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North and South in the Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson *

During a newspaper interview in 1991, the Italian writer Antonio Tabucchi declared his deep passion for the work of Robert Louis Stevenson. During his adolescence, Tabucchi had developed his interest in fiction via Stevenson and other English-language writers such as Joseph Conrad, Jack London and Henry James. That's a diverse group, but a common factor, vital to their art, is that they were all great travellers. Of Stevenson in particular, Tabucchi maintained that he "has this capacity for looking outside himself, and for learning about himself by looking at the world, open to adventures. He was a vagabond, in the sense of a free man, a roving spirit - intellectually, morally and aesthetically. I like that."¹

A free man. For Stevenson, vagabondage was the alternative to bondage. In his native Scotland there were two threats to that prized freedom.

The first was his chronically poor health. He had weak lungs, though it was a brain haemorrhage which caused his sudden death at the age of forty-four. The harsh Scottish climate was unsuitable to his condition. He described Edinburgh, Scotland's capital and his home town, as "the city of the winds."² The city

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¹ "Tuscan Vanishing Tricks with the Truth: Graham Fawcett talks to Antonio Tabucchi about the homely art of storytelling." *The Independent on Sunday* (7 July 1991), pp. 26-27 (27)

² *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin* (Tusitala 19), p. 109 - For Stevenson's works, references are to the Tusitala Edition (35 vols., London, 1924). Citation will be by title followed by its volume number, e. g. *The Master of Ballantrae* (Tusitala 10).

is built on volcanic rock - it's hilly and unsheltered. If one walks across the North Bridge, which links the Old Town with the New, one feels the winds at their strongest: a wintry experience by no means limited to winter.

Stevenson suffered physical pain from his earliest days. In one of his last novels, *The Ebb-Tide*, which is set in the South Pacific, a character is likened to "a child among the nightmares of fever."³ One of young Stevenson's own nightmares was recurrent - he would dream that he had to swallow the whole world.⁴ However, such nocturnal ordeals could be transformed into art; bad dreams gave him raw material for his fiction, most notably *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). There is much in his work that possesses a nightmarish quality even where it may not have been directly influenced by nightmares. There's a paradox: if ill-health was a threat to his physical freedom, it did help to liberate his imagination. As Yeats might have put it, the body was bruised to pleasure the soul.

A similar paradox is discernible in the second major threat to his freedom: the religion and culture of Calvinism. Stevenson grew up in a deeply Protestant bourgeois family; his beloved nurse, Alison Cunningham, held very strong Calvinist views. She told him stories of the Protestant martyrs who were rounded up on the bleak Pentland Hills and executed at the Grassmarket in Edinburgh's Old Town, below the Castle Rock. Again, this was terrifying stuff - but it nurtured one of the most intense and fertile imaginations in the history of literature.

During the nineteenth century, Scottish Calvinism had become somewhat domesticated; it was the religion for a stuffily respectable middle class - prudent, puritanical, professing a negative morality. The emphasis was on the Ten Commandments: thou shalt not do this, thou shalt not do that. Such a culture was deeply hostile to art, as indeed to all else that was spontaneous, instinctual, sensuous - including, of course, sex. (In a Scottish novel of the 1930's, Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song*, a character remarks that his neighbours are so prudish that they must have fathered their children with their trousers on.)

Stevenson's Dr Jekyll is damaged by a pious, repressive upbringing; his response is to damage himself even more by splitting his personality in two - by means of a potion which he has created in his laboratory. His idea is to retain his respectable reputation as the "good" Dr Jekyll while allowing himself to practise his secret vices as the "evil" Mr Hyde. In a letter Stevenson denied that *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was about sex. This is unconvincing. Of course it's about sex (albeit

³*The Ebb-Tide* (Tusitala 14), p. 137

⁴"Memoirs of Himself," in *Memories and Portraits* [etc.] (Tusitala 29), pp. 150-151

not explicitly), as well as about a great deal more than sex. It also concerns the often hidden dynamics of personality, as well as the hidden dynamics of a society that shapes personality, not just as regards sex but across the range of human behaviour.

The point here is that Stevenson believed in the whole man, but that Scottish Presbyterian culture was conducive to the atrophy of the personality. In the early "Lay Morals" (posthumously published in 1896), Stevenson's position reads like a Victorian foretaste of Carl Gustav Jung's advocacy of "individuation," that synthesis of a person's conscious and unconscious forces. Condemning the extremes of asceticism and of self-indulgence, Stevenson calls for one's contrary drives to be respected and channelled:

Now to me, this seems a type of that rightness which the soul demands. It demands that we shall not live alternately with our opposing tendencies in continual see-saw of passion and disgust, but seek some path on which the tendencies shall no longer oppose, but serve each other to a common end. It demands that we shall not pursue broken ends, but great and comprehensive purposes, in which soul and body may unite like notes in a harmonious chord.⁵

"Wholeness" is a word which is etymologically related to "healing" and "health." On grounds of both health and culture, of the physical and the spiritual, it may be that Stevenson felt as if someone who came from the neurotic North should complete himself by acquiring the qualities of the sensuous South; after all, why not learn how to enjoy life's pleasures without feelings of guilt? The reverse could be equally true; Southerners should acquire the Northerners' more positive qualities. A later Scottish writer, the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, believed passionately in the need for diverse cultures to enrich each other: having been based in Salonika during World War I, MacDiarmid felt that the Greeks, excitable and emotional by temperament, would benefit from the restraint preached by the ancient Greek moralists; conversely, Northerners - especially Scots - were by nature steady and restrained, and MacDiarmid implied that they had to learn how to loosen up and lighten up.⁶

⁵"Lay Morals," in *Ethical Studies* [etc.] (Tusitala 26), pp. 27-28

⁶Hugh MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems 1920-1976*. ed. by Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken. London, 1978. p. 662

The young Stevenson would have applauded that, up to a point. During his twenties, he led a self-consciously bohemian life, mixing with the prostitutes and other outcasts of Edinburgh, reading such unPresbyterian writers as Whitman and Baudelaire. However, he was far from a consistent rebel; the northern piety and guilt would reclaim him, so back he'd go to his stern father, the prodigal son begging forgiveness, dutifully attending his lectures at the university's law faculty instead of boozing in the pub across the road (Rutherford's, in Drummond Street - still worth checking out!)

I'd suggest, though, that there is more to his youthful rebelliousness and unconventionality than an immature posturing. The immaturity is certainly there. But it was his travels which afforded him a more robust, more subtle, antidote to the Protestant ethic. During the early 1860's, when he was twelve, Stevenson accompanied his family on a trip to the French Riviera and neighbouring Italy. Admittedly he was too young to make immediate use of the experience, but I submit that this first exposure to the South had long-term effects on his writing, duly reinforced by later sojourns at Menton and Hyères. (There's a comical side to the culture clash between Protestant North and Catholic South: his nurse Alison Cunningham would enter Italian churches where she deposited anti-Popery tracts.)

It was France, rather than Italy, which made a substantial impact on Stevenson. Nevertheless, one of his earliest stories, written in 1875, is set in Italy during the Renaissance. It's called "When the Devil was Well," and already it shows his power to enthrall his readers with a blend of charm and suspense. It also happens to be one of his sexiest tales. A young sculptor falls for a beautiful Duchess, whose neglectful husband is a Machiavellian rogue primarily interested in power. (Such an atmosphere of sexual and political intrigue would be transposed, much later, to the eighteenth-century Scotland of *Catriona*, the sequel to *Kidnapped*.) Of particular interest in "When the Devil was Well" are the accomplishments of the young sculptor, Sanazzaro: he's very much a Renaissance man, having developed himself in diverse arts. As well as a sculptor, he's a painter and architect; he writes sonnets and plays the lute.⁷ In Stevenson's writings one may find references to Leonardo da Vinci, whom he admires as someone who united in one person the fine arts and the more practical handicrafts. Stevenson felt guilty that he himself was a mere writer, whereas his ancestors had been very practical people: the Stevensons had designed and built the lighthouses along and around the coast of Scot-

⁷"When the Devil was Well." In: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* [etc.] (Tusitala 5), p. 121

land. We shouldn't wonder, then, that he was so keen to undertake eminently useful (and hard) work on his estate in Samoa. The Protestant ethic had its advantages. The main point here, however, is that Stevenson displayed a striving after unity of personality, in contrast to Jekyll-like division. For this consummate stylist of the 1880s and 1890s, extreme aestheticism - no less than extreme Puritanism - would have led to atrophy.

Southern Europe, then, held out the ideal of the all-rounder, the whole man. To stay in Scotland would mean that one was likely to remain less than what one could be; at the worst, one might take the self-destructive route of a Dr Jekyll-type. However, that early Italian tale prompts yet another line of enquiry, one which I believe to be new to Stevenson studies. In a letter of January 1875 he refers to the "colour" of "When the Devil was Well," playing it down as "purely imaginary of course, my own unregenerate idea of what Italy then was."⁸ Yet it cannot be unlikely that he was drawing on his pre-adolescent memories of Italy and on his more recent trip to the Mediterranean. Colour was important to him. In the essay "Ordered South" he dwells on sensations of colour, and of unexpected vistas, along the Riviera. Scotland is a predominantly grey country, in terms of the buildings, the weather, and people's perpetual Monday-morning faces. I concede that a trip to the Highlands in the autumn would suggest otherwise - there's a sheer blaze of colour in the leaves, the rocks, the heather. But for a Northerner such as Stevenson the generally more colourful South was an education of the vision. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the painters known as the "Scottish Colourists" settled in France, finding there the tones that were unavailable to them back home - not to mention a more liberated lifestyle.⁹

⁸Letter to Sidney Colvin [January 1875], in *Letters* (Tusitala 31), p. 211

⁹See my "Ordered South? Scottish Artists in the Mediterranean, 1864-1927," *Etudes Ecossaises* no. 2 (Grenoble, 1993), pp. 179-186. Richard Dury, of the University of Bergamo, has suggested that Stevenson uses themes and motifs in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* rather like colours in painting (or notes in music); meanings and symbols belong to the palette of a writer whose work, in its avoidance of what is too specifically referential, aspires to the condition of the abstract. Dr Dury argues that "though Stevenson may be seen as frustrated by the difficulties of expressing meaning, he may also be seen as experimenting with the freedom from having to provide a simple (and therefore false) meaning. [...] Stevenson, like Impressionist and Modernist painters, is interested in technique and in form, convinced of the polyvalence of perception and understanding: sounds, sound sequences, syntax, genre references, suggested symbolism and interpretation all forming part of his palette. [...] In other words, he uses elements of 'information' as aesthetic elements." (*The Annotated Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Richard Dury. Milano, 1993. p. 26).

The Italo-German composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) was an enthusiastic and perceptive reader of Stevenson. His opera, *Arlecchino* (1917), is based on the great legendary hero of the *commedia dell' arte*. According to tradition, Arlecchino hailed from Bergamo, and Busoni's opera is set in the Old Town, the Città Alta. The composer enumerated Arlecchino's characteristics - he wore motley dress, he had a supple body, and a bold, clever spirit.¹⁰ Let's apply this to Stevenson. Motley would serve as a symbol for his love of colour, variousness and wholeness; the supple body would also be Stevenson's, odd as that may sound, but in a sense it is true of a man who simply refused to allow ill-health to restrict his love of long hikes or the physical labours which he undertook at his final home in Samoa. And he certainly possessed the bold and clever spirit! All in all, Stevenson embodied that lightness of body and spirit which Friedrich Nietzsche maintained was a dancing, Latin quality which contrasted with the unrelenting solemnity of the misty Wagnerian North.

Busoni's *Arlecchino* was a key work in the composer's attempt to create a *nuova commedia dell' arte*. I believe that Stevenson is the champion of a *nuova commedia dell' arte scozzese*. Edinburgh in his youth was not entirely a dour, repressive place, and indeed the German writer Theodor Fontane, visiting Edinburgh in the 1850s, remarked that its High Street had a very unNorthern atmosphere: people chatted to each other in the street and strolled about in a leisurely manner that reminded Fontane of city life in Italy.¹¹ In our own time, during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival which takes place every August, there is a plethora of open-air performances in the streets and courtyards of the Old Town. There is a spontaneous carnival ambience which Stevenson would have loved - "the puppet booth of fun" to quote one of his early poems.¹²

I am talking of his cheerful, positive outlook, that lightness of body and spirit. However, as you would expect from the author of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, it is not all lightness. The Old Town of Edinburgh was a labyrinth of dark, sinister passageways where a Mr Hyde might stalk his victims. (*Jekyll and Hyde* is ostensibly set in London, but Stevenson is drawing on his memories of Edinburgh.) In

¹⁰I am indebted here to an article by Ronald Stevenson, "Busoni's 'Arlecchino.'" *The Musical Times* (June 1954), pp. 307-308. As so often, I have benefited from my conversations with Ronald, who is a Scottish and international composer, pianist, and authority on Busoni.

¹¹Theodor Fontane, *Across the Tweed: a tour of mid-Victorian Scotland*. Translated by Brian Battershaw. London, 1965. p. 26

¹²"A Valentine's Song," *Poems* (Tusitala 23), p. 122.

the following parts of my paper, I am going to stress more that darker side, and how Stevenson found it even in the supposedly sunny South.

As a young man he wrote: "Hurray for motley, for a good sound *insouciance*, for a healthy philosophic carelessness."¹³ Stevenson claims that the performing fool, the clown, is the wisest person of all. Such a one laughs at danger: wearing his cap and bells he dances fearlessly along the most slippery ledges.¹⁴ Now this is exactly the nature of an Arlecchino, who is not just a joker, but a joker in the face of nasty experiences; he must either make courageous choices as to how he will act in a desperate situation, or opt to let providence decide by the toss of a coin (in which case "providence" is reduced to "chance"). Among Stevenson's characters who entrust their future to chance are the Young Man with the Cream Tarts in *The Suicide Club*, and the Master of Ballantrae in the book of that name; "insouciance" even in the matter of their own life or death. In France Stevenson met strolling players whom he admired for their courageous humour despite constant financial insecurity; he considered them "a living protest against offices and the mercantile spirit".¹⁵ Take the story "Providence and the Guitar", where the strolling player Berthelini copes very charmingly with difficult situations, including the contempt of the local mayor and police chief who regard Berthelini and his kind as common vagrants and idlers. Stevenson remarks that even when an audience does not applaud, the strolling player maintains his belief in himself and his art: he "has gone upon a pilgrimage that will last him his life long, because there is no end to it short of perfection."¹⁶ No bourgeois can find such a pleasure in his own petty concerns. Indeed, against the respectable classes, Scottish Presbyterian or otherwise, Stevenson is advancing a kind of existentialism. The strolling player leads an insecure life, but that is his choice. He is not bound to comfortable convention. His pilgrimage is endless and is undertaken for its own sake. Stevenson wrote elsewhere that "to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive".¹⁷

This brave existential spirit was to deepen and mature as Stevenson experienced other Southern cultures with their grim realities. The Mexicans, whom he

¹³Letter to Charles Baxter (October 1872), *Letters* (Tusitala 31), p. 57. The first four lines of "A Valentine's Song" are: "Motley I count the only wear/That suits, in this mixed world, the truly wise,/Who boldly smile upon despair/And shake their bells in Grandam Grundy's eyes."

¹⁴*Ibid.* p. 57

¹⁵*An Inland Voyage* (Tusitala 17), p. 103

¹⁶*Ibid.* p. 104

¹⁷"El Dorado," *Virginibus Puerisque* (Tusitala 25), p. 85

met in California, exploited by North Americans; the South Sea islanders exploited by Europeans - they were a far cry from the opulence of the Nice, Monte Carlo and Menton which he had known in his youth. Stevenson talked of "the indefinable line that separates South from North".¹⁸ In several of his writings he tried hard to define that line (I believe it passes through Bergamo - you have the foothills of the Alps to the north of the Città Alta, from where the funicular leads down to the new, lower town and the Lombard plain stretching out towards the Mediterranean world.) Travelling in the French Cévennes with a donkey, Stevenson experienced a distinct difference in the landscape at a certain point: he felt he was descending "into the garden of the world": at last he could view the Mediterranean Sea. He remarked that Hernando Cortès must have had a similar sensation when he saw the Pacific for the first time.¹⁹ Some years later, Stevenson himself would take that even more southerly journey to the Pacific. In one of his last novels, *The Wrecker* (1892), the dilettante artist Loudon Dodd leaves San Francisco and voyages into the Pacific: he experiences a kind of transformation, a "molecular reconstitution" as he puts it.²⁰ It all sounds a lot healthier and happier than Dr Jekyll's transforming potion. But Loudon Dodd, in that very ocean, will encounter realities that are far from pleasant.

We have reached a turning point in the discussion; it is now time to plunge into Stevenson's later and darker work.

The year is 1885, and the first publication of Stevenson's story "Olalla", which is set in Spain. The narrator is a Scottish soldier who has fallen in love with a beautiful young Spanish woman. She is a member of an aristocratic family which has lived for generations in a large hacienda high up in the sierra. Tragically, this family is doomed. It suffers from a degenerative condition which expresses itself in dangerously crazed behaviour. The soldier cuts himself on a broken window and Olalla's mother, smelling the blood, bites him like an animal. As for Olalla, she cannot marry the soldier because there is the risk that she will inherit the family curse. With such material, another late nineteenth century author such as Zola would have made much of heredity, as in his Rougon-Macquart novels. Stevenson, however, is concerned more with the moral-theological than with the scientific (as indeed is the case even among the test-tubes and phials of Dr Jekyll). The

¹⁸"Ordered South." Ibid. p. 62

¹⁹*Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*. In *An Inland Voyage* [etc.] (Tusitala 17), pp. 204, 213-214

²⁰*The Wrecker* (Tusitala 12), p. 180

soldier is a Scotsman and a Protestant who is aware that he is a heretic in a Catholic country. It is curious, however, that this Spanish Catholic family seems to illustrate the Scottish Calvinist doctrine of predestination: God or Providence has already decided whether one will go to heaven or hell, and one is not free to do anything to change that. In Stevenson this idea is in tension with the existential desire for freedom of choice. And so it seems that a Scottish obsession is actually a universal obsession; the South, too, has its hell. After all, it was Dante who gave us our most powerful image of the inferno.

Four years on, Stevenson publishes one of his greatest novels, *The Master of Ballantrae*. The Master, James Durie, is a Scottish aristocrat who has lived in exile in America, India and France; in Paris he has acquired an elegance and sophistication which are in stark contrast to the dour, plodding personality of his brother Henry. Henry is James's rival, his enemy even; he is the dependable, practical manager of the family's estate; he has never left home. James cannot resist ridiculing Henry's provincial Scottish manners. The insults become increasingly nasty and the two brothers are provoked into a duel. Henry kills James - or thinks he has killed him. The body disappears; James turns up later, very much alive. Is James an incarnation of the devil? An old family servant - who is the main narrator of the novel - believes that this is so. The servant, Ephraim Mackellar, finds himself obliged to become the Master's travelling companion on a transatlantic ship. In the course of the voyage, the Master relates to Mackellar the tale of an Italian count who lures his enemy, a German baron, to his death. The count excites the baron's curiosity concerning a dangerous pit within a ruined building situated in the wilderness just outside Rome. The baron feels impelled to visit the place alone, falls into the pit and of course perishes there. There is no proof that the count has murdered the baron, but that is exactly what he has done. Murder committed not so much by direct physical assault, but by devious psychological tactics, would be familiar to readers of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado"; in a review of Poe's works, Stevenson comments on that tale, and it is not unlikely that the count's effect on the baron owes something to Montresor conducting Fortunato to his death in the catacombs. A detailed comparison of the stories would reveal many striking similarities; one of the most obvious is that both are set in Italy.²¹ In the context of Stevenson's novel, the story reflects its narrator: the count is, in effect, a self-portrait of the Master. James Durie describes

²¹Stevenson's review, "The Works of Edgar Allan Poe," appeared in *The Academy* (2 January 1875), and is reprinted in *Essays Literary & Critical* (Tusitala 28), pp. 178-185

the count as “something of the artist”²² - an artist in murder, as it turns out. James himself is a subtle devil, a wicked man with a charismatic personality, a consummate manipulator.

He is also a wanderer, a vagabond, actually an extremely classy sort of vagabond. He is always on the move - if he does wrong, nobody can catch him ... until, at last, his luck runs out towards the end, and his grandeur modulates from the satanic to the tragic. For our present purposes, the main point is that not all vagabonds are harmless, genial, strolling players who would never include real-life murder in the repertoire of their art. Moreover, vagabond villains are not all as classy as James Durie, Master of Ballantrae. Stevenson was to write about a good many sinister characters in the South Pacific - white men who had settled on the islands and who preyed on the native population as well as on their fellow-whites: crooks, colonialists, conspirators. Early in his career, Stevenson had already given us a selection of nasties among the pirates of *Treasure Island*. One of these is Long John Silver, a charismatic and even likeable villain, but a villain none the less. Here are north Europeans behaving very badly south of Europe. In fact, the South becomes a kind of distorting (and therefore revealing) mirror of the vices of the North - rather like Dr Jekyll looking in the mirror and seeing Mr Hyde.

As a young man Stevenson dreamed of the Pacific islands as a paradise, fruits dropping from the trees, ideal tourist territory. Later he discovered the reality, which included leprosy, alcoholism and exploitation. Stevenson and his South Seas friends would exchange legends from their respective cultures; a pleasant, even radiant instance of dialogue between north and south - but he found that the Pacific peoples, like the Scots, possessed (or were possessed by) a terrifying mythology concerning hell and damnation. The volcanoes on the islands suggested entrances to hell. Evil spirits were ubiquitous. Unscrupulous white traders could take advantage of the superstitions of the native peoples in order to cheat them. Such is the course followed by one Mr Case in Stevenson's greatest short story of his final phase, “The Beach of Falesá”. In the depths of a forest, Case sets up mask-like contraptions intended to scare the natives; he finds the use of luminous paint particularly effective for the darker corners of his lair. Clearly, we have come a long way from the *commedia dell' arte* props of Stevenson's relatively innocent strolling players, who presented high spirits rather than evil spirits.

In “The Beach of Falesá” Stevenson believed that he had created a piece of realism, eschewing a sentimental attitude to some Pacific paradise; he refused to

²²*The Master of Ballantrae* (Tusitala 10), p. 167

write what he called "a sugar candy sham epic".²³ However, his tales of the realities of the South did not find favour in the North. This time, by "North" I mean not Edinburgh, but London, the capital of the British Empire, London which considered itself the centre of the literary world, if not the Universe. Even Stevenson's friends there felt that he should write only what would be of interest to that milieu. Stevenson was furious. He declared that he wasn't interested in writing for the fashionable salons of the metropolis. At this time there was a younger writer who would have agreed with him - Rudyard Kipling, whose work excited Stevenson's interest and admiration. Kipling had grown up in India and, like Stevenson, found his material within cultures whose preoccupations were at the furthest remove from those of London. In 1892, Kipling wrote: "London is egotistical, and the world for her ends with the four-mile cab radius. There is no provincialism like the provincialism of London."²⁴

It's striking that this comes from that writer who was to become notorious as the apologist for Empire, for the "White Man's Burden." The European empires were active in the South Seas and Stevenson was moved to passionate protest at their interference in the lives of the native peoples. Here we have a brave example of existential choice, of commitment to a cause. In 1971 an Australian writer of Scottish origin published an essay on Stevenson's periods in Sydney. John Douglas Pringle discovered, in the files of Australian newspapers, a number of statements by Stevenson that had never been published anywhere else. Here, Stevenson denounced the exploitation of black labour on the sugar plantations of Queensland. He even claimed that natives of the Pacific islands were kidnapped and brought to Australia as virtual slaves. One newspaper remarked that, on the subject of Samoa, Stevenson was "apt to express his views in language rather too plain for publication in Australia."²⁵

So, to sum up, here we have a Northerner who involved himself very seriously in the life of the far South. He was a young Presbyterian Scot who completed his personality, made himself a whole man, by acquiring experience which most Scots lacked and which he transmuted into art and action. And yet it was down there in Samoa that he found himself writing about Scotland as never be-

²³ Letter to Sidney Colvin (28 September 1891), *Letters* (Tusitala 34), p. 101

²⁴ Rudyard Kipling, *Letters of Travel (1892-1913)*. Paris: Nelson's Continental Library Edition, n. d. p. 52

²⁵ John Douglas Pringle, *On Second Thoughts: Australian Essays*. Sydney, 1971. p. 75 and *passim*. Mr Pringle's essay "R. L. S. in Sydney" occupies pp. 59-83

fore; he recreated, in imagination, his native Edinburgh and the bleak Pentland Hills to which he knew he would never return. He confessed in a letter that although he laughed at the "old Presbyterian spirit," it was still the culture of his parents and indeed his own.²⁶ His last, unfinished novel is *Weir of Hermiston*, with its Edinburgh and Pentlands setting; he was working at the book on the very day of his death, 3 December 1894.

In *Weir of Hermiston* Stevenson remarks that the Scots have a strong sense of identity with their ancestors, "even to the twentieth generation."²⁷ He instinctively knew that the people of Samoa respected their ancestors and wished to provide for their descendants. One of his last acts, in October 1894, was to make a speech to the Samoan chiefs to celebrate the opening of a new road which they had just constructed. He told them that the generations yet unborn would benefit from such labours.²⁸

Stevenson himself had no children (apart from stepchildren) but such remarks, together with the Spanish story "Olalla," emphasise that while each of us may be a freely acting individual, making our individual voyage or pilgrimage, we are also linked to our ancestors and descendants, who either affect our thoughts and actions or are affected by them. Such a delicate relationship between choice and destiny is the experience of us all, whether we belong to Northern or Southern Europe, or to the Northern or Southern hemisphere.

²⁶ Letter to Adelaide Boodle [May 1891], *Letters* (Tusitala 34), p. 79

²⁷ *Weir of Hermiston* (Tusitala 16), p. 54

²⁸ Address of R. L. Stevenson to the Chiefs, on the Opening of The Road of Gratitude, October 1894, Appendix 2, *Letters* (Tusitala 35), p. 194