A Footnote to History* and the fiction of *The Wrecker,* Stevenson presents the pursuit of mercantile interest by the colonial powers as being freighted with exploitation, mendacity and incipient violence. The emblem

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[696] Roderick Watson, '"The Unrest and Movement of Our Century": The Universe of *The Wrecker*', *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, 4 (2007), 114–128 (p. 118).
[697] Ayşe Çelikkol, *Romances of Free Trade: British Literature, Laissez-Faire, and the Global Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 7, 10.

of this is the *Flying Scud* – a ship which has traversed the boundaries of liminal space of the kind found in imperial romance, but has not found a prelapsarian ideal society. Rather, it sails into a world of avarice. 'Glory! […] This ship's rotten!' a crewman exclaims: speaking literally of a decaying vessel, soon to be dismasted and adrift.[698] Yet the metaphor is obvious: the mercantile trade and the ship operating it are corrupt. The romantic emblem of the ship – the fit frontispiece to many a work of imperial adventure fiction – ends a rotten hulk with a blood-stained crew, cast adrift on the tides of the Pacific, a metaphor instead for the brutal cupidity of the colonial trade.

That *The Wrecker* so strikingly reframed and undermined the expectations surrounding genre led to a considerable resistance to the work; contemporary reviews, as noted in the example by Lionel Johnson quoted above, in section 7.2, describe a dissatisfaction with the lack of a coherent direction. It was a novel seen as too diffuse, too modern to adequately work as a satisfying romance.[699] It is telling that these accounts sought to explain this divergence in terms of collaboration, and suggesting that Stevenson's style had been 'adulterated' by another hand. But the textual history of *The Wrecker* indicates otherwise: this was a conscious and critical engagement with a moribund form. The critique it began, and the striving towards new forms of expression that it carried with it, were extended still further in Stevenson's most ambitious 'South Seas' novel, *The Ebb-Tide.*

[698] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, p. 367.

[699] John St Loe Strachey, 'From an Unsigned Review, *Spectator,* 23 July 1892' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1981) pp. 399-402.

8. *The Ebb-Tide*: A Drift Towards the Modern

8.1 Introduction

The Ebb-Tide: A Trio and Quartette (1894) was the third book of three written by Stevenson in collaboration with his step-son, Lloyd Osbourne. *The Ebb-Tide* stands out among these three works as having received a significantly higher amount of critical attention and regard than *The Wrecker* (1892), and still more than *The Wrong Box* (1889), which remains somewhat understudied compared to most of Stevenson's fiction.[700] However, the estimation that *The Ebb-Tide* enjoys now does not reflect the general critical opinion at the time of publication, as will be highlighted in this chapter. The book begins in a relatively innocuous manner with a style and setting not dissimilar to Osbourne's later solo fiction.[701] But the initial direction of the novella, which portrays the commercial speculations of the 'trio' of the sub-title, is sharply altered by the arrival of the fourth in the 'quartet', Attwater, whose domination of the other men reconfigures the narrative into a dark psychological study allegorising the predations of empire. In this *The Ebb-Tide* represents the culmination of the trend identified elsewhere in the thesis: this is the most complete and successful example of Stevenson's gradual development of a mode of fiction which takes the romance form, with its ultimate origins in the Romanticism of the early nineteenth century, and radically reconstructs it into an approach which challenges and undermines the ideologies which underpin it. In so doing, it provides a presentiment of Modernism, the dominant mode of the early

[700] The relative lack of attention for these novels (especially *The Wrong Box*) can be attributed to the number of ways in which they disrupt notions of literary authority (by being co-authored, for instance) and by the stylistic variance between *The Wrong Box* and the majority of Stevenson's later fiction. See Audrey Murfin, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Art of Collaboration* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 150-151; Ernest Mehew, 'Introduction' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Wrong Box*, ed. by Ernest Mehew (London: Nonesuch Press, 1989), pp. i-xvii.

[701] See, for point of comparison, Lloyd Osbourne, 'The Queen Versus Billy' in Lloyd Osbourne, *The Queen Versus Billy and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), pp. 3-30, which similarly portrays the exploits of several white traders exploiting conditions (and indigenous people) in Polynesia.

twentieth century, with its questioning of narrative authority and fragmentation of perspective.

8.2 Subverted expectations

The Ebb-Tide was written at the end of a period when Stevenson was not producing work of the kind his audience had become accustomed to in the 1880s. It was with increasing frustration that Stevenson's editors and associates (and, by inference, his public) had received from the South Seas a string of works which aimed to get to the root of the Pacific experience. This was first seen in the instance of *In The South Seas* (serialised 1890-1891) which had initially been commissioned as a series of letters that were to be published in the *New York Sun* as works of travel correspondence.[702] McClure, the commissioner of this project, had anticipated something written in the style of Stevenson's early travel narratives, full of colour, detail and whimsy and instead received a work which Stevenson believed could become an authoritative social and cultural history of the entire region – an ambition bemoaned by his more grounded wife.[703] This was to become the pattern for Stevenson's writing from the Pacific: he followed this work with projects such as *A Footnote to History* (1892) recording the events leading up to the Samoan civil war and a number of what might be termed anthropological works which sought to adapt or translate Polynesian folklore, such as 'The Bottle Imp' (1891) and 'The Feast of Famine' (1890). These are amongst Stevenson's most striking and, in their kind, successful works, but they were seen by his audiences (or the audiences assumed by Sidney Colvin, his literary editor) to be of distinctly localised interest.[704] This reception speaks to a patrician and imperialist complacency clearly typified by Edmund Gosse's comment regarding Stevenson's 'exile' that 'I suspect the true atmosphere of literature is to be found within three miles of Charing Cross'.[705] Despite such attitudes, Stevenson seemed intent on ploughing this new furrow, yet

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[702] 'Letter: To Charles Baxter, 21 May 1888'.

[703] See Section 2.2, above.

[704] See Note, 'Letter: To Colvin, March 1894'.

[705] Edmund Gosse, 'From a Letter to G. A. Armour, 31 January1891' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) pp. 374-375 (p. 374).

the commentary from the imperial centre, be it the diffidence of Gosse or the lukewarm reception of *An Island Night's Entertainments* (1893), clearly speaks of anticipating a return to more usual and, to them, more palatable fare.[706] The bend of Stevenson's writing towards describing 'native' lives and advocating for their interests against colonial abuses was not, then, seen as a positive development; Oscar Wilde, indeed, dismissively remarked

> I see that romantic settings are the worst surroundings possible for a romantic writer. In Gower Street Stevenson could have written a new *Trois Mousquetaires*. In Samoa he wrote letters to *The Times* about Germans.[707]

This claim was rather confounded by the publication in 1893 of the belated sequel to *Kidnapped*, *Catriona* (or *David Balfour*), which saw an historical return, in two senses, to the style and subject of one of Stevenson's best known works, from ten years earlier. *The Ebb-Tide* was received, if contemporary reviews are a clear indicator, as if it was intended to be a species of romance, and so to be a relocation of the modes of this particularly Stevensonian form to the South Seas; one anonymous reviewer holds it up to direct comparison with *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, and makes a bellwether of the question 'is this romance, in spirit and style, Stevensonian?'.[708] The distance between what might be expected of the romance in Stevenson's style of more than half a decade before and what is to be found in *The Ebb-Tide* needs now to be considered.

8.3 The Failed Romantic Hero

The principal figure in the early portions of *The Ebb-Tide,* and the character on whom the narrative is focalised, is Robert Herrick. Herrick is an example of that

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[706] See Maixner, pp. 408-422.

[707] Oscar Wilde, 'To Robert Ross, 6 April [1897]' in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), pp. 517-524 (p. 520). Gower Street is around a mile and a half from Piccadilly Circus; Gosse and Wilde are in accord here.

[708] 'From an Unsigned Review, *Saturday Review*, 22 September 1894' in Paul Maixner, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) pp. 453-455 (p. 454).

recurrent figure in Stevenson's fiction, the weak willed child of privilege who fails to make good on his father's expectations.[709]As has been observed by Douglas Gifford, these are clearly a working out by Stevenson of his own 'deep tensions and guilts' with regard to his failure to meet the expectations of his family, especially his father.[710] The most transparently autobiographical example of this is found in one of Stevenson's lesser known works, 'The Misadventures of John Nicholson' (1887). This does little to hide its inspiration in Stevenson's own life: it is a *roman-à-clef* which does not disguise its reference. As such, the short story, recounts a feckless son of Edinburgh's respectable classes having to seek his fortune abroad to atone for disappointing his father by squandering his education and losing money in the insalubrious haunts of the Canongate.[711] While Herrick does not have a history with such close parallels, he is, as Alistair Fowler observes, nevertheless an exaggeration of Stevenson's own perception of himself.[712] So, Herrick is 'the son of an intelligent, active, and ambitious man', with 'hopes [...] conceived of the boy': he is 'sent to a good school' and gains a scholarship to Oxford'.[713] But, much like Stevenson, at university Herrick goes astray after this promising beginning:

> With all his talent and taste (and he had much of both) Robert was deficient in consistency and intellectual manhood, wandered in bypaths of study, worked at music or at metaphysics when he should have been at Greek, and took at last a paltry degree.[714]

Herrick thereafter 'must begin the world again as a clerk', a role to which he is ill suited by temperament, and through vacillation and through fault, he ends in

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[709]See, for example, Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Story of a Lie' in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Tales and Fantasies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920), pp. 115-190; Robert Louis Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896).

[710]Douglas Gifford, 'Stevenson and Scottish Fiction: The Importance of *The Master of Ballantrae'* in Harold Bloom, ed., *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Robert Louis Stevenson* (Philadelphia, PA: Chelsea House, 2005), pp. 53-78 (p. 62).

[711] Stevenson, 'The Story of a Lie', pp. 1-4, 22-23, 11-13.

[712]Alistair Fowler, 'Parables of Adventure: The Debatable Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson' in Ian Campbell, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction: Critical Essays* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1979) pp. 105-129 (p. 116).

[713] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 4.

[714] Harman, pp. 52-69; Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 5.

committing fraud and fleeing to the South Seas to attempt to begin again, where his history is unknown.[715] Stevenson, of course, avoided so precipitous a fall, yet there is the palpable working out here of a sentiment of 'there but for the grace of God' in this.

But note too, that Herrick is not merely an avatar of Stevenson. He also is reminiscent of the typical protagonist of a nineteenth-century imperial romance, with the exception that Herrick is frustrated by the reality of the exotic world beyond the horizon rather than fulfilled by it. His is the gap between expectation and reality, and in this is another instance of how *The Ebb-Tide* confronts the fantasy of imperial romance with the reality of genuine colonial experience: he is the hero of the romance after the enchantment has been dispelled. Compare Herrick with, for example, Leo Vincey in H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) or Bertie Cecil in Ouida's, *Under Two Flags* (1867). They too are the children of the respectable upper-bourgeoisie; they too are an ongoing product of elite educational institutions (Cambridge in the case of Leo and Eton in the case of Bertie).[716] But, unlike Herrick their improbable resourcefulness and the fateful and fantastical events of their books conspire to their success.

To find a closer analogue for Herrick, a similar example of frustrated ambition in the imperial territory, it is necessary to look not back to the imperial romance, but forward to Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900). Jim is glutted on the adventure novels of his boyhood, and accordingly expects to find the colonial territory a place for his heroic apotheosis.[717] But 'the hope of a stirring life in the world of adventure' is confounded by reality, and Jim finds instead ignominy, shame and a slow decline.[718] Much as Jim finds refuge from the shame of his error by seeking an anonymous life in a remote trading post, Herrick too is trapped on the beach of Papeete by his anomie and his debilitating sense of his own inadequacy.[719]

The figure of Davis is another example of the failed hero in *The Ebb-Tide*, and, given that his disgrace involves a dereliction of duty resulting in the loss of a

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[715] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 5-8.

[716] H. Rider Haggard, *She: A History of Adventure* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1888), p. 3; Ouida, *Under Two Flags* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912), p. 3. It is worth observing that the plot of *Under Two Flags*, like *The Ebb-Tide* has a character flee to the imperial periphery because of a major financial misdeed; unlike Herrick, however, the upright Bertie Cecil has been falsely accused.

[717] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1920), p. 6.

[718] Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 6 and *passim.*

[719] Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 218; Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 5-8.

ship, he is, in this one sense, still more closely related to Conrad's Jim.[720] Davis, in his superficial outline, recalls what Linda Dryden identifies as a further stereotypical figure of the imperial romance, the paternal and resourceful 'benevolent sea captain'.[721] Stevenson and Osbourne had already engaged with this type, who features frequently on the pages of Charles Kingsley and R. M. Ballantyne, by producing a parodically exaggerated form of the character in *The Wrecker* in the shape of Captain Nares.[722] This archetypal figure is a one-dimensional indicator of competence, metonymically signifying a British (or, on occasion, Anglo-American) sense of stoic ability and command upon the seas of the world. Davis' narration of himself conforms to many of these stereotypes: his bluff manner and his incongruous sentimentality about his young daughter are of a part with depictions of the loveable and fatherly sea captains of Ballantyne and Kingsley.[723] Yet once Davis begins his commercial venture in the imperial territory, Davis' self-narrative soon falls apart, and is revealed to be at best a delusion:

> 'Why, Davis!' cried Herrick. 'You've told me a dozen times she was alive! Clear your head, man! This must be the drink.'
> 'No, *sir*,' said Davis. 'She's dead. Died of a bowel complaint. That was when I was away in the brig *Oregon.* She lies in Portland, Maine. "Adar, only daughter of Captain John Davis and Mariar his wife, aged five". I had a doll for her on board. I never took the paper off'n that doll, Herrick; it went down the way it was with the *Sea Ranger*, that day I was damned'.[724]

The stark reality that the daughter, so frequently touched on in Davis' anecdote, is lost combines meaningfully with the loss of Davis's command through the image of the doll, going down with the depths in the ship lost to Davis's neglect.

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[720] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 30; Conrad, *Lord Jim*, pp. 29-30.
[721] Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000), p. 90.
[722] See, for example, Charles Kingsley, *Westward Ho!* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1911) and R. M. Ballantyne, *The Pirate City* (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1874); Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Wrecker* (London: Cassell and Company, 1892), pp. 170-185.
[723] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 34-35.
[724] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide,* pp. 95-96.

This is yet another instance of the hard realities and contingencies that append to the lives and roles which are made anodyne in the imperial romance. Stevenson and Osbourne are here once again ironising the glibness of the imperial romance, acknowledging its basis on simplistic notions which sanitise realities of what British sea power means. The comparison to *Lord Jim* is clearly evident, for just as the crisis in Jim's career involves his abnegation of responsibility for the ship he crews so, too is this Davis' failure.[725] For Jim the crisis offers a moment of disillusionment with himself and with the fantasies of adventure he has been reared on; for Davis the disillusionment is with the unreal fantasy of the responsible father figure he had narrated himself to be.

The final member of Stevenson and Osbourne's trio, by contrast, emphatically does not accord with the stereotypical figure of the imperial romance. Rather, Huish is an instance of every phenomenon which the imperial romance sought to ameliorate or correct in contemporary British society. Huish is an example of the spreading urban under-class, whose existence fuelled a particularly virulent strain of Victorian class anxiety. Dan Bivona and Roger B. Henkle describe 'the degeneration thesis', which sought to systematise this anxiety, and which appropriated the language of new scientific discourse in order to make 'a post-darwinist fantasy' which described the urban poor in terms of an 'atavistic' reversion to less developed forms of life.[726] Huish, is just such an example of the unskilled yet unphysical modern class phenomenon of the Victorian city. He is a clerk and a 'cockney', a term still carrying a pejorative value at this period.[727] However, Huish is the true representative of the reality of empire as Stevenson saw it. He is comparable to Case in the earlier 'Beach of Falesá': remorseless, amoral and ever on the make. His mercantile impulses have no shade of a benign interest in improving the Pacific or its people. Huish evolves to the two others his fantasy that he relates to a woman back home ('I suppose I spent the chynge of a fiver on that girl'):

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[725] Conrad, *Lord Jim*, pp. 45-46 ; Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 90.

[726] Dan Bivona and Roger B. Henkle, *The Imagination of Class: Masculinity and the Victorian Urban Poor* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 56-57.

[727] See Lee T. Lemon, *A Glossary for the Study of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 116. Evidence for this use is also seen in how Stevenson uses it as a term of disapprobation in his letters, especially to Sidney Colvin: see, for example, 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, March 1894'.

> I wrote to her, and told her 'ow I had got rich, and married a queen in the Hislands, and lived in a blooming palace. Such a sight of crammers! I must read you one bit about my opening the nigger parliament in a cocked 'at. It's really prime.[728]

Such are the fantasies of Huish: they are those of the exploiter, venal, with a degrading attitude towards women and open bigotry towards the indigenous islanders. He is the imperialist manque, yet has none of the patrician poise of an Attwater or a Kurtz: he is open in his aggression, and remorseless in his methods, as in his resolve to dash vitriol in Attwater's face.[729]

Huish deals less in the mythology of imperialism or in the mythology of its subversion, as is the case with Attwater, but is the exposure of its grimy realism. Indeed, it is Huish who is most Zola-esque, he recalls not a figure of imperial romance but rather Hyacinthe Fouan in Zola's *La Terre* (1887); malign, sneering and casually cruel in his own self interest.[730]

The depiction of Huish and Attwater, and the way they interact, reframes and subverts the conventions of imperial romance. By this estimation the interpretation of *The Ebb-Tide* as merely an unsuccessful romance, or a failure of Stevenson's usual style comes to seem significantly misguided. Indeed, what Stevenson has developed in collaboration with his co-author here is something which disavows previous standards of the fetishization of adventure and the exotic and instead introduces a psychologically complex and morally searing indictment of those same values. It is an indictment, too, of the operation of empire and of the bad faith which dresses its operation up as beneficent when it is anything but. Rather than an example of the encomiums of empire written to persuade a boy's market of the value of the colonies, Stevenson's work is an anticipation, if not an early instance, of the strand of postcolonial literature which scotches and dismantles the narratives of imperial power from within.

8.4 The Failure of the Imperial Project

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[728] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 35.
[729] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 210-211.
[730] Emile Zola, *The Soil (La Terre)* (London: Vizetelly and Company, 1888), pp. 18, 289-293, 313-317.

In the compromised and failed lives of the 'beach-combers' in *The Ebb-Tide*, Stevenson presents the reality of what colonialism looked like in the South Seas. As with every capitalist venture from the Tulip Craze to the dot-com bubble, for every conspicuous success 'making' sudden wealth overnight there are a myriad failures bankrupted or ruined by the attempt to profit.[731] The degradation of the three main characters, reduced as they are to starvation and beggary, are of a type Stevenson was familiar with in reality. His letters and travel writing from the South Seas provide abundant examples of these. Indeed, Stevenson found himself being directly responsible for the maintenance of a particularly vivid example of this: his step-daughter's estranged husband, Joe Strong, who had squandered a career in Hawai'i which, at its height, saw him employed as court painter to King Kalākaua, through unwise speculation and dissipation.[732]

Herrick, Davis and Huish, then, had ample precedent in reality. Indeed, Tahiti, where they are found figuratively like detritus on the beach, was a byword in the Pacific for being the backwater where the flotsam of empire washed up.[733] This is the grounding that *The Ebb-Tide* has in the reality of the white Pacific milieu, with its disingenuousness as to its own aims and abilities, reflected in the litany of fantasy and half-truth that forms the narrative accounts of themselves that Herrick, Huish and Davis give at the start of the novel.[734] Attwater, the fourth figure who makes up the quartet of the subtitle, is the symbolic depiction of this ideal: he is the fantasy of power and confident mastery made real. If the trio are the empire in microcosm, Attwater is the empire as a metonym: a symbol of colonial rule, his capacity, remorselessness and untouchability read scarcely as human, and certainly not as credible when compared to the other characters in the novel. He is an irruption into a realistic narrative, an unbelievable figure who nonetheless speaks of a deeper truth. He embodies the British imperial presence in the Pacific world by being all three of the main forms of colonial actor at once: he is a trader, a colonial manager and a

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[731] See Peter M. Garber, *Famous First Bubbles: The Fundamentals of Early Manias* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001).
[732] Harman, pp. 374-375; Helena G. Allen, *Kalakaua: Renaissance King* (Honolulu, HI: Mutual Publishing, 1995), p. 192.
[733] See Caroline Ralston, *Grass Huts and Warehouses: Pacific Beach Communities of the Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu, HI: The University of Hawai'i Press, 1978) pp. 52-53.
[734] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 11-20.

missionary.[735] As such, Attwater embodies all the authority of empire, and all the pretexts used to justify it. He is the white man's burden embodied and yet, tellingly, Attwater betrays no sense of compassion or of mission beyond a remorseless will for his plantation to succeed. His *sang froid* when detailing the decimation of his island's population speaks to this, but nowhere else in the novel is this so vividly dramatised as the scene where Attwater entertains his guests at dinner on the first night of their arrival and cooly describes his execution of an unfaithful retainer:

> Obsequiousness [as Attwater disparagingly names the man] was [...] a noxious creature [...] Well, presently – to make a long story short – one told him to go up the tree [...] So soon as he was up, he looked down, and there was the rifle covering him; and at that he gave a whimper like a dog.[736]

'Shot', Attwater dispassionately answers when his guests wildly demand what happened next, and Herrick's outbreak in response has a striking parallel with a better known instance from Stevenson's oeuvre:

> Herrick sprang to his feet with a shriek and an insensate gesture.
> 'It was a murder,' he screamed. 'A cold-hearted, bloody-minded murder! You monstrous being! Murderer and hypocrite – murderer and hypocrite – murderer and hypocrite –' he repeated, and his tongue stumbled among the words.[737]

This closely matches the appalled reaction of Archie Hermiston to the execution of Duncan Jopp in *Weir of Hermiston*: he is less vocal and emotive in his voiced reaction, but the sentiment is much the same in his reflection on 'the monstrous, relishing gaiety' of his father in sentencing the man, and his descent into

[735] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 143-162.
[736] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 177.
[737] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 178.

horror and despair at the galling lack of pity and access of self-righteousness shown.[738]

There are strong parallels not only in how Herrick responds, described in near identical language, but in the fact that in both instances the cooly self-righteous paternal figure takes grim satisfaction in the execution, in what in Archie Hermiston's phrase is a 'God-defying murder'.[739] Both narratives speak to an exercise of power which is radically disproportionate and yet exercises force with a complacent and dispassionate certainty of its moral right. Further, in this, Attwater emblematises the British and indeed other imperial states. He is commerce, he is civil service, he is religion and he is law. His exquisite suit of white drill is an emblem of this and so too is his Winchester rifle; both incongruous in the South Seas and both symbolic of an imposition of new sets of standards and of how ruthlessly they will be imposed.[740]

In this it is clear that *The Ebb-Tide* cannot be interpreted as a 'Boy's Own' romance, idealising empire, but can only be read as a complex psychological and symbolic study which seeks to subvert the same. This is the interpretation which has increasingly come to predominate in discussions of *The Ebb-Tide* and has led to studies such as those of Eric Masse, Alan Sandison and Roderick Watson to place *The Ebb-Tide* in a tradition of Modernist works which problematise and deconstruct the discourse of empire.[741]

8.5 The Collaborative Text of *The Ebb-Tide*

The sudden alteration of the narrative of *The Ebb-Tide* has been supposed to be a product of the method of collaboration between Stevenson and Osbourne. By this light, the 'line' in the text where the languid description of 'low-life' in the South Seas is abruptly replaced by symbolic confrontation with the representative

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[738] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), p. 51.
[739] Stevenson, *Weir of Hermiston*, pp. 49-50.
[740] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 127-128.
[741] Eric Massie, 'Stevenson and Conrad: *The Ebb-Tide* and *Victory* Reconsidered' in Linda Dryden, Stephen Arata and Eric Massie, eds., *Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad: Writers of Transition* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2009), pp. 30-38; Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism: A Future Feeling* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Roderick Watson, 'Modernism' in Caroline McCracken-Flesher, ed., *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York, NY: MLA Press, 2013), pp. 69-75.

figure of empire is also the line where Stevenson takes up the pen that Lloyd Osbourne has dropped. This interpretation is understandable, not only given the variation of style, but because Stevenson himself explicitly says in a letter that the early portions were written with Lloyd and the latter portions were solely his own work:

> I propose, if it be not too late, to delete Lloyd's name. He has nothing to do with the last half. The first we wrote together, as the beginning of a long yarn. The second is entirely mine; and I think it rather unfair on the young man to couple his name with so infamous a work.[742]

It should however be noted that Stevenson suggests this in a letter written after receiving negative feedback from Colvin, who had read some of the concluding chapters: Colvin objected particularly strongly to the actions of the main characters on Attwater's island.[743] If we are to accede to the belief expressed by Roger Swearingen that Stevenson's collaborations with Lloyd Osbourne were intended to boost the junior partner's reputation and establish him as a respectable writer, this disavowal might be seen as an attempt to avoid Osbourne's reputation being contaminated with a negative and moralistic response to the text.[744] Gordon Hirsch suggests that 'it is no easy task to assess the extent of Osbourne's contribution to these collaborations', but also indicates that much of the minimising of this might be ascribed to later biographical hostility to Fanny Stevenson and her family, particularly in Frank McLynn's influential *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (1994).[745] However, there is also ample evidence that Osbourne did contribute little to the writing of the second half of the novel: early reports from Stevenson describe

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[742] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, 23 August 1893'.

[743] See Colvin's note to Robert Louis Stevenson, 'To Sidney Colvin, 23 August 1893' in Sidney Colvin, ed., *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 4 vols (London: Methuen, 1911), IV (1911), pp. 209-216 (p. 209).

[744] Roger G. Swearingen, *The Prose Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson: A Guide* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1980), pp. 128-130.

[745] Gordon Hirsch, 'The fiction of Lloyd Osbourne: Was This 'American gentleman' Stevenson's Literary Heir?', *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, vol IV (2007), 52-72 (p. 53); Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1994).

close collaboration, with Osbourne working like 'a machine', while in later letters he describes 'grinding through' the novel 'singly'.[746]

Such claims that there was a breakdown of the collaborative effort during the writing, and that this is evidenced by a sundering of style between the first half of the text and the conclusion are not, however, indisputable. There are clear thematic links between both parts of the novel, even if they are written in a markedly different register. Indeed, it is possible to consider the earliest portions of the novel as being almost a parody of the typical imperial romance of the South Seas, given how closely it engages with the representational clichés of the genre. Tahiti, in particular, is set up as a paradise of indolence and gratuitous ease. This stereotypical attitude is indeed, alluded to if not explicitly cited on the very first page where there is talk of whites living a life of absolute lassitude supported by merry 'chocolate coloured' wives:

> Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease. Some prosper, some vegetate. Some have mounted the steps of thrones and owned islands and navies. Others again must marry for a livelihood; a strapping, merry, chocolate-coloured dame supports them in sheer idleness; and dressed like natives, but still retaining some foreign element [...] they sprawl in palm-leaf verandahs and entertain an island audience with memoirs of the music hall.[747]

This trades on the fantasies of the imperial romance, only to ground them and expose them to a sceptical eye: rather than being seen from the perspective only of the Europeans, the fantasists are included with the objects of their fantasy here. The view is unforgiving, be it in the banality and irrelevance of the 'memoirs of the music hall' or the starker admission of the incomers as 'disseminat[ers] [of] disease'.[748]

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[746] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, 9 March 1892'; see 'Letter: To. S. R. Crockett, 17 May 1893'.
[747] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 1.
[748] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 1.

By point of comparison, earlier representations of the Pacific privilege European perspectives and offer no such scrutiny of imperial actors. The example of Herman Melville's *Omoo* (1847) is particularly germane here.[749] The people of Tahiti are described as exciting 'the wonder and admiration of the voyager':

> Their physical beauty and amiable dispositions harmonized completely with the softness of their clime. In truth, everything about them was calculated to awaken the liveliest interest.[750]

Melville recognises that such tropes were early established, noting that 'earlier and more full accounts were given [of Tahiti] than of any other island in Polynesia; and this is the reason why it still holds so strong a hold on the sympathies of all readers of South Seas voyages'.[751] Yet Melville does not recognise that this 'strong [...] hold on the sympathies' predisposes, even preconditions, the perceptions of those who travel there to see what they expect – and to not consider the perspective of the islanders themselves.[752] Indeed, this is something which Melville himself does not manage to evade. Melville's view of the South Pacific is that of Orientalist, sensual fantasy. That Melville and his perspective are much on Stevenson and Osbourne's minds in their own approach is indicated by the presence in the first chapters of *The Ebb-Tide* of the calaboose on the beach at Papeete. This crude jail was where Melville himself was incarcerated briefly when he was a sailor trading in the South Seas: it is a striking link, then, that the three 'skulker[s] from life's battles' who drive *The Ebb-Tide* should first meet in this self-same place.[753]

By noting the conscious inter-textual challenge made by this link it is possible to read even the early chapters of *The Ebb-Tide* as a subversion of the normal modes of colonial representation, which then allows the later chapters to be read as a critical reconstruction of them. *The Ebb-Tide* then offers itself as a novel

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[749] Herman Melville, *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas* (Boston: The Saint Botolph Society, 1922).
[750] Melville, p. 72.
[751] Melville, p. 73.
[752] Melville, p. 73.
[753] Leon Howard, *Herman Melville: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2022), p. 58.

clearing itself of its inheritance of the imperial romance and offering a challenging new way of representing empire which looks forward to Conrad, rather than back to Melville and the colonial romanticisers in his wake.

The arrival at Attwater's island, as already noted, is the essential hinge-point of *The Ebb-Tide.* As an uncharted island, it entails stepping off the map of the Pacific, and so crossing the boundary from the real geography of the first half of the novel into an imagined imperial space.[754] In place of the satire of ineffectiveness and ineptitude we see in the early portion of *The Ebb-Tide* the latter half offers a stark depiction of colonialism taken to its extreme of efficiency. The single independent trader, Attwater is seen running the island as a well-oiled machine, denuded of life and converted solely to the function of resource extraction.[755] Attwater's island is thus the reduction down to its essential component of the European presence in the Pacific.

The Ebb-Tide, ultimately, is not internally incongruous: it is thematically linked. Its early portion is the obverse side of what is depicted in its latter half. In this it could be argued that the novel is more successful as a critique of empire than *Heart of Darkness,* which formulates its whole argument in the personification of imperial venture in a single malign figure. *The Ebb-Tide* does this as well, and most effectively; it also, however, offers an undermining challenge to the popular imagery of the Pacific world, popular imagery which underpins the 'othering' ideology which ultimately supports colonial venture.

8.6 Changing Critical Regard: Re-Estimations of *The Ebb-Tide*

Critical regard has come to see *The Ebb-Tide* as being a fundamental tonal shift in the work of Stevenson: it develops, as has been argued by both Alan Sandison and Linda Dryden, a 'proto-modernist' approach which anticipates Conrad, Faulkner and other critically favoured authors of the succeeding century. As such, it is argued, the novel has a different (and implicitly superior) quality to the rest of Stevenson's writing. As Sandison puts it, it has 'an *order* of seriousness […] which

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[754] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide,* p. 113.

[755] Note that, despite the chapter title of 'The Pearl Fisher', Attwater is evasive about what he does trade in: this lack of specification is potentially symbolic, allowing any or all exploited resources to be imagined. See Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, p. 135.

is quite different from all the other serious books [Stevenson] wrote'.[756] Sandison substantiates this argument through suggestion that both thematically and in terms of his writing methods *The Ebb-Tide* transcends the 'playfulness' of Stevenson's earlier work to produce something of higher moral gravity and 'integrity'.[757] A similar argument is advanced by other assessors of Stevenson's legacy; all emphasise *The Ebb-Tide* as a work of greater profundity or quality in style.[758] Indeed, it would be difficult to contest these arguments: *The Ebb-Tide*, in both its formal aspects, and, perhaps more importantly, in its detailed interrogation of the power structures of imperialism, represents the work in which the qualities of Stevenson's mature writing are most consistent and sustained. Building on his successes in 'The Beach of Falesà' and *The Wrecker* (as described in the previous chapter), *The Ebb-Tide* is a work which powerfully symbolises the cultural contact and inequities of European incursion into the South Pacific.

8.7 Presentation of *The Ebb-Tide*: Early Publication and Paratextual Contexts

The Ebb-Tide has a curious publication history that is often overlooked in contemporary scholarship on the work. Modern readers are most likely to be familiar with it in its volume form: indeed, the attractive cloth bound first English edition is valued by casual collectors of Stevensoniana for its gold-effect covers and embossed cover illustration, featuring a semi-abstract design redolent of Hokusai, a favourite artist of Stevenson.[759] The associations of such a presentation code the novel to standards of taste and to high culture referants. This presentation was a conscious choice on the part of the publishers, Heinemann, and followed in the wake of the first edition, published by Stone and Kimball in Chicago, which was similar in its presentation. Describing the publication history of *The Ebb-Tide*, Glenda Norquay notes that Stone and Kimball secured the rights to novella over Stevenson's usual

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[756] Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 317.
[757] Sandison, pp. 317-318.
[758] See, for example, Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 50, 53; Alistair Fowler, 'Parables of Adventure: The Debatable Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson' in Ian Campbell, ed., *Nineteenth Century Scottish Fiction* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1979), pp. 105-129 (p. 125).
[759] Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Ebb-Tide* (London: William Heinemann, 1894).

American publishers, Charles Scribner, at considerable cost.[760] Stone and Kimball were what might now be described as prestige publishers: their books were presented on high weight paper, with embossed covers and clear type: that they would publish Stevenson's latest novel is indicative that it was associated with the elevated cultural values that they intended their brand to signify.[761] So, despite the reception of *The Ebb-Tide*, and despite the later diminishment of Stevenson's literary reputation, in the context of its original publication, *The Ebb-Tide* was perceived as being a significant cultural production.

Such interpretation – or, perhaps, pre-interpretation is distinctly at odds with the manner in which the majority of Victorian readers would have originally encountered the novel. As is true with much fiction of the period, serial publication significantly preceded volume publication and was significantly more affordable. In the case of *The Ebb-Tide*, serial publication was in the short lived weekly magazine *To-Day*, edited by Jerome K. Jerome.[762] Here *The Ebb-Tide*, far from being presented as the proto-modernist, serious work recognised by contemporary scholars, is shown in a manner distinctly at odds with its content and likely to give a very misleading sense of its genre and tone. *To-Day* had the style that might be anticipated from its editor: it was given over primarily to light and often humorous feature columns and to serialisations of comic fiction.[763] *The Ebb-Tide* in the textual apparatus of the magazine, is indiscriminately presented as being of a piece with this. This is most notable in the illustrations by one 'W.H.' : frequent wide-cut line drawings of an almost cartoonlike dynamism which might recall to a modern Scottish reader the work of Dudley D. Watkins.[764] This style of illustration becomes increasingly incongruous as it continues through not only the early 'beach-combing' sections of the work but on even to the extremities and the extremes of the novel: to

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[760] Glenda Norquay, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Literary Networks and Transatlantic Publishing in the 1890s* (London: Anthem Press, 2020), pp. 63-64.
[761] Norquay, p. 63.
[762] *To-Day*: A Weekly Magazine-Journal, Vol 1 (1893-4: 11 November 1893 to 3 February 1894).
[763] A recurring feature was 'Club Chatter', and a whole page was turned over each issue to comic portraits by Weedon Grossmith. See, *To-Day*: A Weekly Magazine-Journal, Vol 1 (1893-4: 11 November 1893 to 3 February 1894), pp. 25, 45, 350, 625.
[764] Watkins was a prolific illustrator and cartoonist, best known for his work in the *Sunday Post*. His style could be described as simplified realism, with simple lines and clearly delineated, slightly caricatured features to his characters. See 'Dudley D Watkins (1907-1969)', <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/learning/hall-of-fame/hall-of-fame-a-z/watkins-dudley-d> [accessed 30 August 2022].

Attwater's decimated island emptied by disease and abuse, to Davies' guilt ravaged religious abasement, and to the squalor and enormity of Huish's thwarted acid attack on Attwater. This presentation does suggest that some latitude must be given to contemporary Victorian responses to the work in that we cannot fault the reviewers for judging *The Ebb-Tide* as a romance when it is *presented* as a romance rather than as, as Stevenson puts it, something Zola-esque in its 'pertinent ugliness and pessimism'.[765] The author makes a pertinent and a prescient comment when bemoaning that he has not been sent the relevant issues of *To-Day* in Samoa: 'Why do you not send me Jerome K. Jerome's paper, and let me see *The Ebb-Tide* as a serial? It is always very important to see a thing in different presentments'.[766]

8.8 *The Ebb-Tide* as a Thematic Precursor to 'Heart of Darkness'

The Ebb-Tide, as has been observed, can be read as a key source of inspiration or indeed emulation by Conrad in his 'Heart of Darkness' (1902). There are striking thematic and even structural similarities between the texts, as has been described in a detailed study by Dryden.[767] Attwater prefigures Kurtz in being a malign and yet untouchably elevated example of the European colonialist in the occupied world. Both figures have reified the qualities of the imperial master so completely as to become a type of the Nietzschean superman: through force of will and indifference to conventional moral considerations they have forged a private suzerainty in the imperial space. These suzerainities – Kurtz's 'ruined house on the hill' in the heart of the jungle, Attwater's empty house 'with the graveyard full' in the heart of the sea – are at once an apotheosis and a parody of the colonial state.[768] The physical similarities between the representation of Attwater and Kurtz are likewise striking. They are both described as tall, noble and commanding despite Kurtz's degradation. Beyond their physical resemblances, they match in their role and their character. They are both apostles of empire: Attwater, theorising and

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[765] 'Letter: To Henry James, 17 June 1893'.

[766] 'Letter: To Sidney Colvin, c.28 December 1893'.

[767] Linda Dryden, 'Literary Affinities and the Postcolonial in Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad' in Michael Gardiner and others, eds., *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 86-97.

[768] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* in Joseph Conrad, *Youth: a Narrative, and Two Other Stories* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1902), pp. 49-182 (p. 146); Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide* (London: William Heinemann, 1894), p. 132.

extemporising his idiosyncratic morality at the dinner table, and Kurtz inscribing it in his monograph which he later, in his madness desecrates with the phrase 'exterminate all the brutes'.[769] Both provide images which cut to the truth of the imperial project behind the cant: the reality of a willingness to direct the indigenous populations of conquered territories to their death; or indeed, to direct death towards them. The coolness, indeed the almost sociopathic certainty, of Attwater strikingly gives a sense of what Kurtz must have been prior to his collapse. Attwater is Kurtz in his strength, and his unshakable mental victory over Herrick perhaps suggests what the fate of Marlow may have been, had he found Kurtz sooner.[770] Indeed, the proselytising partisan for Kurtz who Marlow calls the harlequin has clearly sold himself mind and soul to his imperial *übermensch,* in much the same way as Davis does at the end of *The Ebb-Tide*.[771]

Conrad's indebtedness to Stevenson is one unacknowledged and unindicated by any textual evidence betraying Conrad's familiarity with *The Ebb-Tide*, for though his letters speak of a knowledge of Stevenson, and sometimes an appreciation, *The Ebb-Tide* is never explicitly named and for the most part Conrad responded to comparison between himself and Stevenson with irritation.[772] Given the critical regard *Heart of Darkness* has enjoyed due to its complex psychological analysis and mythopoesis of the imperial reality, it is striking to note such similarities in Stevenson's earlier work, a work whose literary significance and moral seriousness were overlooked until scholars reappraised the work in the late twentieth century. Stevenson's reputation was perhaps instrumental in this, but so too were the initial expectations and response to the work based upon preconceptions as to Stevenson's style and genre. These were further emphasised by the manner in which the story was first published and presented, appearing in the first number of a new magazine, whose tone was generally humorous.[773] By contrast, *Heart of Darkness* first appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*, a publication almost a century

[769] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 165-179; Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 134.
[770] Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 230-236; Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* p. 160.
[771] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 138; Stevenson and Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide*, pp. 236-237.
[772] See, for example, Joseph Conrad, 'Letter to Alfred A. Knopf, 30 July 1913' in Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983-2008), V (1996), pp. 256-260.
[773] *To-Day*, ed. by Jerome K. Jerome, Vol 1, No 1 (11 November 1893).

old, with a reputation for publishing the work of the most important writers of any given period.[774]

The serial publication of *The Ebb-Tide* is particularly important to consider given the availability of the volume edition: not only was the volume edition priced at the premium cost of 6 shillings (a fact doubtless related to its high production costs), it was published only three months before Stevenson's death. This event led to a renewal of discussion of Stevenson's earlier work, and gave added impetus to the interest in the Edinburgh Edition of Stevenson's Collected Work which began to be published immediately prior to his death, and which published twelve volumes within a year of Stevenson's demise. With this edition, edited by Sidney Colvin, and the posthumous encomiums by family and associates, emphasis moved swiftly off of *The Ebb-Tide* onto work which his principal advocates (as discussed in chapter two) wished Stevenson to be remembered by: the feverish critique of imperialism which was *The Ebb-Tide* was not included among this. Indeed, *The Ebb-Tide* was published in the second last volume of Colvin's edition, appended to *The Island Night's Entertainments* and labelled under the category of 'South Sea Yarn'.[775] To those who were familiar with *The Ebb-Tide,* they were likely to have encountered it in *To-Day*, with the presentation described above, which would soften its sense of seriousness and literary weight, just as the thematically similar *Heart of Darkness* had these qualities emphasised by its publication in *Blackwood's Magazine.*[776]

8.9 Conclusion

The Ebb-Tide is a work which reframes and then subverts the clichés of a typical representation of the South Seas. The focus not on victorious heroes of empire but rather on a much more grounded reality in the shape of the three drifters who find themselves destitute on Tahiti introduces a standard of realism previously unknown in what Stevenson calls the 'sugar candy sham epic[s]' of the Pacific.[777]

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[774] David Finkelstein,ed., *Print Culture and the Blackwood Tradition, 1805-1930* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006).
[775] Sidney Colvin, ed., *The Collected Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 22 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1894-1898), XIX. *South Sea Yarns Vol. III: Island Nights' Entertainments / The Ebb-Tide* (May 1896).
[776] The circulation of *To-Day* at its peak was 100, 000. Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton, *Below the Fairy City: A Life of Jerome K. Jerome* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2012), p. 112.
[777] 'Letter to Sidney Colvin, 28 September 1891'.

Moreover, the striking and symbolic figure of Attwater offers a metaphor for another reality of European incursion in the South Seas. He serves as an image of the disingenuous expropriative impulse of imperialism as it is masked in the supposedly benign dress of economic and spiritual improvement. The novel, in its textual and moral difficulty, proved alienating to Victorian audiences and so led to the book disappearing into relative obscurity for much of the twentieth century. It was only in the later part of that century that scholars began a reclamation of *The Ebb-Tide* which began to rightly estimate its supreme qualities of critical analysis and potent symbolisation of the imperial project. It is now perceived as an important precursor to Modernist challenges to the logic of colonialism.

The Ebb-Tide has gone from obscurity to being one of the most frequently studied of Stevenson's works. This is principally because of its connection to the representations of imperialism. It features in the curriculum of four different English programmes in Scotland alone. It has appeared as an Oxford University Press World's Classic and in 2017 it was the subject of an event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.[778] That this book is being afforded such levels of critical attention is suggestive of the fact that modern scholars find it indicative of both literary developments toward Modernist style and to a more complex depiction of colonialism.

This thesis argues that the circumstances around the publication of *The Ebb-Tide* in serial form in the year before Stevenson's death, and the fact that he co-authored it with Lloyd Osbourne, led to an uneven critical reception at the time. Stevenson's untimely death which brought about a curation and mediation of his work by his contemporaries led to *The Ebb-Tide* being disregarded in favour of his commercially successful earlier romance fiction. Until a renewed scholarly interest in Stevenson in the late twentieth century, he had been sentimentalised and represented as a Victorian martyr. As a result of this, Modernists and those who came after considered Stevenson as the antithesis to what they stood for and even now this long lived perception colours contemporary readings, leading to criticism of him as a colonialist and even a racist. It is the contribution of this thesis that Stevenson's position as a serious and important writer was predominately

[778] Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Ebb-Tide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

unrecognised for nearly a century largely because of the lens through which he has been presented and in some contexts continues to be presented. During his life his work was controlled in part by his father, Thomas Stevenson and by his wife, Fanny Stevenson. After his death, Edmund Gosse and Sidney Colvin controlled his narrative and presented the image of Stevenson that emphasised the work and aspects of his character that they felt were best. Today some scholars identify profoundly problematic elements in his depictions of indigenous characters and omission of developed women characters.[779] The next chapter will conclude this thesis by further exploring the contemporary image and reception of Stevenson.

[779] See, for example, the discussion in Thomas Bogle Petterson, 'Childishness, Primitivism and the Primitive as Child in the Anti-Imperialist Works of Robert Louis Stevenson' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2021).

9. Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis was to contextualise the development of Stevenson's style from romance towards a form which complicated the genre, modifying and undermining its imagery and, in so doing, beginning to evolve a style which anticipates Modernism. This argument was developed in reaction to critical estimations which saw Stevenson's style as being regressive, rooted in the historical fiction of the Romantic period, particularly the novels of Walter Scott. As this thesis has contended, this development of style and the critically self-reflexive manner that went along with it has not been universally recognised in the history of Stevenson's reception. This is traceable to the manner in which Stevenson's posthumous reputation and image were managed by individuals who were not sympathetic to his innovation but sought rather to emphasise the aspects of his work which seemed to conform to a traditionalist approach and to reinforce conservative ethics and values.

The success of this mediation of Stevenson was affected in the years following his death by a saturation of the market by books sympathetic to the sentimental Victorianist conception of Stevenson championed by these figures. As such, when the Modernist critics of the late 1910s and 1920s came to assess the literature of the generation that preceded them Stevenson was rejected while some of his contemporaries, such as George Moore and Henry James, were embraced as anticipating the literary style of the Modernist generation. Stevenson's own contribution to this mode was thus buried having been successfully occluded by the 'romantically right' sentimental image of Tusitala, the velvet-jacketed 'apostle of cheerfulness'.[780] It was only in the late twentieth century, as critical trends became attuned to the reappraisal of popular fiction and of disparaged non-canonical writers, that Stevenson began to be reassessed. From the 1990s onwards studies of Stevenson began to flourish which recognised not only the qualities described in this thesis but a multitude of other factors and aspects in Stevenson's work that allowed for fruitful and illuminating consideration of the function and value of literature. The thesis will

[780]Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez, *The Life of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p224; F. B. Willard, 'Preface' in Elbert Hubbard, *Robert Louis Stevenson and Fanny Osbourne* (New York: The Hartford Lunch Company, 1916), pp. [iii]-[iv], p. [iii].

now conclude by reflecting on the question of where these trends of reappraisal have taken Stevenson and what this suggests about how he is mediated in the twenty-first century.

9.2 Stevenson in the Twenty-First Century

The oscillating reputation of Stevenson seen in the history of the critical response to his fiction is not a phenomenon that has disappeared in the twenty-first century. For while there is something approaching a critical consensus as to his particular qualities and values in academia, in the broader reception 'Stevenson' is strikingly diverse.

Firstly, Stevenson enjoys an unusually extensive digital afterlife for a Victorian author. His name is appended to numerous 'inspirational' quotations on social media platforms (fig. 4). Some of these, indeed, actually come from his writing (a rare but not negligible occurrence). This is indicative of how his name and perhaps the aura of him being a famous 'classic' author are associated with a sense of timeless wisdom.

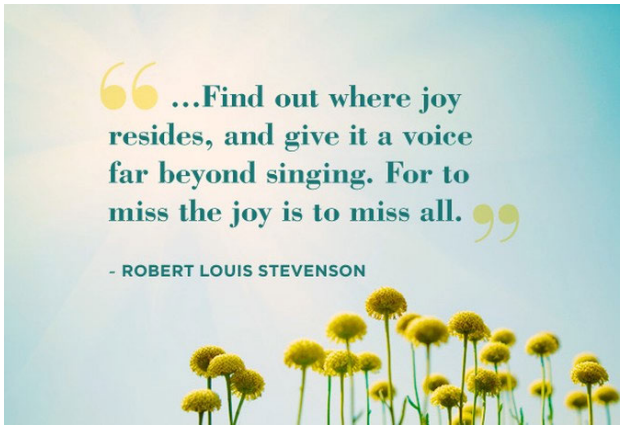

Figure 4: An inspirational image macro featuring a quotation misattributed to Stevenson

This oracular quality has led to Stevenson being marshalled as an advocate for many contemporary causes. It is, however, a testament to the frequently iterated claim of this thesis that Stevenson is 'all things to all people' that the causes he is said to champion often contradict each other. A case in point would be the Scottish Independence Referendum, which saw supporters on both sides of the divide claim

Stevenson as a fellow traveller.[781] This conclusion will propose that this plurality of digital identities for Stevenson suggests that his place in contested traditions is still far from settled: he is still an author whose reputation and authority lies as much with who mediates his words as with the testament provided by his writing itself. However, along with this popular application of Stevenson in contemporary debates, the twenty-first century has seen the burgeoning of scholarly work on Stevenson and its concomitant dissemination continue unabated.

9.3 *Journal of Stevenson Studies*

The *Journal of Stevenson Studies* is an internationally recognised peer reviewed journal which was established in 2004 with an editorial board representing institutions in continental Europe, the United Kingdom and America. The indication given by this diversity, and by the plurality of submissions to the journal, suggests the rise of Stevenson and his writing as a suitable subject for scholarly research and publication. There have now been fourteen volumes of the journal published. The *Journal of Stevenson Sudies* has become a major resource for international scholarship on Stevenson and on the wider context of Victorian literature. This suggests that Stevenson's reputation in academia is now secure and that the efforts of pioneering scholars in the late twentieth century to re-establish his reputation have been successful. Similarly, doctoral studies and other critical work on Stevenson have been especially profuse in the last decade.[782] Indeed, the volume of scholarly publications on Stevenson in the years 2011-2020 exceeded the number for the entirety of the twentieth century.

Stevenson's reputation among contemporary critically regarded authors can be said to be a reversal of the trend seen among Modernists to disparage his literary qualities. This change in reputation is largely due to the critical reappraisal invited by scholarship which has bypassed or corrected the reductive image of Stevenson presented by his first mediators. This has allowed his writing to be appraised on its own merits. Contemporary writers such as James Robertson, Louise Welsh and

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[781] See section 9.5.

[782] See Richard Dury, 'Recent Robert Louis Stevenson Studies 2011-2020' <http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org/richard-dury-archive/studies_2011_2020.html> [Accessed 2 September 2022].

Donna Tartt cite Stevenson as a major influence, and also contribute to scholarship on his work.[783]

9.4 Robert Louis Stevenson International Conference

In a similar vein, Stevenson has now become the subject of major international conferences. Such single author conferences are vanishingly rare: only authors of the stature and wide recognition such as Dickens, Conrad and Shakespeare can reliably sustain the level of scholarly interest required to make regular conferences on their work supportable.The International Stevenson Conference has now been held nine times. Again, this is a phenomenon of the twenty-first century with the inaugural conference being held in 2000. The proceedings of the 2017 conference held at Edinburgh Napier University indicate the scale and diversity of the research being conducted on Stevenson. The conference spanned three days and included forty two presentations of scholarly papers selected from a still higher number of submitted proposals. The range of institutions from which these were submitted along with the submissions to the *Journal of Stevenson Studies* represented a truly international scope featuring submissions from France, America, Chile, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong and Brazil. Stevenson, then, remains an international author, a fact which was held in interesting tension by the location of the conference in this year. Edinburgh capitalises on the continuing popularity and general readership of Stevenson, presenting him as a local and indeed, archetypally, Edinburghian author. Stevenson indeed is nearly as central to Edinburgh's market in popular literary heritage as Harry Potter, as testified by the number of walking tours, themed pubs and museum displays dedicated to him.

9.5 Public Engagement and Popular Media

This same phenomenon is what led to the establishment of Edinburgh's annual Robert Louis Stevenson Day, which recognises this appeal and successfully uses it to promote a broader and deeper understanding of Stevenson's work and context. A joint venture between Edinburgh Napier University and Edinburgh City

[783] See for example *Journal of Stevenson Studies, vol 5, 2008.;* Donna Tartt*, '*On Barrie and Stevenson*', Fairy Tale Review,* vol 1 (2005), 66-71.

of Literature Trust, Robert Louis Stevenson Day was highly successful in promoting engagement with the author among a broad audience. At the peak of its profile in 2015 the programme included thirty-seven events spread out over a Robert Louis Stevenson week centred around the main day, 13th November, most of which had full attendance.[784] This suggests that there is a way to merge the critical reception with popular reception and that scholarly projects can be wedded to popular interest in the author in a way mutually beneficial to both, with each offering context and experience in forming a deeper and more informed appreciation of an author and their relevance.

A third project which suggests serious academic study in the twenty-first century is provided by the *New Edinburgh Edition* by the collected works of Robert Louis Stevenson, which aims to provide, 'the first modern scholarly edition of Stevenson's complete writing with authoritative texts and explanatory notes'.[785] Work on these editions is being informed by academics of international standing and will form the authoritative scholarly edition for all of Stevenson's studies in the future.

Combined with this twenty-first century expansion of scholarly interest in Stevenson is the continuing endurance of Stevenson as a source for popular adaptations. Stevenson, as has been elsewhere observed, is the author whose works have been most frequently adapted; a reflection of his continuing popularity and familiarity within the general culture. Richard Dury's archive of adaptations of *Jekyll and Hyde* alone runs to 213 examples and these are indicative rather than comprehensive.[786] Adaptations or derivative works of Stevenson's work continue to be produced in a significant volume and to have a major cultural profile. Representative might be the Starz television series, *Black Sails* (2014-2017). The series serves as a prequel to *Treasure Island* with incongruous levels of violence and sexual content, and yet is still indicative of an appetite for Stevenson's themes and characters. *Jekyll and Hyde* too remains a perennial source for popular adaptations

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[784] 'Stevenson Day Programme 2015', <http://robert-louis-stevenson.org/ [wp-content/uploads/rls-day-2015.pdf> [Accessed 2 September 2022].
[785] 'The New Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Robert Louis Stevenson' <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/series-the-new-edinburgh-edition-of-the-collected-works-of-robert-louis-stevenson html> [Accessed 18 December 2022].
[786] 'The Richard Dury Archive: Derivative Works', <http://robert-louis-stevenson.org/derivative-works/> [Accessed 2 September 2022].

with at the time of writing two high profile Hollywood films being in production and slated for 2023. Literary and video game adaptations too have proliferated in the last decade with poet laureate Andrew Motion's series of belated sequels to *Treasure Island* being indicative of the former and adventure games like *MazM: Jekyll and Hyde* (2020) being an example of the latter.

Stevenson's presence in contemporary political debate drawing upon the sense of the author as being oracular, discussed above, is another striking instance of the author's popular afterlife in the twenty-first century. In the discussion around the 2014 Independence Referendum and its aftermath, Stevenson has been presented in many opinion pieces and social media posts as being an advocate of one particular side of the debate or the other. This suggests that Stevenson is seen as somehow authoritative and as having access to a particular wisdom which endures and remains relevant: this is necessarily predicated on at least a superficial familiarity with, and respect for, his writing.[787] For Stevenson to be seen as a champion of one's cause, one must implicitly be a champion for Stevenson. This indicates on a more general level that Stevenson remains a name which is assumed to have common currency and to be widely recognised without the need of annotation or explanation. While his early biographers prevented him from being taken seriously by the Modernist generation that came after him, they have clearly been successful in defining a popular image of Stevenson that still resonates more than a century later, despite the critical reappraisals described above. This problematizes the question as to how effectively Stevenson has been reframed so as to have the emphasis placed on the qualities of his fiction. It suggests that the author remains vulnerable to being mediated or re-mediated as principally an emblematic figure who, to return to an earlier phrase, occludes his own work.

This thesis has discussed the way in which interpretation of Stevenson was once authoritatively controlled, with decisions about the legitimacy of claims about Stevenson's life or work being gate-kept by people who claimed a unique authority in understanding the writer based on their proximity to him or some other

[787] See for example, John Drummond, 'Robert Louis Stevenson Helps Highlight Shortcomings of UK Democracy', *The National*, August 2021, <https://www.thenational.scot/politics/19529300.robert-louis-stevenson-helps-highlight-shortcomings-uk-democracy/ > [Accessed 2 September 2022]; John McTernan, 'Scottish Independence: Why Patriotic Scots Will Be Voting No', *Prospect*, July 2014, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/independence-referendum-why-patriotic-scots-will-be-voting-no> [Accessed 2 September 2022].

characteristic. The reclamation of Stevenson as a writer of sophistication who confounds the narrow politics of his most vocal early advocates was affected and, indeed, continues to be affected by the committed scholarship of researchers who seek to broaden the interpretation of his work. However, the twenty-first century offers new opportunities for mediation confined not merely to circles of literary association or, indeed, literary scholarship. Stevenson, in that he remains a potent symbol, is now advocated for, railed against, recommended and condemned throughout contemporary digital spaces. Whether from this democratic plurivocality a new single idea of Stevenson will emerge or whether a discordant chorus of conflicting and contrary ideas of the author will continue to exist side by side remains to be seen. That is, the question is whether Stevenson will be seen as merely one, or whether mediation in the digital age will see him 'ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious incongruous and independent denizens' in the discourse around his name.[788]

[788] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1886), p.108.

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